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Travail Narratives: Damage and Displacement in
Medieval Travel Literature

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

English

by

Jennie Rebecca Friedrich

June 2015

Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Andrea Denny-Brown, Chairperson

Dr. John Ganim

Dr. Michelle Raheja

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The Dissertation of Jennie Rebecca Friedrich is approved:

Committee Chairperson

University of California, Riverside

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Travail Narratives: Damage and Displacement in
Medieval Travel Literature

by

Jennie Rebecca Friedrich

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in English
University of California, Riverside, June 2015
Dr. Andrea Denny-Brown, Chairperson

This dissertation redefines the role of damage in narratives about travelers, poetic tropes about traveling body parts, and even the traveling “bodies” of medieval manuscripts by examining the relationship between travel and physical hardship central to medieval travel narratives and the concept of travel in the medieval vernacular. Recasting damage as a productive force in the travel experience highlights its ability to disrupt the normalizing impulses of cultures that privilege able-bodiedness and opens up new conceptions of travel that do not depend on bodily wholeness to develop characters, significance, or storylines in travel literature. This study employs a disability studies approach coupled with theories of incorporation and materiality to interrogate the traveling body’s ability to disrupt its own movement in ways that augment rather than impede narrative development. This approach lends a new cultural agency to texts as disparate as the legends of the dog-headed Saint Christopher, works by Dante and Chaucer that employ the trope of the traveling heart, and medieval mystery plays that construct simulated pilgrimages for their audiences.

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Travail in Medieval Travel

This dissertation argues that cultural associations between travel and bodily injury in the medieval period have been overlooked in existing criticism in medieval studies. Researching the effects of travel on bodies of various kinds represented in medieval narratives allows us to see that alienation from the body is not just a metaphor in travel literature, but also a physical process brought on by harsh conditions and very real environmental threats. I examine narratives about travelers, poetic tropes about traveling body parts, and even the traveling “bodies” of medieval manuscripts, each of which record damage, and a literary-cultural fascination with travel-related damage, in different ways. In the process, I redefine the role of damage as an obstacle to travel. The narrow view of obstacles in relation to travel, both pre- and postmodern, is that they offer nothing but negative influence to the traveler’s cultural experience. According to this view, anything that gets in the way of forward progress, including bodies or parts of bodies, is disabling. The language of disability thus reveals itself in scholarly responses to literature featuring non-normative bodies or bodily matter—obstacles to movement must necessarily be obstacles to travel, especially in medieval literature, in which travel is so dependent on the physical strength, savvy, and endurance of the individual traveler. This approach to travel assumes that the most important element of the journey is *getting there*, and that anything that slows or stops the traveler slows or stops travel. In fact, the history of the word “travel” carries this meaning within it, as the English word comes from the Old French word “travail,” meaning “suffering or painful effort.” This

etymological link indicates that the *work* of movement is also essential to discussions of travel, and this is where obstacles become productive. While obstacles impede movement, they increase the labor required for movement, often adding cultural significance to the experience by requiring the traveler to interact with his or her environment in new and uniquely challenging ways. This emphasis on resistance invites a conversation on the role of obstacles in marking culturally marginal bodies or spaces in the medieval landscape.

Obstacles to travel are generally conceived as external to one's body, but the obstacles I will focus on in this dissertation exist in the bodies of travelers, whether as flesh, organs, limbs, or skin. Reframing the conversation as one of matter that arrests or interrupts normative progress allows us to read bodies or parts of bodies that disallow uninhibited movement as *travailing* bodies. Rather than being relegated to the category of "bodies that can't," these bodies become productive in their enhanced capacity for labor-related "travel." After all, the significance of travel, in life and in literature, rarely exists solely in the arrival at a destination. A modern travel narrative is comprised of the flight delays, lost luggage, and language barriers that make the rest of the story worth telling, and ultimately make the final destination worth reaching. As Irina Metzler explains, the value of the struggle—or for my purposes, *travail*—also extends to the practice of scholarship:

Transferring the analogy of the social model of disability to the historical disciplines, after a fashion, we, the modern researchers, historians, and even medieval specialists, are disabled by our lack of distinct, neatly arranged bodies of sources and struggle to find materials. And as in the social model of disability, where disability is seen as a construct, so as a discipline too medievalists need to

recognise that an apparent lack of sources is a construct of the rigorously mono-disciplinary school of thought prevalent until fairly recently.¹

Located in the “struggle” of disability that Metzler describes, I argue, is a focus on the form, function and structure of, as well as the relationships between, texts that scholars may not have studied so closely were it not for the gaps in chronology or the missing or marred pages that inhibit normative modes of categorization and interpretation. While she applies the social model of disability to the difficulties of historical research in this passage, I extend this idea to include literary analysis that focuses on the structure and form of “damaged” texts.

In this project I take a disability studies approach combined with theories of incorporation in order to examine travel in general, and medieval travel in particular, through processes of damage, alienation, and disorientation. Using Robert McRuer’s recent critique of compulsory able-bodiedness, for example, allows me to rethink the traveling body in terms that are better suited to medieval conceptions of wholeness: in economies dependent on physical labor, as he argues, the system demands that its workers conform to a standard of physical ability, but an ideal that is impossible to achieve.² As McRuer has established, disability functions culturally as a resistance to normalizing movements such as corporate capitalism and globalization. In medieval spiritual as well as market economies, I argue, fleshly resistance performs similar cultural functions, impeding the normalized cultural message of the body and the text it inhabits while offering broader cultural significance that often extends beyond the pages of a

¹ Irina Metzler, *A Social History of Disability in the Middle Ages: Cultural Considerations of Physical Impairment* (New York: Routledge, 2013), p. 1.

² Robert McRuer, *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability* (New York: NYU Press, 2006).

narrative and into the culture that surrounds it. Likewise, Maggie Kilgour's work on metaphors of incorporation opens up the rhetoric of travel by defining encounters between travelers as more or less complete incorporations, from cannibalism to verbal communication. In this model, however, both eater and eaten—able-bodied culture and “damaged” or disabled bodies—become open and vulnerable. Acknowledging the body's innate failures to perform, whether in terms of physical ability (McRuer) or identity categories (Kilgour), opens up an approach that seems ideally suited to rethinking the relationship between travel, movement, and bodies, particularly in a medieval context. The human relationship with the body takes numerous forms. We eat, love, build, worship, and learn by using our own bodies, and sometimes the bodies of animals, as instruments. In each of these endeavors, the material of the instrument can get in the way, and those bodily obstacles can create new pathways to signification.

I begin the project with a chapter on the medieval origins of the popular patron saint of travel, Saint Christopher. This first chapter is a discussion of monstrous—spiritually disabled—flesh as an obstacle to sainthood in the legends of Saint Christopher, examining the tension between his monstrous form, his legendary travels, and his Christian identity after his conversion. The earliest existing narratives about Saint Christopher describe him as a dog-headed cannibal whose inherent need to travel from his homeland ultimately ends in his conversion to Christianity. Normalized in various ways throughout medieval and modern historical accounts, Saint Christopher's fraught body ultimately caused him to be removed from the Roman Calendar in 1969 for posing

“serious historical problems.”³ I argue that this removal from the calendar is the most recent and unfortunate manifestation of what has been, throughout history, a productive tension between the human and animal flesh of the saint. In medieval culture, Saint Christopher’s monstrosity—his dog-headed body and cannibal practices—made him the ideal representative of the traveler because of his unique ability to embody the ideological threats and challenges posed by cultural contact. Tales of Christopher’s subsequent life as a kind of missionary, traveling and advancing the Christian faith, are always informed by his dominant physical feature, his fierce dog head, and by his past history as a cannibal. My research into this fascinating figure explores his cannibalizing otherness as an example of one of the controlling discourses in medieval travel narratives, which is the conflation of travel with violence, alienation, and destabilization.

The second chapter, “*Concordia discors*: Discord and Incorporation in Dante’s *Vita nuova* and Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*,” examines the objectification of traveling body parts in Dante’s *Vita nuova* and Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*. In these narratives, I argue, the metaphor of the portable heart—removed from the lover’s body and eaten by another—works as another kind of displacement and disorientation. Using China Mieville’s adaptation of Darko Suvin’s theory of cognitive estrangement to talk about the physical dynamics of hearts that travel outside of the body, I examine how the hearts’ movements decenter the lovers in the narratives.⁴ Literal and cultural cannibalism contribute to the travelers’ *travail* in this chapter as well, as do the dynamics of Bill

³ *The Roman Calendar: Text and Commentary* (Washington: United States Catholic Conference/Washington, 1976).

⁴ China Mieville, “Cognition as Ideology: A Dialectic of SF Theory,” *Red Planets* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2009), p. 231-248.

Brown's "Thing Theory," which explains how the breakdown of objects draws attention to their thingness.⁵ The open wound, like the monstrous body, resists classification, and in *Vita nuova* Love's act of consumption—in which Love forces Beatrice to eat the lover's heart—presents such a potent threat to the stability of both the eater and the eaten that completion of the act becomes paramount in order to restore the ontological integrity of both bodies involved.⁶ For Dante, love materially manifests not only as embodied human being but also as a road, combining *travel* and *travail* in a single narrative. In *Troilus and Criseyde*, Troilus—whose name means "Little Troy"—is the human embodiment of the city of Troy, so his exchange of hearts with Criseyde contains similar elements of embodied travel as well as objectified body parts. The exchange of body parts in this narrative is, like in *Vita nuova*, mediated by a third party; the eagle that exchanges its heart for hers while she sleeps. In contrast to *Vita nuova*'s focus on estrangement, the treatment of hearts, bodies, and movements in Chaucer's text emphasizes the internalization of foreign objects.

The third chapter, "The Cant of Simulated Pilgrimage," reads various examples of physical limitation in the York Cycle plays, especially *The Creation of the Angels and the Fall of Lucifer*, *The Fall*, *The Flood*, and *Abraham and Isaac*. Physical restriction is dramatized in the bodies and actions of the lead characters in these plays as well as enacted through the limited movement of the pageant wagons and set designs themselves, and I argue that such limitations were seen as advantageous in the dissemination of

⁵ Bill Brown, "Thing Theory," *Critical Inquiry* 28:1 (Autumn, 2001): 1-22.

⁶ For more on the Freudian desire for completion, see Maggie Kilgour, *From Communion to Cannibalism: An Anatomy of Metaphors of Incorporation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1990).

spiritual instruction to medieval audiences. Because of the emphasis on work and travel throughout the York Cycle, this chapter focuses on the body parts that make these actions possible: the human limbs. The symbolic role of human limbs in medieval literature, I argue, has less to do with the vital functions of the body and more to do with the body's ability to act, and in the context of these plays in particular, to act badly. In medieval society, for instance, criminals' hands and feet were often amputated or disabled in accordance with their crimes.⁷ For this reason, this chapter focuses heavily on legal definitions and penalties associated with the hands and feet.⁸ The travel offered by simulated pilgrimages helps to stage, among other conflicts, the dramatization of violent contact between Jewish and Christian bodies, highlighting the disabling function of amputating limbs—particularly as punishment for criminal acts. In conversation with this symbolism, thematic ties between a particular play's subject matter and the guild craftsmen who produced it made superior craftsmanship and accurate representation economic imperatives in the guild economy. In addition, since injury and dismemberment held competing significations in religious, legal, and industrial contexts in the late Middle Ages, these plays are deeply invested in exactly *how* audiences understood physical weakness and injury. This potential confusion becomes particularly fraught when the plays attempt to represent Christ's sacred Jewish flesh and the soldiers' profane Jewish

⁷ See Margaret Owens, *Stages of Dismemberment* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005) and Cory James Rushton, *Disability and Medieval Law* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013).

⁸ Clifford Davidson, *Material Culture and Medieval Drama* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1999), p. 1. See also Clifford Davidson, "York Guilds and the Corpus Christi Plays: Unwilling Participants?" *Early Theatre: A Journal Associated with the Records of Early English Drama* 9.2 (2006): 10-33 and Alan D. Justice, "Trade Symbolism in the York Cycle." *Theatre Journal* 31.1 (1979): 47-58.

flesh simultaneously. In the York Cycle, I argue, the cultural meaning of disability in terms of human flesh puts the guild economy's need for able-bodied workers in conflict with Christianity's reverence for bodily weakness as a sign of spiritual strength.

The fourth chapter, "Divine Travail: Christ's Conflicting Mobilities in the York Plays," studies the physical dynamics of the relationship between the immobilized body of Christ and the moveable material agents of his crucifixion, both human and object in plays such as *The Road to Calvary* and *Mortificatio Christi*. In the simplest terms, nailing a criminal's hands and feet to a cross renders him or her unable to run or to resist (to act). Writers of the play run into a number of related representational conflicts when dealing with Christ's crucifixion. The first is the thematic throughline of the cycle, which dictates that God moves and works to compensate for human frailty or disability as long as the human demonstrates his or her willingness to attempt the journey or task. The second is that Christ's flesh moves to make contact with humanity through injury, taking on some of the characteristics of limbs such as touching, healing, directing, etc.⁹ Finally, Christ is standing in for the criminal, allowing his limbs to be immobilized. He is beaten and nailed to a cross in accordance with his role as a criminal sacrifice, but the soldiers who crucify him and the cross upon which he is crucified are repeatedly referred to as faulty or flawed, whereas Christ is able to act using the materials and agents of his execution despite his shackled and fractured limbs. In the process of constructing the cross, for instance, the soldiers measure incorrectly and bore a hole in the wrong place. To

⁹ For more on flesh as prosthesis, see Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer*. Daniel Heller-Roazen, trans. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998) and Roberto Esposito, *Bios: Biopolitics and Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

compensate, they simply break Christ's body to fit the cross. His role in the cycle with regard to human flesh is to compensate for its shortcomings, which means in this context that his hands and feet may be nailed to a poorly constructed cross, but he orchestrates every stage of his crucifixion through bodily contortions that render his hands and feet unnecessary for their assigned purposes. Simply put, Christ's body is incapable of disability, a fact that is demonstrated through the play's continuous repositioning of the relationships between mobility and immobility. When Christ is, according to his own purposes, unable to move his earthly body, he simply moves the material world instead.

In my coda, I adapt this concept of *travail* to analyze some of the physically damaged, contested, and fragmented manuscripts that contain the literary texts I discuss in previous chapters. The fragmented Saint Christopher text in the late tenth-century Nowell Codex and the absent York Cycle *Fergus* play, for instance, help me investigate how medieval manuscripts, which are made from animal skins, can be considered another kind of "body" that undergoes violence and reinvention through travel contact.¹⁰ Scholars' continued reference to the Nowell Codex Saint Christopher fragment as "acephalous" not only recalls the devastating loss the medieval canon sustained as a result of the Cotton library fire of 1731, but oddly mirrors the decapitation of the patron saint in the text of the fragment. In a similar way, the relationship between texts of *Troilus and Criseyde* and *Piers Plowman* moves from adjacent to embedded in Huntington Library manuscripts 114 and 143, which transplants Troy into the context of

¹⁰ For examples of this contextual approach, see Andy Orchard, *A Critical Companion to Beowulf* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2003) and Heather Blurton, *Cannibalism in High Medieval English Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 40.

Piers. While HM 114 contains complete manuscripts of both texts, HM 143 contains a text of *Piers Plowman* in which a fragment of *Troilus and Criseyde* appears on the front flyleaf. Noelle Phillips has made the argument for a materially-oriented reading of HM 114:

Despite the indeterminacy of scribal intent during the process of book production, the physical proximity of bound texts both guides their readers and illuminates the scribe or compiler's understanding of the book.¹¹

I am building my argument about texts that undergo this travelling travel—a process that fragments texts or subjects one text to another—along these same lines. Although the current state of a manuscript may not present the text as its author intended, these repurposed manuscripts can be read and interpreted for the meanings offered by their present form. Amputated texts like the absent York Cycle play *Fergus* have a similar function when their excision from a manuscript is documented: the record points to its absence, reserving historical space for as long as the record survives. The advantage of using *travail* as an approach to a fragmented manuscript is that it does not require that the end product remain identical to its source text. Just as the traveler is frequently altered by travel, so these texts have most certainly been altered by their journeys. Studying them in their current form and context does not negate their original form; it simply captures them in a particular historical moment according to their current material configuration.

The idea that bodies or texts should be judged according to standards of normativity is just beginning to give way to different conceptions of wholeness. Scholars

¹¹ Noelle Phillips, "Compilational Reading: Richard Osborn and Huntington Library MS HM 114," *Yearbook of Langland Studies* 28 (2014): 71.

of disability studies have become adept at creating alternate routes to signification and privileging representation over action. Only recently, however, have scholars begun to resist the impulse to focus on lack and deficiency when reading non-normative bodies. The relationship between *travail* and *travel* offers an approach that does just this—a way to study resistances, struggles, and pressures that give rather than take away meaning. Resistance is intrinsic to travel. The struggles and pressures of travel are instrumental in giving the journey meaning. Each of the processes I listed at the beginning of this introduction—eating, loving, building, worshipping, and learning—is essentially a process of objects exerting pressure on each other, creating new landscapes like tectonic plates crushing each other to form mountains. It does not seem strange, then, to acknowledge that extraordinary pressures and strains on the body have generative power, and to read the resulting scars and fractures as new formations rather than mere absences or evidence of lack. Moving beyond categorizing physical difference as “damage” is a productive exercise in the study of travel literature, as is maintaining pressure on literary scholarship to make sense of scars and gaps, to linger on disjunctions within a narrative or between a text and its context. In contrast to normativist impulses, this study seeks to read non-normative structures in human and literary “bodies” as integral to the composition and cultural meaning of a text. Recasting the experience of travel as an experience of physical and psychological endurance and exertion rather than unfettered geographical movement not only expands the definition of travel, but the definition of the traveler as well.

Cannibalizing the Cannibal Saint: Medieval Cultural Incorporation and the Conversion Narratives of Saint Christopher

The Cannibal Prism: Christopher as Cultural Projection

Among the tools for manufacturing cultural difference, cannibalism is one of the most violent and one of the most effective. Cannibalism has been a staple in travel narratives since the Greco-Roman era, and its functions have remained consistent from its literary inception. As Laurence R. Goldman says in his introduction to *The Anthropology of Cannibalism*, “Cannibalism is here, as it has always been, a quintessential symbol of alterity, an entrenched metaphor of cultural xenophobia.”¹ Anthropological studies of cannibalism generally begin with New World travel narratives, but recent postcolonial approaches to medieval literature have precipitated discussions of premodern cannibal tales. Although collective identity in the Middle Ages was predicated on religion rather than nation, medieval cannibal narratives created and reinforced cultural difference through the same frameworks present in modern and postmodern texts. My objective in this chapter is to understand the complex relationships between Saint Christopher’s literary cannibal acts and anxieties about travel in the Middle Ages.

¹ Goldman is referring to Michel de Montaigne’s essay entitled “Of Cannibals,” but as he notes here and as several medieval scholars, including Geraldine Heng and Heather Blurton, have observed, cannibalism has always been used as a cultural marker of savagery—in addition to reflecting more unifying cultural views, such as the various forms of endocannibalism (these practices are recognized within certain cultures as forms of communion with the deceased, but almost always demonized by those outside of the culture). Laurence Goldman, *The Anthropology of Cannibalism* (London: Bergin and Garvey, 1999), p. 1.

Cannibal metaphors lend themselves so readily to these cultural conversations in part because the veracity of anthropological accounts of cannibalism is now in question.² As a result, cannibal episodes in travel narratives reveal perhaps more about the culture of the anthropologist than they do about his or her subject.³ In this way, cannibal narratives frequently function as a “prism,” reflecting the values and practices of the observer’s culture rather than the intended subject of the study. The boundaries of the human body are threatened, along with the entire category of the human, when confronted with an act of cannibalism. Humans become “stuff”; in this instance, food.⁴ For this reason, the study of cannibalism in literature brings up essential questions about the breakdown of those boundaries, the threats such a breakdown poses to an individual as well as to larger communities and cultures, and the ways in which the body is constituted as a cultural object.⁵

Saint Christopher is particularly relevant to this discussion because he is a monstrous cannibal saint linked to the East, a symbolic figure for those who would venture beyond their own cultural and geographical boundaries and risk assimilation into another culture or way of life. Saint Christopher’s hybrid form is indicative of a cultural

² See William Arens, *The Man-Eating Myth: Anthropology and Anthropophagy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979) and Gananeth Obeyesekere, *Cannibal Talk: The Man-Eating Myth and Human Sacrifice in the South Seas*. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005).

³ See Goldman, pp. 1-2.

⁴ Maggie Kilgour, *From Communion to Cannibalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

⁵ Elaine Scarry’s discussion of the making and unmaking of the world according to our material bodies is useful in talking about how the boundaries of our bodies, physical as well as psychological, define our world. See Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

ambiguity, as both Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Karl Steel have observed.⁶ Saint Christopher, according to this characterization, both enacts and embodies his cultural role: he commits acts of cannibalism, according to the narratives chronicling his life, and his form is self-cannibalizing. He embodies a struggle between two culturally significant forms, both competing for control of his identity. This portrayal is not confined to his body, but his other conflicted characteristics can almost always be traced back to his physical monstrosity. As I argue in this chapter, the narratives of his conversion support this reading; Christopher and those who encounter Christopher are similarly conflicted when trying to make sense of his competing cultural affiliations and characteristics. This cannibal narrative, then, is functioning as a cultural prism. The characteristics of Saint Christopher are varied and contradictory, but those he encounters are revealed by their interactions with him.

Travelers, Narrative and Incorporation

Saint Christopher's history has been punctuated by controversy because of his possibly monstrous origins. Scholars have made efforts to define him through his historical context, his species, his sainthood, his monstrosity, as well as according to the generic conventions of romance.⁷ Art historian Eleanor Elizabeth Pridgeon's recent

⁶ See Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Hybridity, Identity, and Monstrosity in Medieval Britain: On Difficult Middles* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) and Karl Steel, *How to Make a Human*. (Columbus: Ohio State University, 2011).

⁷ For more on a historical reading of Saint Christopher, see Heather Blurton, *Cannibalism in High Medieval English Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). For a discussion of his species, see Karl Steel, *How to Make a Human* (Columbus: Ohio State University, 2011). For more on Saint Christopher's sainthood, see Scott G. Bruce, "Hagiography as Monstrous Ethnography: A Note on Ratramnus of Corbie's Letter Concerning the Conversion of the Cynocephali," *Insignis Sophiae Arcator: Essays in Honour of*

scholarship suggests that Saint Christopher's role as the patron saint of the traveler in the Middle Ages may have been exaggerated, but she acknowledges that implicit connections between Christopher's saintly protections and the dangers of travel remain:

Since the nineteenth century (and before), it has been understood that medieval Saint Christopher images were inherently associated with travellers and pilgrims . . . In one sense, the manner in which Saint Christopher images were utilised (they were generally glanced at and passed by) immediately associates the figure with movement and travel. However, there is very little indication that such images of Saint Christopher were employed by pilgrims, at least in England and Wales.⁸

The two examples that Pridgeon cites of Saint Christopher's explicit cultural connections to travel, however, have to do with pilgrims. The most prominent is the silver Saint Christopher medal that the yeoman wears in the general prologue to the *Canterbury Tales*: "a Cristopher on his brest of silver sheene."⁹ Pridgeon points out that the yeoman's accessories are rather eclectic. The yeoman's use of the Christopher medal here, she argues, is simply one piece of evidence among many that he is over-prepared for his journey. Chaucer's characterization of the yeoman indeed indicates that he is "a forster," first and foremost, and that a number of his accessories were more associated with the hunt rather than with travel explicitly.¹⁰ The fact remains, however, that the yeoman is preparing for a pilgrimage in this scene. "Circumstantial" or not, the inclusion of a Saint

Michael W. Herren on His 65th Birthday (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), pp.44-56. For an analysis of Saint Christopher's monstrous characteristics, see Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Hybridity, Identity, and Monstrosity in Medieval Britain: On Difficult Middles* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006). For a discussion of Saint Christopher according to the conventions of romance, see Geraldine Heng, "Cannibalism, the First Crusade, and the Genesis of Medieval Romance," *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, 10.1 (1998), pp. 98-174.

⁸ Eleanor Elizabeth Pridgeon, "Saint Christopher Wall Paintings in English and Welsh Churches." Diss. U. of Leicester, (2008), p. 91.

⁹ Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Riverside Chaucer*. Larry D. Benson, ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), I:115.

¹⁰ Chaucer, I:101-117.

Christopher medal in the yeoman's traveling ensemble is predicated on the idea that his journey will prove dangerous.

Further resisting popular characterizations of Saint Christopher as the medieval traveler's patron saint, Pridgeon also contests the claim that Saint Christopher medals and rings were worn primarily by medieval travelers:

There are a number of medallions or pendants depicting Saint Christopher that survive from the late medieval period. It is not clear how common or widespread these medallions were, or what types of people might have worn them. One such item (housed in the British Museum) is a small pilgrim badge of lead alloy, measuring approximately 4cm in length. The relief engraving shows the saint carrying the Christ Child on his right shoulder. Another pendant (c.1500) of silver gilt, a fifteenth-century gold brooch (diameter 2.5cm), and four fifteenth-century gold rings depicting Saint Christopher, are held in the collections of the Victoria and Albert Museum. One of the rings is inscribed on the inside with black lettering 'De bon cor'. This could be a reminder or confirmation that whoever wears the ring will be safeguarded against harm. The existence of these objects has led researchers (including Salmon), to conclude that they were worn by travellers or pilgrims for protection.¹¹

Pridgeon's point here, that these cultural links between Christopher and travel do not prove that medieval travelers recognized him as the patron saint of the traveler, is well taken. Christopher's protections, however, align him with medieval travelers' primary concerns about travel and, as Pridgeon herself demonstrates, there are at least two examples of badges associating Christopher with pilgrimage.

Historian Jean Verdon questions the application of modern definitions of travel to the Middle Ages, suggesting that travel in the Middle Ages occurred generally over shorter distances because "nothing either in the means of communication or in the

¹¹ Pridgeon, p. 92.

landscape encouraged travel.”¹² Longer trips, especially for religious reasons, were not uncommon, but even brief excursions were treacherous and costly. Tolls, taxes, and piracy, along with all of the natural hardships of journeying, awaited the medieval traveler. Given the harsh reality of the medieval “road,” it is not difficult to see why a traveler might very well want Christopher’s protections against illness and injury while traveling or why the two concepts are often difficult for historians studying medieval culture to separate.¹³ Travel and bodily injury are so tightly coupled in the Middle Ages because one so frequently results from the other: There is no medieval corollary to air travel that eclipses the distance and time between two points on the landscape—the distance must be deliberately and painfully traversed, so the exposed traveler calls on spiritual and philosophical protections to sustain his physical and ideological integrity.

As Robert Bork and Andrea Kann observe in their introduction to *The Art, Science, and Technology of Medieval Travel*, “[a]s the traveler moves across the countryside saint by saint, relic by relic, the world seems a place of endless wonders—and yet a distinct thread of xenophobia is wound into the tapestry of worship and adventure.”¹⁴ The feeling of wonder and threads of xenophobia are not specifically medieval phenomena, but real and perceived threats are more ever-present to the relatively slow-moving, exposed medieval traveler. In discussing the medieval traveler’s

¹² Jean Verdon, *Travel in the Middle Ages* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003).

¹³ Broadly speaking, this is the case, since medieval travel often included sea and wilderness travel. Paul B. Newman details several types of medieval travelers that fall into four main categories: “Business Travel,” “Travel of the nobility,” “Religious Travel,” and “Beggars and Vagabonds.” The final category has the most direct link to bodily damage, since many people who relied on charity for food did so because they were unfit for physical labor. Also in this group were lepers, who were outcast from society. See *Travel and Trade in the Middle Ages* (London: McFarland and Company, Inc., 2011), pp. 3-11.

¹⁴ Robert Bork and Andrea Kann, *The Art, Science, and Technology of Medieval Travel* (Burlington, VT: Asgate Publishing, 2008), p. 4.

mindset, Bork and Kann go on to say that “travel should only be undertaken with a great deal of caution, and . . . travel may involve encountering not only new sights and sounds, but also new people, some of whom may seem threateningly alien.”¹⁵ In light of these attitudes toward travel, the reality that one of the figures medieval travelers summoned to protect them from spiritual and bodily harm is a monstrous hybrid creature begs closer examination.

Christopher appears in some legends as a cynocephalus, or dog-headed cannibal. In other legends, his monstrous form is obscured, but some monstrous behavioral characteristics remain. These origin stories appear to have been troubling for the Vatican, since Saint Christopher’s status remains a subject of debate into the twenty-first century.¹⁶ His legacy is still heavy with controversy, the most recent liturgical move being Pope Paul VI’s apostolic letter, the *Mysterii Paschalis*, removing Saint Christopher’s feast day from the Roman Catholic calendar of saints in 1969.¹⁷ In these documents, Christopher is described as being more “legendary” than historical, and therefore more suited to local celebrations than to the universal calendar. Despite the fact that the official text and commentary explaining the calendar revisions counts Saint Christopher among those who “should be left to be celebrated by a particular Church, nation, or religious family,” some church leaders maintain that Christopher wasn’t

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Recent articles taking up the issue:
<http://cathnews.acu.edu.au/408/84.php>
<http://articles.latimes.com/2004/jul/31/local/me-beliefs31>
<http://www.ucc.ie/milmart/chrismodern.html>
<http://www.wcprr.org/pdf/06-01/2011.01.84-92.pdf>

¹⁷ *The Roman Calendar: Text and Commentary* (Washington: United States Catholic Conference/Washington, 1976).

demoted.¹⁸ It is curious, however, that one of the more popular saints should be deemed unfit for the universal calendar, given that the alternative explanation typically given by these leaders is that the saints who were removed from the calendar just weren't as ubiquitous as those who remain. Furthermore, he is listed in the document under the heading of "Saints Who Pose Serious Historical Problems," along with the following explanation: "Although it cannot be stated with certainty that these saints did not exist, hagiographers are unable to find any accurate historical basis for their veneration."¹⁹ These explanations contradict assertions that Saint Christopher was simply less well-known than the saints who remain on the universal calendar.

The persistence of this hagiographical controversy is useful for my study of Saint Christopher because the subject of this chapter is precisely the unsettling of Christopher's status. As Asa Mittman states in his review of Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's *Hybridity, Identity, and Monstrosity in Medieval Britain*, the medieval hybrid—exemplified in Cohen's book by the cynocephalus—is "a disunity formed by the incomplete incorporation of its constituent parts."²⁰ Neither form is able to fully incorporate the other, so the body exists in a perpetual state of hybridized ontology that simultaneously signifies as self, other, and neither. This perpetual formal and material instability, I contend, makes Saint Christopher particularly well-suited to his task, which is to represent the tension inherent in

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 28. See also *Abilene Reporter-News* article: <http://www.texnews.com/1998/religion/demote0606.html>

¹⁹ *The Roman Calendar: Text and Commentary*, p. 30.

²⁰ Mittman, Asa S. Rev. of *Hybridity, Identity, and Monstrosity in Medieval Britain: On Difficult Middles*, by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen. *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 1 (2009): 314-318. For more on the cultural significance of monsters, see also Cohen, *Medieval Identity Machines* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), *Of Giants: Sex, Monsters, and the Middle Ages* (Medieval Cultures) (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), and *The Postcolonial Middle Ages* (New Middle Ages) (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001).

geographical boundary-crossing. Geographical boundaries in both the medieval and modern consciousness represent the threat of difference to a traveler—the danger of losing pieces of identity to another people, culture or landscape. Using Maggie Kilgour’s “metaphors of incorporation” along with other theories of incorporation, my goal here is to analyze the ways in which ideas about Christopher’s body provide a model for understanding medieval conceptions of material corporeal stability in the face of geographical, cultural, and spiritual threats.²¹ I contend that these ways of understanding travel and ontological threats to the traveler extend beyond the threshold between the medieval and the modern, informing the ways in which the traveler conceives of himself and his Other in the New World and beyond.

Saint Christopher’s cannibalism also links him to travel, as cannibalism is a particularly active and threatening form of incorporation, episodes of which occur most frequently in narrative when travelers encounter a new land and/or culture.²² According to Kilgour’s “metaphors of incorporation” and larger theories about the anthropological role of threats of cannibalism, fears about travel are rooted in the desire to preserve the integrity of the physical body. Incorporation, by definition, is a breakdown or invasion of that body, which begins to destabilize the identity of the individual being consumed.

Travel in the Middle Ages was particularly hard on the body of the traveler. In addition to the normal wear and tear of travel either on foot or by beast of burden,

²¹For more on skin as a threshold for medieval identity, see *Reading Skin in Medieval Literature and Culture*, Katie L. Walter, ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013). For more on the importance of materiality to medieval cultures and economies, see Claire Sponsler, *Drama and Resistance: Bodies, Goods, and Theatricality in Late Medieval England* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

²² I am using the term “cannibalism” here as Kilgour uses it—defined in opposition to more peaceful and equitable processes of incorporation she calls “communion.” See Kilgour, p. 6.

travelers also had to contend with new illnesses and ideologies when entering new lands. Both were considered threatening—the waves of plague were deadly and invisible, while the crusades created constantly shifting boundaries between allies and enemies.²³

The Cannibal Patron Saint

I have chosen to make Saint Christopher the focus of this chapter because he embodies the perpetual incomplete incorporation I see as essential to fears of travel and prevalent in narrative accounts of travel. Christopher's body can be read as a material manifestation of a cultural contact zone, in which disparate cultures or cultural elements struggle to reconcile themselves with one another.²⁴ His cultural incorporation is a literal incorporation of two conflicting bodies. As Kilgour argues, "[t]he relation between an inside and an outside involves a delicate balance of simultaneous identification and separation that is typified by the act of incorporation, in which an external object is taken inside another."²⁵ In the body of Saint Christopher, two distinct ontological categories—man and beast—exist, but it is unclear who is taken inside whom. This reflects the

²³ John Block Friedman and Kristen Figg provide useful definitions for "travel" and "exploration" in a medieval context in their study of medieval travel:

We understand "travel" to mean the movements of individuals from their homes to other places, some close and some extremely distant, whether the travel was undertaken for religious reasons (as with pilgrims or ascetics), for personal and political gain (as with merchants or colonizers), out of simple intellectual curiosity (as is demonstrated in the travel reports of Ibn Battūta), or out of a mix of motives (as several entries here indicate was true of European crusaders) . . . "Exploration" is broadly conceived as an intellectual and practical curiosity which encourages travel, either armchair or actual, on the part of voyagers on land and over water, to learn about or experience regions of the world new to them, though often mentioned in works of the ancient Greek and Roman geographers in sensationalizing and garbled ways.

For the full discussion, see the introduction to *Trade, Travel and Exploration in the Middle Ages: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Garland Pub., 2000).

²⁴ For more on the contact zone, see Mary Louise Pratt's article, "Arts of the Contact Zone," *Profession* (1991): 33-40.

²⁵ Kilgour, p. 4.

difficulty inherent in categorizing bodies engaged in acts of incorporation. As Kilgour explains, “[t]he idea of incorporation . . . depends upon and enforces an absolute division between inside and outside; but in the act itself that opposition disappears, dissolving the structure it appears to produce.”²⁶ It is this tension that I find most theoretically productive in the form of Saint Christopher: the simultaneous reinforcement and dissolution of ontological boundaries that identifies him as not only the embodiment of incomplete self and other, but as the patron saint—the religious representative—of such a conflicted creature.

To engage this tension, I’ll begin with an examination of one of the more beastly depictions of Saint Christopher from the *Old English Martyrology*, a collection of two hundred and thirty Old English hagiographies written in the Mercian dialect. Six medieval manuscripts and one Early Modern transcript of the *Martyrology* still exist, but none of them are complete. Included in the *Martyrology* are the legends of Roman, European, and English saints, and most are brief accounts. Saint Christopher’s tale is one of the longest in the collection (along with St. Cecilia and St. Lucia). Saints Sisinnius, Martyrius, and Alexander are given short shrift: their collective tale is told in one sentence.²⁷ According to Paul E. Szarmach, recent scholarship on the *Martyrology* has suggested that the text might have been translated from Latin sources.²⁸ He uses Günther

²⁶ For more on theoretical applications of cannibalism and consumption, see *Eating Their Words: Cannibalism and the Boundaries of Cultural Identity*. Kristen Guest, ed. (New York: State University of New York Press, Albany, 2001).

²⁷ See Mark C. Amodio, *The Anglo-Saxon Literature Handbook* (West Sussex, UK: 2014), p. 92. Amodio goes on to say that the characteristic brevity with which all of the saints’ lives are treated in these manuscripts might be an indication that the manuscripts were intended for use as memory aids rather than read as full literary texts.

²⁸ Paul E. Szarmach, *Studies in Earlier Old English Prose* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press), p. 10.

Kotzor's term, "narrative prose martyrology," to describe the genre of the text and says that the ninth century is the "latest possible time for the composition of the *Old English Martyrology*."²⁹ According to George Herzfeld in his introduction to the *Early English Text Society* edition, linguistic and textual analysis suggest that the original source of the *Martyrology* was compiled in about 750AD in England.³⁰

In this Anglo-Saxon version of Saint Christopher's legend, the tale begins with Christopher's entry "on þa ceastre þa Samo is nemned of þære þeode þær men habbað hunda heafod *and* of þære eorðan on þære æton men hi selfe" [into the town called Samos from the nation where men have the head of a dog and from the country where men eat each other].³¹ In addition to giving Christopher a monstrous point of origin, the narrative also makes clear that he is also monstrous: "he heafde hundes heafod, *and* his loccas wæron ofer gemet side, *and* his eagan scinon swa leohte swa morgensteorra, *and* his teð wæ swa scearpe efores tuxas" [He had the head of a dog, his locks were exceedingly thick, his eyes shone as brightly as the morning-star, and his teeth were as sharp as a boar's tusk].³² The next descriptor begins to complicate our understanding of Saint Christopher as beastly: "he wæs gode geleafull on his heortan, ac he ne mihte spreca swa mon" [In his heart he believed in God, but he could not speak like a man].³³ In this description, Christopher is rational despite his canine head and his inability to

²⁹Szarmach goes on to say that studies have demonstrated "the lack of a direct and striking relationship between the Latin texts and the Old English." This makes way, he says, for "the proposition that the *Martyrology* is an independent and original work." See Ibid.

³⁰"April 28. Christophorus," *An Old English Martyrology*. Ed. George Herzfeld (EETS, No. 116). (London: Kegan, Paul, Trench, Trübner, & Co., Ltd., 1894), p. xxviii.

³¹Ibid., pp. 66 and 67.

³²Ibid.

³³Ibid.

speak. This is significant because the human head was traditionally conceived of as the seat of reason, while the monstrous head was indicative of a lack of reason. As Isidore of Seville says of the head in the first Christian encyclopedia, *Etymologies*, “unde ipsius animae, quae consulit corpori, quodammodo personam gerit” [it plays the role, so to speak, of the soul itself, which watches over the body].³⁴ As Karl Steel extrapolates, the “zoocephalic monsters, the upright, rational, bipedal form of the human governed by animal lusts” are “thus made morally monstrous.”³⁵

Given Isidore’s definition, Saint Christopher’s beastly head, then, is not only a marker of physical difference, but of moral monstrosity that sets Saint Christopher in symbolic opposition to Christianity “as [a tool] for Christians to generate, imagine, and contain the threat of religious and ethnic difference.”³⁶ The chronology of the story from the *Martyrology* also indicates that Saint Christopher was able to believe in God before he could speak, which presents a theological conundrum. According to the seventh or eighth-century *Liber Monstrorum*, cynocephali could only communicate by barking, which was an indicator of their beastly natures.³⁷ The narrative makes clear that when Saint Christopher prays for “monnes gesprec” [human speech], that ability comes, not to him from God directly, but through a white-robed intermediary who “eðode him on Þone muð” [breathed into his mouth].³⁸ This mediation eases, but does not erase, the ontological tension between the human and beastly signifiers in Saint Christopher’s

³⁴ *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*. Trans. Stephen A. Barney, W.J. Lewis, Oliver Berghof, and J.A. Beach (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 232.

³⁵ Steel, p. 137.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 138.

³⁷ See *Liber Monstrorum*.

³⁸ Herzfeld, p. 66 and 67.

character. While an external figure grants this creature speech, he is clearly capable of the reason necessary for conversion before he is capable of speaking. It is also worth noting that Saint Christopher ends up terrifying pagans rather than Christians with his beastly appearance. This legend ends with the pagan emperor Decius falling from his throne in astonishment at the “onsyne” [countenance] of Saint Christopher and Saint Christopher’s subsequent execution when he refuses to renounce Christianity.³⁹

This version of the narrative emphasizes Saint Christopher’s physical monstrosity, while at the same time imbuing him with certain abilities and characteristics that run counter to contemporary theological conceptions of the monstrous body in the early Middle Ages. He is dog-headed at the same time as he is rational, incapable of speech at the time of his conversion, and symbolically threatening in “countenance,” but to his own people rather than to Christians. Some of this has been rationalized by modern scholars, who, as Steel has noted, “tend to silently bypass the problem of monsters, many of which are hybrids of human and animal forms.”⁴⁰ Like Steel, I feel as if scholarship on the body would benefit from sustained analysis of Saint Christopher’s body and its significations. Unlike Steel, I am decoding Christopher’s body using a theoretical approach that depends on, rather than deemphasizes, categories of difference. This does not mean that I advocate for an unequal power relationship between humans and animals, but that I see a productive tension in narrative depictions of that relationship that does not preclude categorization of various material elements of the body as either human or animal. I am arguing that Saint Christopher’s agency relies heavily on his categorizable human and

³⁹ Ibid., p. 68 and 69.

⁴⁰ Steel, p. 52

animal parts working together to signify a persistent tension that is not possible in an undifferentiated body. Rather than functioning consistently as fully monstrous, Christopher emerges in various forms in medieval narrative.

As I mentioned, several scholars have engaged Saint Christopher's form in ways that have enriched the body of travel narratives and hagiographies in which he and his cynocephalic kin appear. These studies inform my reading of his liminal and perpetually unstable—but stable in its instability—form that invites questions about the cultural significance of incorporation and boundary-crossing. It is this cultural significance that is most prevalent in the eleventh-century *Passio Sancti Christophori Martyris*' characterization of Saint Christopher.⁴¹ This anonymous eleventh-century Latin text, found in the *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Latina* 1764 manuscript and reproduced by the Bollandists in the *Analecta Bollandiana* 10. The Bollandists' current website bills its publication as “a journal of critical hagiography, edited and published since 1882 by the Société des Bollandistes in Brussels.”⁴² They go on to say that “the journal was conceived as a continuous updating of the prestigious *Acta Sanctorum* series, as well as an entirely new instrument devoted to hagiographical research. Every issue contains both critical editions of hagiographical texts (Greek, Latin, Oriental...), and fundamental studies about hagiography.”⁴³

⁴¹ Carolus de Smedt, Josephus de Backer, Josephus van den Gheyn, and Hippolitus Delehaye, *Analecta Bollandiana* 10 (Paris: Société Générale de Librairie Catholique, 1891).

⁴² See Société des Bollandistes, *Analecta Bollandiana*, <http://www.bollandistes.org/publications-analecta.php?pg=journal>.

⁴³ The Bollandists publish a number of volumes outlining their methodologies, all of which appear to be in French.

The hard copy of the *Analecta Bollandiana 10* has no table of contents and the entire volume—including its index—is in Latin, which might account for the lack of scholarship on the texts it contains. The version of the Saint Christopher legend in this text emphasizes the threatening environment surrounding the narrative, opening with an ominous description of the cultural landscape from a Christian perspective:

In temporibus illis erat multa insania et multitudo copiosa idola colentium. Cum haec igitur invalesceret adversus fidem christianorum, exiit edictum a principibus temporibus illis, ut omnes Deum colentes immundarum escarum idolatriae degustarent, eos vero qui contradicerent tradi et diversis poenis affligi.⁴⁴

[At that time there was much madness, and a great multitude of idol worshippers. When therefore this madness was growing stronger in its opposition to the Christian faith, there was sent forth an edict from the emperors of that time that all who worshipped God should taste the unclean food of idolatry, and those who objected should be delivered up and subjected to different penalties].

I want to return here to my definition of travel as an act of incorporation in that the traveler either consumes the strange land or is consumed by it. The author here is clearly expressing a fear of either being consumed by madness or an idol-worshipping throng, or being force-fed idolatry by the godless emperors. As Kilgour makes clear, threat of spiritual contamination, like the one in the *Passio Sancti*, is a potentially lethal threat of incorporation:

[T]aste concerns what we are inclined to take into ourselves by eating, what will by intussusception either actually become ourselves or refuse to be assimilated and perhaps kill us . . . one can be poisoned by what one takes in.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ de Smedt, et al., p. 394. For more information on the historical origins of the Saint Christopher manuscripts, see Pridgeon, p. 6-7.

⁴⁵ Kilgour, p. 9.

I will talk about the threat of spiritual contamination when I engage Bynum's definition of medieval holy matter as the "insistent" and "problematic" locus of the sacred. What I want to emphasize here is the way the narrative framing of this encounter with Saint Christopher itself embodies the threat of otherness before the monstrous other actually enters the narrative. In a sense, the cynocephalus is naturalized by the threatening, mad and idolatrous environment in this version of the narrative.

Prefaced by a description of the church of God as "devastated," by local governors, the author then introduces "quidam autem vir, cum esset alienigena, regionis eorum qui homines manducabant, qui habebat terribilem visionem et quasi canino capite." [a certain man who, since he was a foreigner from the land of man-eaters, had a terrible appearance, like a dog's head.]⁴⁶ In this narrative, the man is not identified as Christopher until he is baptized, so even though he has converted, he is known as Reprobis for a time after he claims to be Christian. Reprobis' inability to speak is depicted here as a translation problem: "hic ei beatissimus non poterat loqui nostrae linguae sermonem" [This most blessed man was not able to speak our language].⁴⁷ In this version, as in the *Old English Martyrology*, Reprobis prays for speech and this time a "shining figure" [viri fulgentis] appears and breathes language into him, only this time the narrative has allowed him the capacity for speech prior to his conversion.⁴⁸ This indicates, according to Isidore's definitions, that Reprobis was capable of reason prior to his conversion despite his canine head. Immediately upon his conversion, Reprobis

⁴⁶ de Smedt, et al., p. 395.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

begins to proselytize, following God's orders to "fight vigorously" [certare ergo valde] and go to talk to the king.⁴⁹ Upon his arrival, Reprobis indeed has occasion to fight. The king's servants "coepit percutere eum in faciam" [began to hit him in the face]. He refuses to fight, however, and they retreat at the sight of his face, which is "immutatum et terribile" [unchanged and terrible].⁵⁰ King Decius responds to reports of Reprobis sightings by demanding that his soldiers rip Christopher to pieces but that they bring his head so the king could see what it was like ("solummodo mihi caput ejus adferte, ut videam qualis sit, si vere ipse sit au alius").⁵¹

After a period of imprisonment, Reprobis agrees to be taken to the king. He promises the king's soldiers food after they convert to Christianity and God miraculously multiplies their loaves (which were not mentioned previously in the narrative). Reprobis and the soldiers are all baptized on the journey so that by the time he reaches the city, he is Christopher, "Bearer-of-Christ."⁵² In this narrative, as in the *Old English Martyrology*, Decius falls from his throne at the sight of Christopher's face.⁵³ Notably, Decius expresses difficulty deciphering Christopher's categories of identity: *cujus religionis uel au quo genere es, aut quis vocaris* [What is your religion, or your nationality, or what are you called?]⁵⁴ Christopher's reply indicates a recognition of ontological disjunction in his appearance:

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 396.

⁵² Ibid., p. 397.

⁵³ Ibid., p.398.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

si velis seire sujus religionis sum, christianus sum. genus autem meum meus vultus indicat. nomen autem meum, quod vocatum est a parentibus, Reprebus; postquam autem inluminatus sum, Christophorus sum vocatus.

[If you want to know my religion, I am a Christian. My face reveals my nationality. My name, that which I was called by my parents, is Reprobus; but after I was enlightened I was called Christopher].⁵⁵

Decius' trouble categorizing Christopher is symptomatic of the larger struggle in the legends to decide precisely where Christopher belongs. In some narratives, Christopher begins the story as a Canaanite, which means he is originally one of Decius' subjects. In all versions of the legend, Christopher is originally pagan and threatening and at least living among cannibals. In the above passage, Christopher makes a distinction between his religion and his nationality, but his appearance has not changed enough to make clear that he belongs to the body of Christ; instead it aligns him with his pagan enemy. Christopher's new name appears to stabilize his identity and ground it in Christendom, but it does not explain the origins of his birth name; to whom was Reprobus behaving falsely? By whom was he rejected? Finally, who perceived him as spurious? The role of Christbearer is a new task, which arguably carries with it a new identity, but it seems to me to reinforce the idea that, again, Christopher is more domesticated than converted. His new name indicates that he is now engaged in behaviors appropriate to a new belief system, but that there are irreconcilable facets of his identity that continue to confuse those around him.

Jacobus de Voragine's mid-thirteenth century collection of Latin hagiographies known as the *Legenda aurea*, or *Golden Legend*, has a more easily verifiable history. The

⁵⁵ Ibid. Christopher's statement is not strictly accurate since he was still called Reprobus after his conversion and after he was given the gift of Christian speech.

author was born around the year 1230, became a Dominican friar in 1244, and rose to the top of the Order. He became the archbishop of Genoa in 1292 and died in 1298. Pope Pius beatified him in 1816. Jacobus' works include books of sermons, a *Chronicle of Genoa*, and some less prominent works. Around one thousand manuscripts of the *Legenda aurea* remain extant, which contributes to scholars' wealth of knowledge about the texts' origins and confidence about the life and work of its author. The collection of saints' lives in the *Legenda aurea* includes a version of the Saint Christopher narrative in which he is depicted as surprisingly human in form, especially given that other saints in the collection, such as Saint Ignatius, Saint Dominic, and Saint Bernard are explicitly associated with dogs.⁵⁶ Variations include a version published by Th. Graesse in 1845 that includes 61 works by authors other than Jacobus de Voragine.⁵⁷

Christopher's monstrous characteristics emerge in his behavior and manifest materially in more subtle ways throughout this narrative.⁵⁸ The passage on Saint Christopher makes clear before the narrative begins that his given name was Reprobis—meaning false, spurious, or rejected—but that upon his baptism he was named Christopher, or “the Christ-bearer.” In this legend, “Christophorus gente Cananaeus, procerissimae staturae vultuque terribili erat” [Christopher was of the lineage of the

⁵⁶ It should be noted that all of these associations are symbolic; none of these saints actually transform into animals. Saint Ignatius witnesses a demon possession in which wicked men begin to bark. Dominic's mother dreamt she had a dog in her womb before Dominic was born; there is also an interesting linguistic connection between the Latin words *dominicanus* and *domini canis*, according to the earliest source text penned by Jordan of Saxony. Saint Bernard's mother also dreamt she was carrying a dog in her womb; this one was to become “the watchdog of the House of God.”

⁵⁷ William Granger Ryan, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. xiii-xiv.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. xiii.

Canaanites, of great stature, and had a terrible and fearful face].⁵⁹ He appears to be incorporated into the Christian tradition in this version of the narrative, but the emphasis on his frightening appearance suggests that his threatening characteristics have not disappeared. Kilgour argues that “the mere idea of outsideness” with regard to body politics “is the very source of fear.”⁶⁰ The manifestations of Christopher’s beastliness are altered in this narrative. They appear in his name, his gigantism, his “terrible and fearful face” and in the fact that he is in search of a spiritual power of whatever persuasion—Christian or Satanic—to serve, until the devil confesses his fear of God, at which point Christopher decides to seek God. This Christopher reads as an unrepentant beast in search of power, which he finds in the person of Christ. Even when he finds Christ, he continues to resist servitude until the hermit preaching to him flatters him by saying the task he is charged with will make use of his great strength and stature. Essentially, he becomes a beast of burden, living by the river and “carry[ing] over all those who shall pass there” (*cunctos traduceres*).⁶¹ In this sense, this version of the legend might be better characterized as a domestication narrative rather than a conversion narrative. This creature whose given name was “rejected one” searches for the most powerful master he can find and, through process of elimination, subjects himself to Christ.

King Dagnus’ final words to Christopher in this legend confirm the saint’s beastly origins, even in the events leading up to his martyrdom: “*inter feras nutritas es et tu non potes nisi opera feralia et hominibus incognita loqui*” [You were nourished among wild

⁵⁹De Voragine, p. 430.

⁶⁰ Kilgour, 4.

⁶¹ de Voragine, p. 430.

beasts, and therefore you may not say but wild language, and words unknown to men].⁶²

Although Christopher is cast as a Canaanite rather than a cynocephalus here, he cannot escape his beastly origins altogether. Those beastly origins are troubling precisely because Christopher is a religious figure. The appearance of physically beastly Saint Christophers in certain medieval narratives and ontologically beastly—threatening, abject, animalistic—but not overtly cannibalistic or cynocephalic Saint Christophers in other tales leaves a stubborn cultural residue on the medieval literary tradition concerned with his conversion. This residue is my focus for this reading of Saint Christopher, which contents itself with the bits of man and beast constantly asserting themselves and constantly resisting each other in the figure of the cannibal Saint Christopher.

I want to look at a few details of some less prominent versions of the text in order to tease out a few additional elements of Saint Christopher's identity. John Block Friedman and Heather Blurton have made compelling arguments about the character of the poetic and the prose version of Walter of Speyer's *Vita et Passio Sancti* (983 AD) and the fragment in the Nowell Codex (late ninth century), respectively.⁶³ Jean Yves Tilliette writes in his essay, "Verse Style," that there are distinct stylistic elements connecting Speyer poetry and prose versions of the *Life of Saint Christopher*:

[B]oth employ scholarly, complex, and obscure language, replete with the play of homophones, internal rhymes, and parallelisms also found abundantly in eleventh-century chronicles and formally related to writing techniques used in the lyric poetry of the same period.⁶⁴

⁶² Ibid., p. 433.

⁶³ See John Block Friedman, *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000) and Heather Blurton, *Cannibalism in High Medieval English Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

⁶⁴ Jean Yves Tilliette, "Verse Style," *The Oxford Handbook of Medieval Latin Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 239.

As I will discuss, this rich and playful language contributes to the Speyer's unique characterization of Saint Christopher's monstrosity as a source of wondrous joy. As Tilliette notes, Speyer's doubling of the narrative—his creation of poetry and prose forms—is not unusual, particularly in hagiography. He goes on, however, to talk about the linguistic origins and functions of prose and verse:

[G]rammatical instruction passed down from the teachers of late antiquity continues to contrast prose, *prosa*, as “that which goes forwards (*proru[i]t*), which continues a forward motion,” with verse, *versus*, as that which turns back on itself (*revertitur*), which doubles back to the margin of the page.⁶⁵

Speyer's meandering tale of Christopher's conversion is punctuated with promises to return (*revolvens*) to Saint Christopher.⁶⁶ Tilliette casts these differences as tensions in his discussion, but given Speyer's playful descriptions of Christopher's hybrid form in the narratives, Speyer might well be content to add formal disjunctions to the “paradoxes” of Christopher's tale, as I will explore below. In terms of chronology and plot, Speyer's versions align closely with the other Latin versions of the legend, aside from lengthy autobiographical passages that Claudio Leonardi argues test the boundaries of the hagiographic genre.⁶⁷ These passages are notable, however, because they set the scene for Christopher's narrative with descriptions of wonder and spectacle as well as casting Christopher among the gods of Greco-Roman mythology. This preface to the tale is quite the departure from other versions, which tend to dwell on earthly concerns.

Speyer's introduction reads as follows:

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 240. Tilliette draws on Isidore of Seville for parts of this discussion.

⁶⁶ Walter of Speyer, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica (500-1500)*. Karl Strecker and Gabriel Silagi, eds. *Poetae Latini Medii Aevi. Vol. 5* (Monumenta Germaniae Historica: Munich, 1937-39), 14:110.

⁶⁷ Claudio Leonardi, “Monastic Centres in the Tenth and Early Eleventh Centuries,” *The New Cambridge Medieval History: Volume 3, C. 900-c. 1024* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999): 199.

En oculis subiecta tuis paradoxa beati
Christophori, quem si pleno cantibimus ore,
Ante tribuniciam securi stabimus iram.

[Behold with your eyes, lying next to your philosophical paradoxes, Saint
Christopher, to whom if we sing with a full mouth,
We will stand firm before the tribune's wrath untroubled.]⁶⁸

This characterization of Saint Christopher captures his meaning with the most nuance and beauty out of the tales. Speyer seems to be in genuine awe of Christopher's complex spiritual role. To be clear, the passage does not stipulate that Christopher *is* a philosophical paradox, but rather that he is located next to them—similarly, as I have discussed, some of the versions of Saint Christopher's conversion story identify him as one who dwelt *among* cannibals rather than stating explicitly that he is a cannibal. This is a fitting introduction for a hybrid saint, however. The line that follows captures the oral fixation that punctuates these legends—penitents must sing to Christopher with a full mouth to receive his protection from the tribune's wrath. After a few lines of reverence to God and nods to other religious figures, the author exuberantly returns to Saint Christopher, saying:

At nos, Christophore, placido si conspicias ore
Atque tuos scribas vultu ridente serenas.

[But us, O Christopher, gentle whether you draw attention because of your mouth,
At least you lighten your scribes with a laughing face.]⁶⁹

Saint Christopher is a “wonder” in this text, described in more playful and fanciful terms, but his “wondrous” characteristics are still described as threatening. There is a tension here, between the spiritual threat and the jocular tone of Speyer's descriptions, that I

⁶⁸ Ibid., 34:237-8.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 35:257-8.

think is useful. In addition, the author breaks the fourth wall here, addressing Saint Christopher directly and giving him agency even in relation to the scribes who are reimagining him. Unlike the other accounts, Speyer's adopts a tone of familiarity with his descriptions of Saint Christopher.

The Nowell Codex fragment is perhaps most interesting when discussed in combination with the other manuscripts in the codex, but it does have monstrous characteristics of its own, including its fragility, fragmentation, and its narrative that begins jarringly *in medias res* as a result of fire damage to the manuscript. Both versions describe Saint Christopher as having the appearance of a cynocephalus. The prose version says he had “*acuta facie cynocephalum*” [the sharp face of a cynocephalus] and the verse account describes him as “*cynocephalicae formae*” of cynocephalic form or appearance]. One significant departure does occur, however, in the prose version; Christopher's face shines white when he is converted. Friedman makes a tentative connection between the color change here and the symbolic whitening of the sultan's skin upon his conversion in *King of Tars*.

As in *King of Tars*, Saint Christopher's color change in the passage is certainly significant. It is the repeated emphasis on partial transformation throughout the various iterations of this legend that I find so theoretically compelling—the numerous persistent indicators of ontological and symbolic conflict in the ways in which Saint Christopher is portrayed. While Saint Christopher's color change does work to change the way he signifies, the narrative makes clear that Christopher's threatening features coexist with this transfigured skin: “*simul etiam Cynocephalici vultus in aliis horrenda severitas per*

sacri chrismatis inunctionem candidior lacte resplenduit” [At the same time that the face of the cynocephalus looked otherwise strictly horrible, through anointing with sacred oils, it shone whiter than milk].⁷⁰ What I find most fascinating about this passage is between the spiritually symbolic color change and what I am arguing is a similarly symbolic lack of change in the shape of Christopher’s monstrous head. One could argue that the inclusion of the description of Christopher’s threatening features in this line simply serves to emphasize the magnitude of Christ’s accomplishment in converting this creature—his triumph over monstrous matter, so to speak. These hagiographic legends, however, are so conscious of their spiritual significations that it is difficult to dismiss the pairing of these disparate material elements as a rhetorical flourish. Again, I am not arguing that there is a lack of significant material transformation in these narratives, but rather that there is continuous, incomplete material transformation whose incompleteness might have as much to say about how Saint Christopher signifies as the nature of those changes has.

The Nowell Codex presents an entirely different set of historical and material complications. This codex fell victim to the 1731 Cotton Library fire, and the folios are now mounted separately at the British Museum.⁷¹ Heather Blurton skillfully makes the case for the presence of those cynocephalic and cannibal characteristics in the fragmentary version of the narrative in the Nowell Codex as well, saying that the ways in which the images are juxtaposed in the manuscript makes “one monster a mirror image of

⁷⁰ Speyer, p. 68.

⁷¹ Scholars frequently refer to this version as “acephalous,” since approximately the first two-thirds of it are missing. See Colin Chase, *The Dating of Beowulf* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), p. 23.

the other” and connecting them to “the same set of physical traits.”⁷² Blurton argues for the possibility that cannibalism, dog-headedness, and gigantism might not just be shared character traits among medieval monsters, but that they have at times been read as interchangeable. She goes on to illustrate that rearranging the physical characteristics of a monster might not “appreciably chang[e]” the monster if the monster’s cannibalistic monstrosity signified strongly enough in other ways in the narrative. In the Nowell Codex narrative, Saint Christopher has already been converted when the narrative begins. The missionary Christopher travels to Samos to evangelize, and is ultimately martyred (beheaded) at the hands of King Dagnus. The thrust of Blurton’s argument regarding the Saint Christopher narrative and the Nowell Codex in its entirety is that they are united by a “theme of political expansionism” and that cannibals “frustrate that expansionism.”⁷³ I am making a similar argument about these Saint Christopher narratives, but I am identifying Saint Christopher’s body as a contested cultural space to consider the potential for his material form to encompass not only the potential for resistance to external expansionism, but the symbolic expansionism present in its own matter as well. Similarly to the ways in which Blurton sees monstrous images in the Nowell Codex as ontological mirror images of each other, I see this holy (acephalous) cynocephalus as a mirror image of the cultural conflict surrounding him in the narratives. Saint Christopher is the patron saint of the traveler because he embodies the instability of the contact zone in the Middle Ages.

⁷² Blurton, p. 45.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 43.

Cannibalizing the Cannibal

At this point, Kilgour's and Blurton's readings of cannibalistic narratives must be reconciled with one another to construct a complete picture of Saint Christopher's autocannibalistic incorporation. Blurton's reading of the Nowell Codex martyrdom of Saint Christopher is insightful and engages with the cultural identity of Saint Christopher and his form in ways that are essential to my argument about his cannibal characteristics. The problem, for me, is that Blurton's interpretation of Saint Christopher's martyrdom relinquishes the idea of cannibalism as violence at the very moment in which the narrative becomes the most violent:

The arrival of a former cannibal to convert a pagan people is suggestive of the vision of violent incorporation that cannibalism often figures. Christopher's mission, however, is not represented like this at all: the mission of this cannibal ensures that the people of Samos will not fall into such bad habits.⁷⁴

When his martyrdom is complete, Blurton argues, "Christopher becomes a native at the same time that the natives become Christian, permanently transfiguring the nation."⁷⁵

Blurton's reading of this passage seems to me to miss a significant act of literal and cultural cannibalism. Although she has argued, as I mentioned, that cannibal signifiers can obstruct expansionism and signify in ways that do not depend on seeing the body as one complete signifying unit, she still reads this scene as if Christopher has completely jumped the ontological divide between his cynocephalic form and all that entails (pagan, Eastern, animalistic) and the material signifiers of Christian humanity.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 44.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

As Kilgour has observed, incorporation is by definition an act of ontological violence. The consuming body breaks down the identity of the consumed in order to make itself more powerful. Ontologically speaking, the scene Blurton describes here sounds more like this “monologic bloodbath,” in which one term is broken down and subsumed by the other, than a gentle nudge to the people of Samos to change their habits. Christopher has lost pieces of his identity through conversion, name change, adoption of a new language, and being set in opposition to his own kin. Where Blurton reads the scene as a non-violent attempt by Christopher to proselytize to the people of Samos, I contend the scene might more appropriately be read as the final stages of Christian incorporation of Christopher’s ontology.⁷⁶ It seems to me worth noting that Saint Christopher is beheaded; the piece of Christopher’s anatomy most difficult to reconcile with Christianity is finally excised. In this way, Christopher’s death in the *Nowell Codex* fragment might be read as the most complete incorporation of Christopher’s body extant in these texts. In this way, Blurton’s argument regarding the power of the cannibal body to obstruct cultural expansionism might point toward the conclusion that the only way Christopher’s body can be incorporated is through dealing in material terms with the part of the body that signifies religious and racial (species) otherness. Perhaps the cynocephalic body cannot simply be transfigured through baptism, but must be deliberately cut off in ways that are linked to material signifiers of spiritual ontology rather than spirituality alone.

⁷⁶ The literary and cultural incorporations of Saint Christopher and his monstrous characteristics take much longer; the immediate threat is simply neutralized in this scene.

Kilgour's link between materiality and ontology with regard to both literal and cultural acts of incorporation works well within Carolyn Walker Bynum's conception of the historical progression of medieval theories about spiritual matter throughout the Middle Ages. The sticky part about ontology is that it is never completely divorced from the materiality of a thing. Religious and cultural significations can change or be changed, but as they change, those changes are also signifying. Kilgour uses Bakhtin's theories about the ambivalence of eating to introduce her theory that the processes of literal consumption can also be applied to larger cultural acts of consumption because they are linked by a human impulse to reconcile uncertainty:

[I]t is the most material need yet is invested with a great deal of significance, an act that involves both desire and aggression, as it creates a total identity between eater and eaten while insisting on the total control—the literal consumption—of the latter by the former.⁷⁷

This ambivalence, says Kilgour, is hard to withstand; the struggle to identify oneself and to distinguish the self from the other leads to an often violent impulse to incorporate that which cannot be—or is not easily—reconciled with the self. History, says Kilgour, is “marked by a recurrent desire to resolve uncertainty.”⁷⁸ This desire, I contend, becomes more difficult to fulfill when one encounters a creature as ontologically conflicted as Saint Christopher. Kilgour argues that the result of attempts to fulfill the desire to incorporate have historically resulted in violently monologic incorporation rather than fostering the kind of joyful communion Bakhtin describes in his studies on the open body and the grotesque: “in the struggle between desire and aggression, between identification

⁷⁷ Kilgour, p. 7.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

and the division that creates power over another, a struggle which is finally that between communion and cannibalism, cannibalism has usually won.”⁷⁹ I do not disagree with Blurton that Christopher’s attempts to convert the people of Samos are framed as peaceful encounters on his part. My issue is with the Blurton’s reading of the subtext of the narrative as a whole, which defines peace as the dominance of Christian ways of thinking over all other worldviews, to the extent that what was natural to Christopher—his identity, monstrosity, and native culture—becomes unnatural, resulting in an unnatural monstrosity more ontologically disruptive than—although linked to—Christopher’s material body. Given this definition of cannibalism, then, I submit that the scene in which Christopher is martyred in the *Nowell Codex* is decidedly violent and decidedly cannibalistic.

All of these significations, although interesting, require some kind of material anchor in order to be historically and culturally relevant to questions of materiality in the Middle Ages. If these materialities can be explained away by invoking the rhetoric of magic or spiritual transcendence, then all of the theorizing about Christopher’s body is irrelevant. There is evidence that medieval thinkers and audiences did not, however, so easily dismiss Christopher’s hybrid form. As Steel notes in his chapter, “Domesticating Beasts: Cynocephali, The Wild Herdsman, and Prudentius’s Indomitable Sheep,” ninth-century monk and philosopher Ratramnus of Corbie took very seriously the question of cynocephalic materiality and its implications for the spiritual fate of the dog-man. His letter to a fellow monk, Rimbart, carefully considered the degree to which the

⁷⁹ Ibid. For more on desire and the grotesque, see Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).

cynocephalus could be considered human despite his considerable departures from the normative human body. This letter is evidence of a theology predicated on the reconciliation of materialities with questions of spirituality rather than a dismissal of the physical world in favor of a more abstract conception of human spiritual realities:

[B]ecause Ratramnus still responded as if he were considering actual cynocephali, his letter possesses enormous value for studies in medieval teratology and especially for the history of the question of the human.⁸⁰

For Ratramnus, the cynocephalus was a real creature existing in the East whose physical aberrations must be analyzed through a spiritual lens before it could be located in the economy of salvation. Its materiality affected its spiritual fate. This letter itself is only a part of a larger correspondence between Rimbert and Ratramnus, most of which is not extant. From the letter's references to prior conversations, however, it is clear that Rimbert most likely initiated the conversation and that his concerns were practical. As Scott G. Bruce notes, Rimbert had previously been a missionary and likely planned to travel again, which meant he needed to know what to do should he encounter a cynocephalic creature on his journey:

It seems that Rimbert had initiated this dialogue because he was curious about the nature of the Cynocephali, in particular, whether they were rational beings and not simply animals and therefore open to the possibility of salvation through conversion to Christianity. His concern may have been more pragmatic than fanciful. As a participant in missionary activity in Denmark and Scandinavia, Rimbert could have anticipated encountering cynocephali as he preached the faith in the northernmost regions of the world, where such creatures were commonly believed to dwell. If so, what was he to do?⁸¹

⁸⁰ Steel, *How to Make a Human*, p. 147.

⁸¹ Scott G. Bruce, "Hagiography as Monstrous Ethnography: A Note on Ratramnus of Corbie's Letter Concerning the Conversion of the Cynocephali," *Insignis Sophiae Arcator: Essays in Honour of Michael W. Herren on His 65th Birthday* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), p. 46.

The letter is a careful examination of spiritually problematic elements of the monstrous body as well as monstrous behavior, and provides textual proof that Saint Christopher's body was not just a narrative tool for spiritual instruction, but a physical conglomeration of human and inhuman parts that needed to be reckoned with in order to be converted.

The conclusion reached by these two thinkers, Rimbert and Ratramnus, is that the cynocephalus was, in fact, human—this would seem to indicate that the monstrous elements of the body were not the impediments to entry into Christendom that I have argued they were, but for two factors: 1) Many medieval thinkers such as Augustine, Isidore of Seville, and Rabanus Maurus have expressed opinions to the contrary, and 2) Regardless of their final conclusions, their conversation engages with the cynocephalic body in ways that suggest that it was close enough to human to be converted, not that God is powerful enough to overcome its materiality. Ratramnus' evidence for the humanity of the cynocephali included their social practices and the precedent set by Saint Christopher. Rimbert agreed that their communities indicated that they were appropriately social beings and their abilities to make clothing and domesticate (other) animals made them closer to humans than beasts. These pieces of evidence, they argue, are sufficient to overcome the physical monstrosities of the cynocephalic body, such as their sharp tusks, barking, and consumption of blood.⁸²

⁸² In addition, as Steel observes, they “silently eliminate [the cynocephali's] anthropophagy” and Ratramnus cannot seem to make sense of their “animal fierceness” when he talks about their gentle domestication of animals. Steel goes on to say that the seat of this ontological problem is the cynocephalic head:

The cynocephalic head, terrifying, carnivorous, yet in the place of reason, materializes the ineluctable and dehumanizing violence of the human condition. Like any human, the cynocephali must dominate animals; but to do so, and thus claim reason for themselves and deny it to animals,

The Mouth of the Cannibal

The cannibal's mouth is the center, historically speaking, of horror and controversy. It also generally serves as the locus of the cannibal's humanity or inhumanity: The cannibal's inhumanity is expressed through consumption of human flesh, while the cannibal's humanity is expressed through intelligible speech.⁸³ Kilgour explains this dual function of the mouth in her introduction:

If cultures are defined by what they eat, they are also stereotyped by how they speak, as "barbarian" referred originally to those who could not speak Greek. Food is the matter that goes in the mouth, words the more refined substance that afterward comes out: the two are differentiated and yet somehow analogous, media exchanged among men, whose mediating presence may prevent more hostile and predatory relations.⁸⁴

By these definitions, Saint Christopher is portrayed alternately as refined and as barbarian in the legends. Christopher's sharp teeth in the *Old English Martyrology* version of the tale accentuate his "barbarian" attributes, while the following line, "in his heart he believed in God, but he could not speak like a man," indicates his potential for refinement as well as his physical impediments. In reference to Christopher's origin, the author of this version explicitly calls Christopher human, using the Old English word "men," using

requires violence; but to be violent means acting like a beast. Without "bestialitas feritas" there is no claim to possess reason, and thus no claim to be human; but neither is there a human with it.⁸² Both Ratramnus and Steel are invested in the idea that cynocephali can be categorized as human. Ratramnus disregards a number of prominent medieval thinkers and, as Steel notes, leaves the question of violence unresolved. Steel works throughout his book to show that the human and the animal in medieval narrative are arbitrary categories based in part on the production of violence by the human.⁸² See Steel, p. 150 and Paul Edward Dutton, ed., *Carolingian Civilization: A Reader*, 2nd ed., *Readings in Medieval Civilizations and Cultures 1* (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2004).

⁸³ The definition of intelligible varies based on the ethnographer's subject position. The cannibal's native language is frequently dismissed as gibberish, like the "barking" cynocephali in Ratramnus and Rimbart's correspondence.

⁸⁴ Kilgour, p. 8.

the same word to describe Christopher's countrymen. The author then proceeds to describe their monstrous eating in a way that cements their collective humanity and collective barbarism at the same time: "Pære æton men hi selfe." The implication here is that the men eat each other, but the literal translation is "eat themselves." This highlights the central tension in definitions of the cannibal: he must be human and inhuman at the same time. This tension is made material in the multiple functions performed by the human mouth.

The *Passio Sancti* does not make the same ontological distinctions. The corresponding passage describes Christopher as "alienigena, regionis eorum qui homines manducabant," referring to him only as a "stranger" who comes from a land of "those" who "eat men."⁸⁵ Here, the distinguishing characteristic of Christopher's countrymen is that they are excluded from the author's category of identity and that they eat humans. For this reason, the threat of the Old English Saint Christopher might be read as contained or containable, while the Latin version is directed outside of the cannibal's own culture and toward humanity as a whole. The ensuing description of Christopher as one who "non poterat loqui nostrae linguae sermonem," ("cannot speak *our* language"—emphasis mine) reinforces the author's conception of Christopher as an outside threat against a specific group of humans or type of humanity.⁸⁶

By Kilgour's definition, then, Christopher's physical (oral) attributes define him as "barbarian," but he possesses an unexpressed humanity that God is able to render

⁸⁵ De Smedt, et al., p. 395.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

expressible.⁸⁷ The *Analecta Bollandiana* version states more specifically that Saint Christopher does not speak the “right” language, which places the onus on him for any violence that might result from miscommunication, since Christopher is unable to produce the “mediating presence” Kilgour describes above.⁸⁸ The *Legenda aurea* description makes the link between Christopher’s speech and beastly wildness much more explicit: “You were nourished among wild beasts, and therefore you may not say but wild language, and words unknown to men.”⁸⁹ The *Passio Sancti* also makes a spiritual connection between the act of eating and barbarism, claiming that the emperors commanded “ut omnes Deum colentes immundarum escarum idolatriae degustarent” [that all who worshipped God should taste the unclean food of idolatry]. The Latin word for “food” here, “escarum,” means not only “food or meat,” but also “bait,” which lends these particular morsels a sinister purpose.⁹⁰

The exchange between Decius and Christopher in the *Passio Sancti* is also instructive. Decius asks the simple question “quis vocaris?” which indicates a single mode of identity construction. Christopher’s reply complicates this assumption: “nomen autem meum, quod vocatum est a parentibus, Reprebus; postquam autem inluminatus sum, Christophorus sum vocatus.” [My name, that which I was called by my parents, is Reprobis; but after I was enlightened I was called Christopher]. With this response, Christopher makes clear that his parents’ speech contributes to the expression of his identity, even though his conversion has altered that identity. “Barbaric” speech, at least

⁸⁷ Herzfeld, p. xxviii

⁸⁸ De Smedt, et al., p. 395.

⁸⁹ De Voragine, p. 430.

⁹⁰ Whitaker, <http://ablemedia.com/ctcweb/showcase/wordsonline.html>.

in this version, is viable and intelligible to the storyteller to the extent that it illuminates the beastly backstory to Christopher's conversion narrative.

The *Legenda aurea* contains perhaps the most fascinating coupling of eating and speaking among the narratives. Dagnus tells Christopher that his inability to speak intelligibly is the result of his having eaten in the company of wild beasts: “inter feras nutritas es et tu non potes nisi opera feralia et hominibus incognita loqui” [You were nourished among wild beasts, and therefore you cannot say but wild language, and words unknown to men].⁹¹ The word “feras” here refers specifically to beasts, but the adjective “feralia,” translated here as “wild,” also means “deadly” or “fatal.” The punning in this version serves to further cement the idea that Christopher's words are not only wild; they are also threatening. Furthermore, the fact that Christopher ate among wild beasts, according to Dagnus, made him incapable of producing anything but wild speech.

Kilgour explains this relationship between feasting and speaking in historical terms:

From Plato's *Symposium* on, feasting and speaking have gone together, and there is a long tradition of seeing literature as food . . . Reading is therefore eating. But in part this is simply because it belongs to a tradition which, as Genesis most dramatically represents, sees knowledge as the food with which we feed our egos . . . We “take things in” with our eyes and absorb sounds through our ears; both seeing and hearing are therefore considered to be more refined versions of taste. However, as a model for knowing, taste is not only the most basic and bodily way of making contact with the world outside of the individual but also the most intimate and intense way, resulting in a strict identity between eater and eaten.⁹²

In terms of food as “the matter that goes in the mouth” producing the substance of words, then, Saint Christopher's early diet and eating habits contributed to his limited and

⁹¹ De Voragine, p. 433.

⁹² Kilgour, p. 9.

barbaric (in)capacity for speech, producing words more closely wedded to the savage meals of his youth than to his sacrificial holiness.

Cannibalistic Holy Matter

As I will show in my final discussion regarding Carolyn Walker Bynum's engagement with medieval ideas about holy matter, there is a case to be made for the presence of differentiated matter in Saint Christopher that renders him materially appropriate for his role as the patron saint of the traveler without requiring him to be categorized as human or to escape classification altogether. Like Blurton, Bynum argues for matter's potential to get in the way of certain cultural and spiritual process in the Middle Ages.⁹³ Bynum argues that matter was an "insistent and problematic locus of the sacred" in the twelfth to sixteenth centuries, and although she is making a historical argument, she allows for the presence of this kind of material "insistence" in earlier texts as well.⁹⁴ Bynum argues that the emphasis on physical matter increased in this period, and although I will make significant distinctions between her conclusions and mine, her explanation for this claim is valuable:

It was exactly the materialization of piety that created theological and disciplinary problems for the church, stimulating not only resistance from dissident groups but also intellectual creativity on their part and the part of their opponents.⁹⁵

⁹³ Carolyn Walker Bynum, *Christian Materiality: An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe* (New York: Zone Books, 2011), p. 19.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 20.

The closer worshippers got to the object, then, the more difficult it became to dismiss that object through spiritual argument. Instead, the material object had to be dealt with spiritually. Arguments had to be made for how the Host could be holy and still rot, or how Christ could exist simultaneously in heaven and in blood relics on earth.⁹⁶ Bynum gives a number of examples of late medieval theological arguments that attempt and fail to reconcile the ‘stuffness’ of an object with its religious purpose or signification. Bynum says of Nicholas of Cusa that “his negative theology . . . strained sometimes toward light, sometimes toward darkness, but always toward a God beyond human categories.”⁹⁷ To Cusanus, materiality was essential, but an important facet of his theology was that it also strongly emphasized Christ’s capacity to transcend that materiality. In that sense, then, late medieval materiality might be understood as a two-fold evolution from earlier theologies: Materiality became more present in individual spiritual practices, but a view of God as abstracted from those materialities was also essential:

As our link to the God who lies beyond all categories and divisions, the human Christ was, to Cusanus, beyond any real dissolution. Never fragmented, he could not leave holy particles behind or appear again, even in miraculous stuff on wafers, altar cloths, or wood.⁹⁸

The remove between earthly materialities and Christ’s materiality is clear here. The separation is incredibly important. Christ must not be susceptible to earthly physics, even as he is bound by certain regulations barring him from submitting to earthly physics. This indicates that although cultures of piety in the later Middle Ages may have been increasingly dependent on the materiality of their modes of connecting with holy matter,

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 17.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 16.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 16.

the holiness itself was explicitly exempted from that materiality. The divide between matter and spiritual agent, then, is growing wider. For instance, the version of the narrative in the *Old English Martyrology* seems much less concerned than the other narratives with concealing Saint Christopher's monstrous body or his monstrous behavior. Holy matter seems not to matter quite as much in this narrative as in others. Blurton makes similar observations about the ways in which the fragmented *Nowell Codex* legend reflects the monstrosity of *Beowulf* and other monstrous narratives in the folio. Walter of Speyer's *Vita et Passio Sancti* seems somewhat conflicted in its treatment of Saint Christopher's materiality; his face turns white to reflect his spiritual transformation, but he retains his most monstrous features with all of their attendant significations. The eleventh-century *Passio Sancti* is framed in ways that naturalize the threatening presence of Saint Christopher but at the same time deemphasize his monstrosity; for instance, he is identified as having a head *like* a dog's rather than a dog's head. Finally, the *Legenda aurea* erases all traces of monstrosity aside from Saint Christopher's stature, indicating a greater concern about the materiality of this monstrous saint than any of the other versions.⁹⁹

⁹⁹ Ibid., pp. 34-35. Because these narratives do appear to adhere to a general chronology of increased concern with Saint Christopher's body, it is tempting to make a historical argument about his characterization in these narratives. Paganism was much more comfortable with material changeability whereas Christianity has taken pains to make sure God does not change:

[P]aradox lies at the heart of late medieval Christianity. And paradox, I suggest, is not dialectical. Paradox is the simultaneous assertion (not the reconciliation) of opposites. Because of the paradox not just of Christ's incarnation (God in the human) but also of divine creation (God's presence in all that is infinitely distant from him), matter was that which both threatened and offered salvation. It threatened salvation because it was that which changed. But it was also the place of salvation, and it manifested this exactly in the capacity for change implanted in it.⁹⁹

This paradox exists in Christianity because of its emphasis on spiritual transcendence. The agent of spiritual change is external to the human body. The pagan or animal elements of Saint Christopher's body adhere to different rules. As Steel has noted in his discussion of the Heideggerian distinction between

For these reasons, I am arguing that in a number of different foundational ways, Saint Christopher's body is in ontological conflict with itself, moving past the basic paradox of Christianity Bynum has described to a definitional problem of whether the animal parts of Saint Christopher's body are able to transcend their materiality at all (even with God's help). Kilgour's definition of incorporation also helps to explain the ways in which Christian theology is especially predisposed to seek resolution through incorporation. She argues that within the Judeo-Christian tradition, "duality itself, the very existence of 'otherness,' is an evil and unity a good, ultimately identifiable with a transcendent deity behind or above (and therefore in fact *outside*) the multiplicitous world of appearances, from which humanity came and to which it should strive to return."¹⁰⁰ If the animal parts of Saint Christopher are unable to transcend their materiality because of their ontological limitations, then the Christian ideal of unity cannot be achieved and his body is locked in its uneasy state of incomplete incorporation, unable to resolve itself.

This material instability has implications of homelessness and alienation. Since Saint Christopher has now been spiritually and culturally converted, he now longer belongs in his native culture or to his native identity. Instead, he exists in a liminal space and takes on new hybrid forms in each version of the narrative. As Kilgour observes:

Incorporation becomes identified with a return to home and a proper identity from a state of alienation; its opposite is eternal homelessness and a continual metamorphosis into alien forms, a state recalled by Ovid in the *Metamorphosis* and Dante in the *Inferno*.¹⁰¹

umwelt and *dasein*, the animal's relationship to the world is perceived as being limited to the realm of the material whereas the human relationship to the body is generally characterized by ontological, spiritual, intellectual, and linguistic concerns.

¹⁰⁰ Kilgour, p. 11.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

Christopher is decidedly alien by this definition, and defined by continual metamorphosis. It is my contention, then, that the body of Saint Christopher, locked as it is in its state of perpetually incomplete incorporation, possesses the ideal material form to represent the desires and anxieties of the medieval traveler, reflecting the religious and cultural fears of incorporation by the other and the simultaneous desire for complete incorporation *of* the other.

At this point, the legend of Saint Christopher might appear to be an endless cycle performed by and of Christopher, by and of the texts in which he exists, and by and of the cultures in which those texts were produced. I think the most accurate characterization of the Saint Christopher tradition is, to expound on Asa Mittman's characterization, perpetual incomplete incorporation. The only way to explain his form is to account for its inconsistencies, and the only way to account for his inconsistencies is to acknowledge that he is in constant flux. Legends of a dog-headed saint exist far earlier than the examples I have mentioned in this project. Particularly in Eastern Coptic Orthodox churches, the tradition is still thriving. David Gordon White examines possible early Greek and Egyptian roots for the legend in his study of Saint Christopher.¹⁰² Numerous informal histories exist online in eastern and western countries and languages. Several Eastern Orthodox churches feature wall paintings of the cynocephalic Saint Christopher and countless others feature him as a giant with a human head.¹⁰³ The tradition is varied and far-reaching, and most studies of Saint Christopher thus far have either been surveys

¹⁰² David Gordon White, *Myths of the Dog-Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

¹⁰³ Pridgeon, pp. 1-305.

or brief theoretical interludes to express the difficulty of accounting for a dog-headed saint in Catholic hagiographies.

My goal in this project has been to engage what I find to be his strongest qualifications for the position of the patron saint of the traveler. While the body of Saint Christopher signifies in ways I am calling ideal for the patron saint of the medieval traveler, it has begun to cause problems when theology is no longer able to perform the necessary contortions to account for his monstrous otherness. If the narrative itself cannot incorporate him into its theology, then cultural incorporations external to the narrative must be performed in order to preserve the belief system of the culture in which it exists. When Christopher's monstrous form can no longer be defined as human enough to be converted, then it must disappear from the narrative entirely, as in the *Legenda aurea* and in contemporary western culture, where the cultural imagination cannot account for a dog-headed saint.

***Concordia discors: Discord and Incorporation in
Dante's Vita nuova and Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde***

Quid velit et possit rerum concordia discors
-Horace, *Epistles* I:xii, line 4¹

The Traveling Heart as Place, Body, and Book

I am expanding the definition of travel here to encompass internal as well as external disorientation and estrangement. By this I mean that I consider the whole body's movement to be an act of travel, but I also consider the movement of an individual piece of the body to be an act of travel by some of the same definitions. Using the concept of labor and injury as *travail*, as I established in my introduction to the dissertation, I will focus in this chapter on how removing hearts from bodies profoundly affects notions of identity and ontological integrity in Dante's *Vita nuova* and Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*—in *Vita nuova*, the primary effect is estrangement, while in *Troilus and Criseyde*, the hearts are often framed as foreign objects. As China Miéville has argued, Darko Suvin's concept of cognitive estrangement can be applied to texts that do not adhere to modern definitions of science fiction:

To briefly restate familiar positions, in Suvin's enormously and justly influential, if by now somewhat notorious approach, SF is characterized by 'cognitive estrangement,' in which the alienation from the everyday affected by the non-realist setting—an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment—is 'cognitively' organised. As one of the various Others implied by that novel, generic fantasy comes in for a particular savaging because, though it also estranges, it is 'committed to the imposition of anti-cognitive laws[...]'²

¹ Horace, *Epistles*. Trans. F. G. Plaistowe and A. F. Watt (London: U Tutorial, 1905).

² China Miéville, "Cognition as Ideology: A Dialectic of SF Theory," *Red Planets*, (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2009), p. 231. See also Darko Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1979).

Miéville's contention that the concept of cognitive estrangement can apply to fantasy as well as science fiction is fundamentally useful to my examination of these texts, but his comments also highlight the fascinating emphasis on 'cognitive organisation' in Chaucer's and Dante's works. As Miéville goes on to argue, literary works of science fiction and fantasy frequently blur and overlap. For these reasons, I will focus on the ways in which the forms of cognitive estrangement present in these texts engage with the physical environment, and the organization thereof.

Along the lines of Suvin's original reservations about generic fantasy, taking seriously the physical dynamics of *travel* and *travail* in *Vita nuova* and *Troilus and Criseyde* might seem counterintuitive, but there are certain environmental and structural constants worth considering in the ways that suffering and movement occur and behave in these narratives. The first concerns the issue of limited movement. Due to travel constraints and the hardships of the medieval landscape, journeys in the Middle Ages were generally brief and infrequent. Pilgrimages were the longest journeys, involving travel to other areas of the country or even to foreign countries—especially during the crusades. Throughout most of the Middle Ages, however, travel was local and did not involve as many encounters with strangeness and self-discovery in the more modern sense. What did characterize medieval travel was danger, health risks, and exhaustion. Medieval travelers were likely to be robbed or killed on the roads. They had to travel through dense forests and uncharted landscapes. This introduces the threats of misdirection and disorientation into the structure of the *travail* in medieval travel literature. Short journeys lasted for days, and involved quite a lot of physical labor, which

makes the relationship between *travel* and *travail* essential to the structure of the journeys in these texts. Jean Verdon explains this labor-centric reality of medieval travel in his introduction to *Travel in the Middle Ages*:

[Travel] had so little substance that at first it was identified with the concrete elements that made it up: the road itself (via—way or journey), or the money needed to carry it out (viaticum). Later came the sense of movement, especially as carried out by pilgrims, and then by those armed pilgrims, the crusaders.³

Verdon goes on to call the harsh medieval landscape discouraging to travelers, requiring incredible savvy and stamina as well as frequent risks and the occasional drink to numb the pain. The main concerns, then, were the immediate environment and the costs—financial and physical—of the journey. In light of this understanding of travel, it makes sense to talk about medieval travel in material and microcosmic ways. Movement across vast landscapes matters less to the medieval definition of travel than the suffering and loss incurred on the journey. Also mentioned in Verdon's description is the financial cost of travel, which appears explicitly in *Vita nuova*, in conversations about poverty and in imagery of the ragged traveler. In both narratives, the idea of exchange is integral to processes of disorientation and estrangement, particularly in the exchanges of hearts.

As I discussed with regard to the hybrid body of Saint Christopher in the previous chapter, bodies that exist in a state of incomplete incorporation—that are not recognizable as a single, closed system, and therefore typically read as grotesque or monstrous—reveal the inherent instability of systems of identity construction. The monstrous body, like the open wound, resists classification, and Beatrice's subsequent act of consumption presents such a potent threat to the stability of both the eater and the

³ Jean Verdon, *Travel in the Middle Ages*. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), p. 1.

eaten that completion of the act becomes paramount in order to restore the ontological integrity of both bodies involved. In this chapter, I reframe the familiar medieval trope of the disembodied heart in Dante's *Vita nuova* and Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* using these theories of incorporation to take a closer look at how the movements of the hearts in these narratives actually reflect and threaten the unstable identities of the characters.⁴ In addition to the distinct functions of estrangement and foreignness in the texts, two medieval literary manifestations of the heart are also vital. The first is examined in Heather Webb's study of medical and metaphorical conceptions of the heart in literature and culture.⁵ The second, the relationship between the heart and the "metaphor of the inner person or self as a kind of text," is explored in Eric Jager's *The Book of the Heart*.

Jager's literary conception is of course prevalent in Dante's *Vita nuova*, which tells a story in which the heart is removed from the male lover's body by Love and passed around to various ladies—his true love, Beatrice, and two "screen ladies" to whom Love gives the heart for safekeeping, while Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* chronicles the thefts and relocations of Criseyde's heart during the siege of Troy. In the *Vita nuova*, bodies and parts of bodies move, but those movements are incorporated by Love—they take place under Love's power, which he wields by inhabiting bodies, by being inhabited by bodies, and by forcing bodies to incorporate other bodies. In the tradition of the *dolce stil novo*, the *Vita nuova* portrays love as a violent and invasive force. In this narrative, Dante fuses together Love and the lover to form a grotesque and

⁴ The heart reflects identity in that it is recognizable as belonging to the body, but it threatens the integrity of the body and its identity when it is removed from the body. Conversely, a heart that does not belong to the body, when inserted into the body, is foreign and therefore threatening.

⁵ Heather Webb, *The Medieval Heart* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010).

unwieldy hybrid, disorienting himself as well as the lover. He physically takes the place of the spirits of the body rather than just driving them out:

Allora furono sì distrutti li miei Spiriti per la forza per Amore prese ueggendosi in tanta propinquitade all gentilissima donna, che non mi rimase in uita più che gli Spiriti del uiso; ed ancor questi rimasero fuori de'loro strumenti, però Amore uolea stare nel loro nobilissimo luogo per uedere la mirabile donna.

[Then my spirits were so disrupted by the strength Love acquired when he saw himself this close to the most gracious lady, that none survived except the spirits of sight; and even these were driven forth, because Love desired to occupy their enviable post in order to behold the marvelous lady.]⁶

Love also tears out the lover's heart while he is sleeping and forces Beatrice to eat from it. In this sense, he is the agent of cannibalistic consumption, even though Beatrice is physically consuming the heart. Finally, Love's body serves as the physical landscape upon which the lover travels in the narrative. Love is ever-present and in control of the hearts, bodies, and movements in the *Vita nuova*.

The power structure in *Troilus and Criseyde* is based on foreignness, allegiance, and acculturation, which alters the figurative landscape. The treatment of hearts, bodies, and movements emphasizes the internalization of foreign objects. Troilus, meaning "Little Troy" is the human embodiment of the city of Troy, which renders his fate inextricable from that of the city. Early in Book 1, the arrogant Troilus mocks the pain of lovers and the "God of Love" shoots him with an arrow:

And with that word he gan caste up the browe,
Ascaunces, "Loo! Is this naught wisely spoken?"
At which the God of Love gan loken rowe
Right for despit, and shop for to ben wroken.

⁶ Ibid., p. 24. I am using Mark Musa's translations throughout this chapter, noting where I have altered the translation for a more literal reading. See Dante Alighieri, *Vita nuova*. Trans. Mark Musa (Bloomington: Indiana, UP, 1973).

He kidde anon his bowe nas naught broken;
For sodeynly he hitte hym atte fulle—
And yet as proud a pekok kan he pulle.
I:204-210⁷

From this point forward, Troilus begins to desire Criseyde.⁸ In this tale, Criseyde's uncle, Pandarus, acts as the mediator between the two lovers. Love is largely absent from the narrative, except as an abstract influence on the characters. Pandarus makes a number of overwrought speeches to Criseyde about how Troilus will die if she does not love him, and finally, Criseyde begins to fall in love. Soon after, however, Criseyde discovers that her traitorous father, now living in Greece, has orchestrated a trade in which she will be sent to Greece in exchange for the imprisoned Trojan warrior Antenor. Troilus begs Criseyde to remain faithful to him, but Criseyde ultimately transfers her allegiance to Diomede:

Soone after this they spake of sondry thynges,
As fel to purpos of this aventure,
And pleyinge entrechaungeden hire rynges,
Of whiche I kan nought tellen no scripture;
But wel I woot, a broche, gold and asure,
In which a ruby was set lik an herte,
Criseyde hym yaf, and stak it on his sherte.
III:1366-1372

According to *The Aeneid*, when Antenor returns to Troy, he betrays the Trojans by letting the Trojan horse into the city.⁹

⁷ Larry D. Benson, *The Riverside Chaucer* (Princeton, NJ: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), p. 476.

⁸ This allies the structure of desire here more closely with Cavalcanti than with Dante, but Cavalcanti's darts are shot from the lady's eyes through the lover's eyes and into his heart, whereas Cupid simply shoots Troilus with an arrow here, the story giving the reader no indication of whether it reached Troilus' heart.

⁹ *A Companion to the Aeneid and Its Tradition*. Ed. Joseph Farrell and Michael C.J. Putnam (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), pp. 137-8.

Drawing also upon Stephen Greenblatt's theory of "estrangement-effect," which states that geographical and cultural strangeness have a distancing effect between the traveler and the world, I examine how the figure of the heart serves as the symbolic physical manifestation of that distance.¹⁰ My approach seeks to reassign the symbolic hearts in these texts their corporeality so that their full range of meaning in the contexts of these narratives might be fully appreciated. In his brief article, Greenblatt is speaking of a much less traumatic estrangement than the theft and consumption of a lover's heart or body, the forcible transplantation of a foreign heart into a sleeping woman's chest, or a widowed Trojan woman into Greek society. His definitions of the temporary strangeness of new surroundings and its effect on subjectivity, however, are also applicable to the traumatic estrangements in these texts:

Travel's estrangement-effect makes the external world not only more noticeable but more intense, just as poetry makes language more intense. The consequence is that the ratio of the self to everything that lies beyond the self changes: for a moment the world insists upon its own independent existence, its thingness apart from ourselves, and we are temporarily liberated from our own personal obsessions.¹¹

Since the heart serves as the center of the essential functions of the body, the "thingness" of the heart estranged from itself makes the body more noticeable and more intense.¹² It also, I argue, renders the heart distinct from the body, making either it or the body from which it has departed a part of the landscape rather than, or in addition to, the self. In

¹⁰ Stephen Greenblatt, "Expectations and Estrangement," *The Threepenny Review* 67 (Autumn, 1996): 25-26.

¹¹ Greenblatt, p. 25.

¹² Bill Brown, "Thing Theory," *Critical Inquiry* 28:1 (Autumn, 2001): 1-22. Brown explores the inescapability of things, including the body, as well as their capacity to interrupt the intentional processes of subject and object. Disconnecting the heart from the rest of the body's systems—"circuits of production and distribution"—draws our attention to its status as an object and gets in the way of our recognition of it as part of a whole.

both of these narratives, either the body or the heart, in Bill Brown's terms, "insists on its own independent existence," which makes its functions much more visible in relation to its human host(s).¹³ In *Vita nuova*, these relationships are especially difficult to parse, since bodies are things that travel, but they are also traveled upon or act as the point of departure in different circumstances.

Given the *Middle English Dictionary* definition of 'herte,' the disorientation caused by these disincorporations of the heart is significant. The physical heart can refer to the organ itself or to the entire area around the heart, including the stomach, and is the seat of the soul and memory.¹⁴ The *MED* states that the heart is symbolic of "the conscious self, the true self as opposed to the outward *persona*; the center of psychic and sensitive functions."¹⁵ Removing the heart from the body, then, decenters "the true self," and sorting out the pieces of the selves becomes particularly tricky when the heart is incorporated into a foreign body.

These extractions should not be read as surgical procedures, however. Language of fear and aggression punctuates the removal of the hearts in the narratives. Maggie Kilgour uses the term *concordia discors* to describe a meeting of extremes, "although not in an equal relation but in an identity achieved through the subordination, even annihilation, of one of the terms." This explanation is especially applicable to the hearts' patterns of movement and damage in these texts.¹⁶ Both words contain the root word for

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Robert E. Lewis, Hans Kurath, and Sherman M. Kuhn, *Middle English Dictionary* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1952), p. 318.

¹⁶ For a brief explanation of *concordia discors* in the context of cannibalistic power relations, see Maggie Kilgour, *From Communion to Cannibalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 3.

heart, one connoting unity, the other distance and separation. Likewise, in the texts I examine in this chapter, what is external to the body is in constant, often violent, contact with what is internal. The subsequent “estrangement-effect” of the disembodied hearts of the characters in these narratives enhances the reflective function of the texts because it objectifies and renders foreign the organ most central to medieval notions of identity.

The frequency with which the disembodied heart appears as a trope in medieval literature means that scholars often take its significance for granted and underestimate its capacity to speak to cultural and political concerns having to do with medieval bodies. Heather Webb draws distinctions between medieval and modern conceptions of the heart, identifying it as more complex and more vulnerable. The following is Webb’s explanation of the physical dynamics of the heart in the literary tradition of the *stilnovisti*:

[T]he heart is literally open to sensation. The arrows of love, now a timeworn trope devoid of meaning, are in this case real trajectories of breath and spirit, relentlessly invading the poet’s porous body. [The] heart was a heavily trafficked space, host to myriad entities that we would now divide into the categories of physical, spiritual, and psychological. One thing it did not do, however, was circulate blood.¹⁷

Webb explains that, in the Middle Ages, spirits were thought to escape the heart through pores in the skin and that the heart was thought to have respiratory functions, which might explain the myriad sighs issuing from the heart in Guinizelli’s, Cavalcanti’s, and Dante’s poetry. The idea of a circulatory system that extends outside of the body is useful for understanding the function of the spirits that are disrupted and displaced in Dante’s text. The benefit of this approach to reading of traveling hearts in medieval literature is that we can use the most recent scholarly approaches to the body, which focus on

¹⁷ Webb, p. 2.

component parts like skin, organs, and flesh and how they contribute to identity construction, to understand travel as a process of self-discovery regardless of the length of the journey.

In the beginning of Dante's *Vita nuova*, the god of love gives Beatrice her lover's burning heart to eat.¹⁸ This sets off a series of painful and disfiguring disruptions in the lover's bodily functions, culminating in Love's violent and disorienting incorporation of the lover. First, his natural spirit is disrupted, the corresponding obsession with Beatrice making him weak and frail.¹⁹ When his first "screen lady" leaves town, leaving him without a way to disguise his affections for Beatrice, he "wastes away" into depression, lamenting the suffering caused by travel "on the road of Love."²⁰ After his tongue wears itself out cursing and grieving the death of Beatrice's friend, both in body and in verse, he sets out on his own journey, and encounters Love, whose body mysteriously fuses with his. Dante explicitly endows Love with both "substance" and "potentiality" in this text, making clear distinctions between how Love affects the male and the female body.²¹ While *Troilus and Criseyde* involves a literal captivity narrative—when Criseyde is traded to Greece—the *Vita nuova* contains a figurative captivity narrative: Dante makes repeated references to the lover's captivity and Love's mastery over him, and eventually Love takes over his major bodily functions to the point where his body moves like an inanimate object.²² Although the lover travels in this narrative, his heart, ruled by Love

¹⁸ According to the *MED*, to set the heart afire is to stimulate a violent emotion. See *Middle English Dictionary*, p. 318.

¹⁹ Alighieri, p. 7.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

²¹ Alighieri, pp. 38-39.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 17.

and given to Beatrice and two “screen ladies” in the course of the tale, often travels independently of the lover. Both elements of medieval travel—movement and bodily damage—are fully engaged. While the lover locates himself on the road of Love, he also indicates that he is the “key and the inn of every torment,” but that he is too timid to speak or write of his pain.²³ This idea of the lover’s body as either a container or a thing to be inserted into a container is echoed in Clark and Wasserman’s analysis of the function of Chaucer’s literary hearts, which they describe as either vessels—in which emotions, thoughts, or the soul are contained—or things to be placed in vessels, like the heart in the body. Dante’s *Vita nuova* opens up this dual vessel function to encompass whole bodies, and even landscapes, in his portrayal of heart-oriented incorporation. This may reflect the idea of the heart as the text of the self that Jager explores.

In *Troilus and Criseyde*, the heart becomes a number of objects external to the characters’ bodies. Two such manifestations are most important for my discussion of travel’s estrangement-effect in this tale: 1) The heart is an object that can be exchanged—in her dream, the eagle steals Criseyde’s heart and leaves his in its place. As a result of this theft, Criseyde’s affections turn toward Troilus, which means that the replacement heart has fundamentally altered the way Criseyde’s body functions. 2) The heart can also be worn as an ornament—Criseyde pins the ruby brooch on both of her lovers. The ornamental heart is not purely symbolic or decorative, however. Not only is Troilus heartbroken when he hears Criseyde has given the brooch to Diomedes, but the act also demonstrates Criseyde’s cultural disorientation—she has affixed her identity to a new

²³ Ibid., p. 10.

cultural authority. The *concordia discors* of internal disorientations occurs when Criseyde is traded for Antenor and sent to Greece: she is a stranger with a strange heart in a strange land—before she pins the brooch on Diomedes, she has not yet shifted her alliance from Troy to Greece. The treatment of the heart in these two tales is similar, then, in that the lovers and their hearts travel, but organs and bodies often travel independently of one another. This distance created by outsideness causes the lovers to feel the kind of wonder at and estrangement from their own bodies that generally only comes from encountering the foreign.

In the interest of clarity, it is worth considering the *OED* definitions of *strange* and *foreign* as well. Both words are characterized by two primary criteria: possession and distance. What is either foreign or strange to me is excluded, not mine, or located elsewhere. The concept of foreignness appears to be preoccupied with origin according to some definitions, however, whereas strangeness has more to do with a present state of distance or unfamiliarity.²⁴ In addition, the concept of estrangement introduces the idea that a person or place may *become* distant or unfamiliar. The concept of foreignness seems to have no such corollary. For this reason, I will describe the process of organ removal and consequent increases in distance and familiarity in terms of strangeness, and the shock of encountering an organ that has become strange in terms of foreignness. In these narratives, theft, relocation, transplantation, and consumption of hearts disrupts the inside/outside binary that governs identity and identification with the body so severely

²⁴ See *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993).

that body parts become the landscape, the currency, and the foreigners in relation to the bodies they once inhabited.

Ontological Threats to the Traveler in *Vita nuova*

The *Vita nuova* is ostensibly a story about the tortures of love. The narrator is utterly lovesick, possessed and ravaged by Love—the personification of his obsession with Beatrice—to the point where his bodily functions are taken over and disrupted by Love’s cruel machinations. This is a familiar theme. There are numerous lovesick heroes, bedridden and ravaged by longing, in the medieval literary tradition. This tale, though, is preoccupied with self-reflection. The narrative alternates between prose and verse, with the prose composing the narrative but also prescribing how each poem should be read. This structure mirrors the function of the central and most shocking episode of the narrative, a dream in which Love comes to the lover in a cloud the color of fire, removes the lover’s burning heart, and commands Beatrice to “eat of it.” The first part of the scene reads as follows:

[N]e le sue parole dicea molte cose, le quali io non intendea se non poche; tra le quali intendea queste: *Ego dominus tuus*. Ne le sue braccia mi pareva vedere una persona dormire nuda, salvo che involta mi pareva in uno drappo sanguigno leggermente; la quale io riguardando molto intentivamente, conobbi ch'era la donna de la salute, la quale m'avea lo giorno dinanzi degnato di salutare. E ne l'una de le mani mi pareva che questi tenesse una cosa, la quale ardesse tutta; e pareami che mi dicesse queste parole: *Vide cor tuum*.

[He spoke and said many things, of which I understood only a few; one was *Ego dominus tuus*. I seemed to see in his arms a sleeping figure, naked but lightly wrapped in a crimson cloth; looking intently at this figure, I recognized the lady of the greeting, the lady who earlier in the day had deigned to greet me. In one

hand he seemed to be holding a thing that was all in flames, and it seemed to me that he said these words: *Vide cor tuum.*]²⁵

This passage makes clear that Love is controlling the narrative from this point forward. He begins the conversation with the words “I am your master.” Both Love and the heart appear to be burning, which indicates Love’s influence over the heart as well as the lover. When he presents the heart to the lover, he commands “Look at your heart,” which accentuates its separateness from the lover. The lover’s reference to the heart as “a thing” also emphasizes its status as an object in this passage. Love’s call to self-reflection here is a particularly aggressive and violent one, and the gesture assures that the victim knows he is vanquished. The “thing” that represents the center of his emotional and psychological self, according to medieval definitions, is now under the control of another. Because it prefigures an act of cannibalism in the next line, and because Love—whom Dante describes explicitly as fully embodied and fully human—incorporates the bodies of both Beatrice and her lover in the course of the narrative, we might also read this as the kind of prismatic horror one experiences when witnessing a cannibal act. The simultaneous identification and abjection inherent in anthropophagy confronts the viewer with his own humanity at the moment when that humanity is being threatened. The call to self-reflection is reinforced by the pause in the narrative before Love awakens Beatrice

E quando elli era stato alquanto, pareami che disvegliasse questa che dormia; e tanto si sforzava per suo ingegno, che la faceva mangiare questa cosa che in mano li ardea, la quale ella mangiava dubitosamente.

²⁵ Alighieri, p. 5. Musa translates “una cosa” as something, but the literal translation, “a thing,” is vital to my discussion of the passage.

[And after some time had passed, he seemed to awaken the one who slept, and he forced her cunningly to eat of that burning object in his hand; she ate of it timidly.]²⁶

The language describing this act is again characterized by aggression. Through his *ingegno*, his wit or cunning, Love forces her to eat (*'facea mangiare'*). When she complies, she does so *dubitosamente*, with doubt or fearing. It is noteworthy that Love is the aggressor here, and that Beatrice reacts with fear even though she complies. This reinforces the reading that Love is the cannibal figure in the text.

In a typical travel narrative, encounters with cannibalism occur far from home. Cannibal acts often serve to emphasize just how far from home the traveler has strayed. In this narrative, however, the cannibal scene serves two primary purposes. The first is to establish the pattern of self-reflection that governs the narrative. The second is to establish Love's dominance and imminent incorporation of the bodies of the two lovers. Since this narrative is not preoccupied with literal travel—although the characters do embark upon literal journeys—distance between the lover and his “home” is created by the removal of his heart, and the dream state facilitates his disorientation. The heart, “the conscious self, the true self as opposed to the outward *persona*; the center of psychic and sensitive functions,” is extracted from the lover.²⁷ This process eliminates the need for significant geographical distance. Love, described later in the narrative as a road, facilitates disorientation and estrangement by removing the lover's center from his body.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Robert E. Lewis, Hans Kurath, and Sherman M. Kuhn, *Middle English Dictionary* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1952), p. 318.

In order to understand how estrangement occurs in these texts, it is important to understand the power dynamics surrounding the disembodied hearts in each narrative. Early in the *Vita nuova*, Dante locates each of the spirits in a different part of the body: the vital spirit in the heart, the animal spirit in the brain, and the natural spirit in the liver.²⁸ As Mark Musa notes:

[T]he reader may gradually come to wonder if the lover's tears, so frequently recorded in the narrative, are not often strongly influenced physiologically. It is only after this reference to the organ of digestion that Love is mentioned.²⁹

Upon seeing Beatrice, each of the spirits is disrupted in its dwelling place. The vital spirit recognizes a master stronger than itself. The animal spirit, "to which all the senses bring their perceptions," tells the spirits of sight that their bliss has appeared, and the natural spirit weeps and laments that it will be forever disturbed.³⁰ The text makes clear that Love governs the lover's soul from this point forward in the narrative. In the scene in which the lover falls asleep dreaming of Beatrice and has a vision, Love appears in a cloud the color of fire:

E pensando di lei mi sopraggiunse uno soave sonno, ne lo quale m'apparve una maravigliosa visione, che me pareva vedere ne la mia camera una nebula di colore di fuoco, dentro a la quale io discerneva una figura d'uno signore di pauroso aspetto a chi la guardasse; e pareami con tanta letizia, quanto a sè.

[I began thinking of this sweet lady and, thinking of her, I fell into a sweet sleep, and a marvelous vision appeared to me. I seemed to see a cloud the color of fire and, in that cloud, a lordly man, frightening to behold, yet he seemed also to be wondrously filled with joy.]³¹

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 3-4.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 91.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., p. 5.

Love is frightening but joyous, and he speaks, but most of his words are unintelligible to the lover. In the dream, Love asserts his dominion over the lover and Beatrice. He holds the lover's burning heart in his hand and commands the lover to look at it:

E ne l'una de le mani mi pareva che questi tenesse una cosa, la quale ardesse tutta;
e pareami che mi dicesse queste parole: *Vide cor tuum*.

[In one hand he seemed to be holding something that was all in flames, and it seemed to me that he said these words: *Vide cor tuum*.]³²

Love then hands the heart to Beatrice and forces her to eat some of it.³³ Shortly after, the lover's happiness turns to "bitterest weeping," and he decides to compose a sonnet to "all of Love's faithful subjects" asking them to interpret his dream. The poem's first line is, tellingly, addressed "[t]o every captive soul and loving heart."³⁴ The master in this scene is clearly Love, but it is also important to note the effect of the heart's consumption on Love: he weeps when Beatrice consumes the heart.³⁵ This reaction falls in line with the description of the natural spirit in the initial encounter between the lover and Beatrice. It seems, then, that both the master and the slave of affections are similarly disturbed when the natural spirit—the one associated with digestion—is engaged.

Threats of Captivity and Consumption in *Vita nuova*

In keeping with Dante's careful prescription of the functions of the body, the physicality of Love's body is also carefully justified in the narrative. Dante acknowledges that Love is "an accident in a substance," rather than a substance itself. This means that

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 6.

³⁵ Ibid.

Love is something that happens in the body rather than being itself embodied. He persists, however, in granting Love not only a body, but a human body:

E che io dica di lui come se fosse corpo, ancora sì come se fosse uomo, appare per tre cose che dico di lui. Dico che lo vidi venire; onde, con ciò sia cosa che venire dica moto locale, e localmente mobile per sì, secondo lo Filosofo, sia solamente corpo, appare che io ponga Amore essere corpo. Dico anche di lui che ridea, e anche che parlava; le quali cose paiono essere proprie de l'uomo, e specialmente essere risibile; e però appare ch'io ponga lui essere uomo.

[And that I speak of Love as if it possessed a body, further still, as if it were a human being, is shown by three things I say about it. I say that I saw it coming; and since "to come" implies locomotion, and since, according to the Philosopher, only a body may move from place to place by its own power, it is obvious that I assume Love to be a body. I also say that it laughed and even that it spoke—acts that would seem characteristic of a human being, especially that of laughing; and so it is clear that I assume love to be human.]³⁶

The fact that Love possesses both agency and the capacity for spoken language is noteworthy, but I will examine in more detail the limitations on these abilities in context. Most importantly, Dante's description of Love as being both corporeal and human frames Love's incorporation of the lover as a material process rather than as a symbolic transformation alone. Dante justifies his personification of Love by saying that, since Latin poets endowed inanimate objects with sense, reason, and voice—even imaginary objects—the Italian poet, with good reason, can do the same.³⁷

After Beatrice eats from the heart, taking the lover captive, Love's incorporation of the lover begins to show outwardly:

[I]o [. . .] rispondea loro che Amore era quelli che così m'avea governato. Dicea d'Amore, però che io portava nel viso tante de le sue insegne, che questo non si

³⁶ Ibid., p. 54.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 55.

potea ricoprire. E quando mi domandauauo: "Per cui t'ha così distrutto questo Amore?" ed io sorridendo li guardava, e nulla dicea loro.

[I would answer that it was Love who governed me. I said that it was Love because I bore so many of his signs clearly marked on my face that they were impossible to conceal. And when people would ask: "Who is the person for whom you are so destroyed by Love?" I would look at them and smile and say nothing.]³⁸

The processes of incorporation leading up to Love's transformation of the lover's appearance are multiple and complex. Love's command over the lover's heart is first symbolized by the flames that consume the heart as Love hands it to Beatrice, since Love himself had just arrived "una nebula di colore di fuoco" [in a cloud the color of fire.]³⁹ When Love commands Beatrice to eat of the heart, the act of consumption is not hers alone, but Love's act through her, and her consumption of the lover's heart alters his appearance:

Lo viso mostra lo color del core,
che, tramortendo, ovunque po' s'appoia;
e per la ebrietà del gran tremore
le pietre par che gridin: "Moia, moia"

[My blanching face shows the color of my heart
Which, fainting, seeks support from anywhere,
and I tremble in this drunken state
the stones in the wall I lean on shout back: "Die!"]⁴⁰

The text makes clear that Love is the culprit, not Beatrice—although she is the instrument of torture. This is a distinguishing factor between the *Vita nuova* and the other love poems of the *stilnovisti*. The blame for the lover's destruction is assigned to Love rather than to the object of the lover's affection.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 7-8.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 5.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 27. I have altered the translation of the first two lines here to more literally reflect the relationship between the color of the face the heart here.

It is unclear whether the lover finds his “captive soul” imprisoned within Beatrice or within the flames of Love—or both. Love himself, on the other hand, incorporates the lover from the inside, and the lover is “destroyed” by Love’s gradual takeover of the appearance and vital functions of his body.⁴¹ This is the beginning of the systematic estrangement of the lover from himself, which coincides with the lover’s first screen lady’s departure. At this juncture, the lover feels compelled to write a poem for the screen lady so as not to arouse suspicions that he might not be as in love with her as he pretended to be. The first six lines read as follows:

O voi, che per la via d'Amor passate,
attendete e guardate
s'elli è dolore alcun, quanto 'l mio, grave;
e prego sol ch'audir mi sofferiate,
e poi immaginate
s'io son d'ogni tormento ostale e chiave.

[O ye who travel on the road of Love,
pause here and look
for any man whose grief surpasses mine.
I ask this only: hear me out, then judge
If I am not indeed
the inn and the key of every torment.]⁴²

These lines bring together a number of the theoretical elements of travel and incorporation I have examined thus far. It is important to note that this poem is about the loss of a physical protection as well as an emotional one. The screen lady’s function was

⁴¹ This process of incorporation most closely mirrors Kilgour’s explanation of the host: Man is a host in that he literally takes God, in the form of the Host, into himself. But the Host is the kind of food that converts the feeder into himself; Augustine’s God explains, “cibus sum grandium; cresce et manducabis me. Nec tu me in te mutabis sicut carnis tuae, sed tu mutaberis in me” (I am the food of full-grown men. Grow and you shall feed on me. But you shall not change me into your substance, as you do with the food of your body. Instead you shall be changed into me”).

For more on the confusion between host and guest and the concept of host as stranger, see Kilgour, p. 15.

⁴² Alighieri, p. 10. Musa translates the last line in this stanza as “the host and the abode of every torment,” but “the inn and the key” is the more literal translation, which is necessary for my reading.

to serve as a physical screen through which the lover could watch his lady without being found out by onlookers. The lover considers this woman's departure a threat to his safety:

[I]o, quasi sbigotito, de la bella difesa che m'era venuta meno, assai me ne disconfortai.

[I, bewildered by the fact that my ideal defense had failed me, became extremely dejected.]⁴³

This screen, which shields him from onlookers but does not prevent him from seeing Beatrice, is now physically gone, leaving him exposed. The first line establishes Love as a corporeal landscape—because Dante insists that Love has a body—upon which lovers travel. The lines that follow emphasize the suffering that travelers encounter when traveling this road. Finally, the last line identifies the lover as both “the inn and the key” of the torments of travel which Love visits upon him. These characterizations of the lover's body are made literal in the actual journey that the lover subsequently takes toward his former screen lady's new home. Here, the road is Love and the journey takes its toll on the lover internally. In the next journey, the lover travels a literal road along the same path the screen lady took in the first poem, meets Love in human (pilgrim) form on that road, and becomes fused physically with Love.

The final stanza of the first travel poem emphasizes the economic toll of the journey on the lover:

Or ho perduta tutta mia baldanza,
che si movea d'amoroso tesoro;
ond'io pover dimoro,
in guisa che di dir mi ven dottanza.
Sì che volendo far come coloro
che per vergogna celan lor mancanza,

⁴³ Ibid., p. 9.

di fuor mostro allegrezza,
e dentro dallo core struggo e ploro.

[Now all is lost of my boldness
that was moving from the treasure of Love;
from which I know Love's poverty,
in that I am timid when I talk or write.
So that, like those wanting to
conceal their poverty for shame:
I show cheer outwardly,
but in my heart I wither and lament.]⁴⁴

In this stanza, the dual costs of medieval travel are combined: The lover's travel economy is bound up with Love, who has stolen his heart and left him destitute. The final line, "e dentro de lo core struggo e ploro," includes the word for heart (*core*), and the verb *struggo* can mean either "wither" or "consume." The line indicates that the lover is being consumed by his travel on the road of Love. We know that the lover is not in possession of his heart at this point, but wherever it is, it is still being consumed or is withering. So far in his travels, then, the traveler is incurring internal and external bodily damage and beginning to look like Love, or at least bear Love's marks. The parts of him that dwell in the heart are traveling independently and incurring physical damage as well.

Disorientation in *Vita nuova*

At the beginning of chapter IX, the lover embarks on a literal journey, "in the direction of, (but not all the way to)" where his former screen lady was staying. Notably, this puts him on the "road of Love," according to the poem he wrote for the same screen

⁴⁴ Ibid. It is also worth noting that the bodily imagery is amplified in the verse sections of the narrative. The prose backs off of some of the intense bodily imagery at points. This translation is my own.

lady upon her departure. On the way, he encounters Love in pilgrim form, “scantly and poorly dressed” and emotionally distressed.⁴⁵ This pilgrim Love is a shadow of his former self, “a once-great ruler since bereft of power.” Love reveals to the lover that the screen lady had been in possession of his heart, that Love now has it, and that he is taking it to another screen lady. As soon as he says this, Love completes his incorporation of the lover:

Allora presi di lui sì gran parte,
ch'elli disparve, e non m'accorsi come.

[Then I took such a big part of Love from him,
he disappeared, and I did not notice how.]⁴⁶

This scene again reflects the confusing power relations involved in a host/guest process of incorporation. Love is clearly weakened, “bereft of power,” but he is nearly finished with his incorporation, and the lover is clearly not taking over power at this point.

Instead, it appears the Love has simply been starving as a result of his travels, because as soon as he fuses with the lover, he becomes so powerful that the lover’s body, “lo quale era tutto allora sotto il suo reggimento, molte uolte si mouea come cosa graue inanimata.”

[which was completely under his rule, many times moved like a heavy, inanimate object.]⁴⁷ This incorporation has objectified and estranged the lover from his body, and the road of Love—with its attendant distance, danger, and poverty—has crawled inside him.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 14.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 17. This is my own translation.

⁴⁷ Ibid. As soon as this occurs, the lover runs off alone to “bathe the earth with bitterest tears.” At this point, Love has also taken over the lover’s “spirits of sight” and annihilated the rest of his senses. If the lover wants to see his beloved, Love takes the place of the spirits of sight and engages that sense.

Once back in power, Love forbids the lover to greet Beatrice, and when he breaks down and begs Love to help him, Love joins him in weeping and explains that he is centered, whereas the lover is not: “Ego tamquam centrum circuli, cui simili modo se habent circumferentie partes; tu autem non sic.” [I am like the center of a circle, equidistant from all points on the circumference; you, however, are not.]⁴⁸ Love explains that the lover was doing harm to Beatrice by greeting her on the “road of sighs.” In the tradition of the *stilnovisti*, as I’ve mentioned, sighs are expressions of suffering in love, and they issue from the heart. Because they are fused, Love and the lover are both now disoriented: Love because he is a perfect circle inhabiting an off-center shape of unknown designation, and the lover because the perfectly centered Love is in tension with his disoriented form. To right this wrong, Love commands the lover to write a poem to Beatrice in which he explains the power Love has over him. In this way, the lover will establish Love’s center as his own and cease his travels, sending a ballad to Beatrice in his place.⁴⁹

The process of writing poetry, however, also poses a danger to the lover. Here, the lover seems to regain some semblance of agency, at least to reactivate Love’s potentiality. In trying to remember his experiences of Love in order to record them, he revisits the pain of Love’s incorporation as well:

[M]olte volte io mi dolea, quando a mia memoria movesse la fantasia ad imaginare quale Amore mi facea. [. . .] Amore spesse volte di subito m'assalia sì forte, che 'n me non rimanea altro di vita se non un pensiero che parlava di questa donna. [. . .] quando questa battaglia d'Amore mi pugnava così, io mi movea quasi discolorito tutto per vedere questa donna, credendo che mi difendesse la sua

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 18.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 19.

veduta da questa battaglia, dimenticando quello che per appropinquare a tanta gentilezza m'addivenia.

[[M]any times I suffered when my memory excited my imagination to re-evoke the transformations that Love made in me [. . .] Love, frequently and without warning, attacked me so violently that no part remained alive except one thought that spoke of this lady [. . .] [W]hen this battle of Love raged within me so, I would go, pale and haggard, to look upon this lady, believing that the sight of her would defend me in this battle.]⁵⁰

While ultimately, Love appears to defeat the lover in every battle, the lover at least seems to wield some control in the creative process. With Love in control of the lover's body, the lover at least maintains the power to provoke Love for creative purposes. If Jager's conception of the heart as a text of the self can be applied here, it appears that the lover, by asserting his text, reinforces some piece of his selfhood.

The Heart as Text: The Substance and Potentiality of Love in *Vita nuova*

This scrap of power that the lover is able to wield against the incorporation of Love reveals Love's key weaknesses as the composition process becomes conscious in the narrative—when we actually go through the fears and struggles of writing with the lover, Dante and the lover begin to fuse in the text, and the mechanics of Love's expression begin to take material form and start to move in the landscape of the narrative.⁵¹ Although bilingual and philosophical, Love is not always able to communicate intelligibly. Returning to the beginning of the narrative, when Love is introduced in a cloud of fire, he is described as quite talkative, but the lover can

⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 289-29.

⁵¹ Dante and the lover never literally fuse with one another the way Love does with the lover, but the roles of the author and the lover become much more explicitly linked through the act of writing from this point forward. The narrative becomes occupied with the process of writing, so the role of the author is infused into the text and the lover.

understand only a few words. This is easy to interpret as the lover's shortcoming, but according to Dante, Love is the one who needs assistance and activation in order to assume a human form. In this sense, then, Love might be seen as possessing only the potentiality of language, becoming more eloquent as he assumes power over both of the lovers. In chapter XX, the lover explains the physics of Love:

[L]a prima dico in che soggetto sia questa potenza; ne la seconda dico sì come questo soggetto e questa potenza siano prodotti in essere, e come l'uno guarda l'altro come forma materia. [. . .] [D]ico come questa potenza si riduce in atto.

[[F]irst, I tell in what substance this potentiality resides; secondly, I tell how this substance and this potentiality are brought into being, and how one is related to the other as matter is to form [. . .] I explain how this potentiality is realized in action.]⁵²

The lover explains that Beatrice has brought Love into existence. Her eyes and mouth “actualize” the potentiality of Love, but the distinction that Love is in control and works through Beatrice—and, as Dante's discussion of Love's body makes clear, is made material and human through his speech and his power over his own movement—indicates that Beatrice is the matter through which Love expresses his potentiality, and once he is activated, his form becomes material. Possibly by taking over human bodies, Love is able to activate the abilities of his own. The exact method by which Love controls the lover's entire body is unclear, but since Love's entry into the body on his way to the heart is described as “penetration,” and since the heart is repeatedly identified as his dwelling place after his fusion with the lover, the text seems to suggest a parasitic relationship. From his home in the heart, Love is able to extend himself into various parts of the body

⁵² Ibid., p. 38-39. I have not engaged with Love's incorporation of Beatrice, although there are some references to it in the text, because there is little detail about the process and those few details are not functionally different from Love's incorporation of the (male) lover.

to assert control over the actions of the lover. Clearly, there is still a struggle for control, since the lover's actions cause Love to weep and to remark on how decentered the lover is. Perhaps with a more compliant host, Love would not have to endure such a struggle.

When Love gives the lover his directions for sending the poems to Beatrice, he stipulates that Love should go along with them—the language indicates not that he will deliver them, but that he will accompany them. In this way, he is even asserting control over the written expressions of Love that the lover produces.⁵³ In a literary rather than corporeal fashion, Dante is asserting the thingness of the lover's self-text by removing it from the lover's body. Love's argument here is that letting the poems travel on their own will help to keep the lover centered, or at least keep Beatrice from being damaged by the lover's disorientation, but since we see the lover distraught and tortured after he sends the letter, it seems that this serves to decenter the lover even further. In terms of Greenblatt's argument, the space between us and what is familiar to us is what renders the familiar strange. By this definition, the lover's emotions are estranged from his body in textual form, causing him separation anxiety rather than a calm assurance that Beatrice will hear what he has to say.

The lover is further destabilized by illness, and his and Beatrice's mortality, which wreaks havoc in the landscape of his dream:

Onde, sospirando forte, dicea fra me medesimo: "Di necessitate convene che la gentilissima Beatrice alcuna volta si muoia". E però mi giunse uno sì forte smarrimento, che chiusi li occhi e cominciai a travagliare sì come farnetica persona ed a imaginare in questo modo.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 18.

[Then sighing deeply, I said to myself: “It is bound to happen that one day the most gracious Beatrice will die.” At that, such a frenzy seized me that I closed my eyes and, agitated like one in delirium, began to imagine things.]⁵⁴

He begins to hallucinate disheveled ladies who tell him he is going to die and that he is already dead. This causes him to become disoriented: “Così cominciando ad errare la mia fantasia, venni a quello ch’io non sapea ove io mi fosse.” [While my imagination was wandering like this, I came to the point that I no longer knew where I was.]⁵⁵ From there the entire natural environment falls into disarray:

[E] vedere mi pareva donne andare scapigliate piangendo per via, maravigliosamente triste; e pareami vedere lo sole oscurare, sì che le stelle si mostravano di colore ch’elle mi faceano giudicare che piangessero; e pareami che li uccelli volando per l’aria cadessero morti, e che fossero grandissimi terremuoti.

[I seemed to see ladies preternaturally sad, their hair disheveled, weeping as they made their way down a street. And I seemed to see the sun grow dark, giving the stars a color that would have made me swear that they were weeping. And it seemed to me that the birds flying through the air fell to earth dead, and there were violent earthquakes.]⁵⁶

When Beatrice actually dies shortly thereafter, the poet finds poetry inadequate to bridge the celestial distance between himself and Beatrice, surprisingly forsaking words for numbers, and choosing instead to calculate her perfection through the alignment of the planets at her birth and the correspondence between the number nine—nine planets—and the holy trinity.⁵⁷ His explanation is as follows:

E avvegna che forse piacerebbe a presente trattare alquanto de la sua partita da noi, non è lo mio intendimento di trattarne qui per tre ragioni: la prima è che ciò non è del presente proposito, se volemo guardare nel proemio che precede questo libello; la seconda si è che, posto che fosse del presente proposito, ancora non sarebbe sufficiente la mia lingua a trattare, come si converrebbe, di ciò; la terza si

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 44.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 62.

è che, posto che fosse l'uno e l'altro, non è convenevole a me trattare di ciò, per quello che, trattando, converrebbe essere me laudatore di me medesimo, la quale cosa è al postutto biasimevole a chi lo fae.

[And even though the reader might expect me to say something now about her departure from us, it is not my intention to do so here for three reasons. The first is that such a discussion does not fit into the plan of this little book, if we consider the preface which precedes it; the second is that, even if this had been my intention, the language at my command would not yet suffice to deal with the theme as it deserves; the third is that even supposing that the first two reasons did not exist, it still would not be proper for me to treat the theme since this would entail praising myself—which is the most reprehensible thing one can do.]⁵⁸

Faithful to the overall formal constraints of the narrative, even when dealing with the loss of his favorite subject, Dante cites logistical concerns as the reason he effectively leaves his heart out of his book, asserting that a) It doesn't fit in the book, b) his linguistic ability is inadequate, and c) It would turn the focus on him. All three of these justifications for neglecting to address Beatrice's death mirror the dynamics of Love's incorporation of the lover in the text: When Love incorporates the lover's body, it doesn't fit. Although Love and the lover have trouble with articulation at times, Love is the one who is described as having a linguistic deficit. Finally, Love is the "master" in the narrative, the one who incorporates, while the lover generally plays the role of the vessel. If the heart is the text of the lover's self in this narrative, Beatrice's earlier consumption of the lover's heart

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 61.

The preface:

In my book of memory, in the early part where there is little to read, there comes a chapter with the rubric: *Incipit vita nuova*. It is my intention to copy into this little book the words I find written under that heading—if not all of them, at least the essence of their meaning. (3)

[In quella parte del libro de la mia memoria, dinanzi a la quale poco si potrebbe leggere, si trova una rubrica la quale dice: *Incipit vita nova*. Sotto la quale rubrica io trovo scritte le parole le quali è mio intendimento d'asemplare in questo libello; e se non tutte, almeno la loro sentenza.]

This passage reinforces the text's emphasis on adhering to structural guidelines, even in terms of spiritual interpretation, grieving, and sentiment. It is part of what makes this narrative so conducive to a conversation about the roles of structure and form in meaning-making and identity construction.

may be having formal effects on his self-text. Since Love actually committed that act of incorporation, using Beatrice as a proxy, we might read this development as evidence that the lover is unable to defend against complete incorporation by Love in Beatrice's absence.

Travel and Incorporation in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*

Troilus and Criseyde is a retelling of Boccaccio's *Il Filostrato*, an early fourteenth-century tale about a romance between Troilus and Criseyde during the Trojan War. In the course of the poem, Troilus falls in love with the widow Criseyde, who considers herself unable to love, regardless of the suitor. After a dream in which an eagle steals her heart and transplants its own into her chest, Criseyde begins to warm up to Troilus. In this tale, Criseyde's uncle, Pandarus, acts as the mediator between the two lovers. Love is largely absent from the narrative, except as an abstract influence on the characters. Criseyde's uncle Pandarus makes a number of overwrought speeches to Criseyde about how Troilus will die if she does not love him, and finally, Criseyde begins to fall in love. As soon as she does, however, Criseyde discovers that her traitorous father, now living in Greece, has orchestrated a trade in which she will be sent to Greece in exchange for the imprisoned Trojan warrior Antenor. Troilus begs Criseyde to remain faithful to him, but Criseyde symbolically transfers her allegiance to Diomedes upon her arrival in Greece by pinning the ruby brooch on him.

The locus of control in *Troilus and Criseyde* is largely external for the main characters. Pandarus tries to maintain control over the lovers through smooth-tongued

manipulation, Troilus tries to keep Criseyde in check by pleading and bargaining, and Calchas and Diomedes exercise political power and physical strength, respectively. The exception, the one character who asserts power by replacing an internal structure of the body, is the eagle. He comes to Criseyde in a dream, much like the god of Love comes to the lover in *Vita nuova*, and the violation is described in similarly threatening terms:

And as she slep, anonright tho hire mette
 How that an egle, fethered whit as bon,
 Under hir brest his longe clawes sette,
 And out hir herte he rente, and that anon,
 And dide his herte into hire brest to gon—
 Of which she not agroos, ne nothyng smerte—
 And forth he fleigh, with herte left for herte.

II:925-932⁵⁹

In contrast to Troilus, whose metaphorical feathers are described as being so “lymed” by Love that his lovesickness becomes obvious to those around him, this eagle’s feathers are clean white and unfettered.⁶⁰ The passage emphasizes his long claws and the language, in contrast with the reassurance in the last line that Criseyde does not feel any pain or fear, is violent and abrupt. Criseyde is mercifully asleep, but the eagle has “seized” and “rent” her heart from her breast before putting his own in its place. Even the protection sleep can offer in this poem demonstrates the structural differences governing the

⁵⁹ Benson, p. 502.

The nightingale’s song in the previous stanza might be read as rendering Criseyde’s heart ripe for the plucking:

A nyghtyngale, upon a cedre grene,
 Under the chambre wal ther as she ley,
 Ful loude song ayein the moone shene,
 Peraunter in his briddes wise a lay
 Of love, that made hire herte fressh and gay.
 That herkened she so longe in good entente,
 Til at the laste the dede slep hire hente.

II:918-924

⁶⁰ I:351-357.

material body between this text and the *Vita nuova*. While Beatrice has to suffer through her fear of eating the heart in the lover's terrifying dream, Criseyde is spared pain and fear by the parameters of the dream state here. Her trauma is anesthetized and she is therefore distanced from it.

While the *Vita nuova* is characterized by the concept of estrangement as a bodily process—being inhabited and transformed or mutilated and consumed—*Troilus and Criseyde* is predominately concerned with foreignness, and in particular foreign objects being introduced to bodies. Criseyde's new heart is the eagle's heart. This foreign transplant does not perform the same prismatic function that I described in conjunction with the cannibal dream in the *Vita nuova*: it does not confront the recipient with her own humanity, in part because the narrative asserts that she is unaware that it is happening in the dream and in part because an eagle's body does not facilitate recognition, only abjection. The prospect of having one's heart replaced with an eagle's is horrifying, but an eagle's heart is already an object. Those "psychic and sensitive functions" assigned to the Middle English definition of *herte* have no corollary in the animal heart.⁶¹ While it appears that Criseyde's affections are altered by the eagle's heart since she begins to have feelings for Troilus after her heart is exchanged, that effect is ultimately temporary, since she symbolically replaces Troilus with Diomedes. I would go so far as to say that the eagle's heart, and its attendant affections for Troilus, are always foreign to Criseyde, and that she might be imagined as embodying a perpetual state of disincorporation,

⁶¹ See *MED*. For an in-depth examination of the degree to which animals have a "presence"—meaning higher than object status—in medieval culture, see Susan Crane, *Animal Encounters* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013): 1-171.

consistently rejecting the transplant, which retains its object status because her body never incorporates it. Criseyde is, in a sense, a tourist by Greenblatt's definition: Greenblatt's effect centers on the temporary disorientation of the self within an unfamiliar physical environment. With regard to Criseyde's exchange of hearts in the poem, the agent of disorientation is fundamentally external. After she is exchanged for Antenor, her disorientation is compounded. Finally, by pinning her heart brooch on Diomedes, she recovers some sense of orientation, expressing her loyalty to Greece, but also her rejection of Troilus:

And after this the storie telleth us
That she him yaf the faire baye stede
The which he ones wan of Troilus;
And eke a broche—and that was litel nede—
That Troilus was, she yaf this Diomedes.
And ek, she bet from sorwe hym to releve
She made hym were a pencil of hire sleve.
V:1037-1043

This stanza makes clear that, not only did Criseyde give Diomedes Troilus' possessions, but that it was completely unnecessary for her to do this. Here again, the framing of the narrative indicates that Criseyde's actions connote rejection or temporariness rather than full incorporation. In short, I propose that Criseyde experiences estrangement-effects imposed by others, but she also estranges herself from her heart and her environment in the poem—as evidenced by the simultaneously romantic and political act of pinning the brooch on Diomedes. It is possible to see Greenblatt's concept at play in the ways in which Criseyde reacts to changes in her psyche as well as in her environment. The encounter itself is a violation of Criseyde, as Aranye Fradenburg notes, calling the eagle's theft "a simultaneous evocation and denial of violence, an image at once of

overwhelming invasive power and of apparent reciprocity.”⁶² In much the same way that Criseyde acquiesces to being traded by her father, she appears to consent to participation in this exchange of hearts as well. Criseyde is involved in incorporation as a form of exchange, but the circumstances surrounding the event and the language used to describe it reinforce the idea that Criseyde is only a tourist.

Captivity and Consumption in *Troilus and Criseyde*

The manifestations of captivity and consumption in this narrative are not quite as neatly categorized as in the *Vita nuova*. The agency with which the characters react to the gods and to Fortune in the narrative, and the degree to which they orchestrate their own suffering will not allow them to be constrained by external forces. Criseyde does, however, fall prey to a series of events that temporarily hamper her movement and her control over her affections. I agree with Fradenburg that the aggression with which the eagle violates Criseyde’s personal space in her dream has an effect on Criseyde’s subjectivity in subsequent scenes.⁶³ Criseyde’s center has been replaced with a foreign object and in the passages following the eagle’s invasion, she is given no voice with which to protest in the passages following the eagle’s invasion; the narrator moves on to concern himself with Troilus’ return from ‘the scarmuch’ while Criseyde sleeps.⁶⁴ In effect, Criseyde is temporarily disabled and ignored. The pause mirrors the pause for

⁶² Aranye Fradenburg, “Loss, Gender, and Chivalry in *Troilus and Criseyde*,” *Chaucer’s Troilus and Criseyde: “Subgit to alle Poesye”* (1992), p. 99

⁶³ For an alternate interpretation of the encounter, see Mary Behrman, “Heroic Criseyde,” *The Chaucer Review*, 38.4 (2004), pp. 314-336.

⁶⁴ II:934.

reflection after the heart's removal in *Vita nuova*, but Criseyde is not awake to reflect in this scene. Her role is ostensibly passive. This effect is reinforced by her behavior toward Troilus. When Criseyde sees him again, her heart responds differently to him:

And how so she hath ben here-byforn,
To God hope I, she hath now kaught a thorn,
She shal nat pulle it out this nexte wyke.
God sende mo swich thornes on to pike!
II, 1271-1274⁶⁵

The phrasing here indicates again, however, that the effect is temporary. Criseyde has “kaught a thorn,” that she shall not pull out next week, but the thorn clearly will not remain in its place permanently, since the poet asks God to send more to pull out. Seeing that Criseyde is responding to Troilus’ appearance, Pandarus begins to behave like the nightingale, stoking the fires of affection to keep Criseyde’s new heart warm:

Pandare, which that stood hire faster by,
Felte iren hoot, and he bygan to smyte,
And seyde, “Nece, I pray yow hertely,
Tel me that I shal axen yow a lite:
A womman that were of his deth to wite,
Withouten his gilt, but for hire lakked routhe,
Were it wel doon?” Quod she, “Nay, by my
trouthe!”
I:1275-1282⁶⁶

The external forces surrounding Criseyde here take care to ensure that the carefully orchestrated transplant will be effective, and Pandarus here appears to be trying to reinforce the link between the physiology of Criseyde’s new heart and her affections, using his heart to stimulate hers: “I pray yow hertely.”⁶⁷ The characterization of the

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 506.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ “heartily, adv.” *OED Online* (Oxford University Press, March 2015). Web. 12 May 2015.

thorns as temporary and subject to Criseyde's will, however, indicates that Pandarus' efforts are ultimately futile, however. The bodily damage Criseyde sustains in the eagle attack is not insignificant, but the text appears insistent that the wounds will heal and Criseyde will find a way to remove the thorns' influence.

In keeping with the theme of distance, the poem's frequent descriptions of the heart are most often stripped of their "stuffness."⁶⁸ The hearts that do take material form are objectified, and thereby removed from their function as bodily organs. Hearts are ubiquitous throughout the text, but not in ways that confront notions of the body or identity. As S.L. Clark and Julian N. Wasserman note, Chaucer's poem contains hundreds of references to the heart. Clark and Wasserman proceed to characterize those references in spatial terms:

It is no oversimplification that the symbolic functions of the heart in *Troilus and Criseyde* fall into two basic groups. The heart may serve as a vessel (for emotions, for thoughts, and even for the soul), or it may be that which is placed within an enclosure/vessel (the heart in the body). This dual possibility even allows for a merging of the symbolic functions . . . In fact, this duality is further mirrored in the thematic functions of the heart in the poem, in the giving and receiving of hearts that is peculiar to lovers.⁶⁹

A number of these references are inarguably symbolic. I find no cause to argue, for instance, that Troilus' heartsickness is an effect of anything other than emotion since, unlike the *Vita nuova*, there is no set of instructions issued by the author in this poem instructing us to read the sickness this way. Likewise, the key that Criseyde holds to Troilus's heart never materializes in the poem. These symbolic functions are not

⁶⁸ Ruth Evans, "When a Body Meets a Body," *New Medieval Literatures, Volume I* (1997): 194.

⁶⁹ S.L. Clark and Julian N. Wasserman, "The Heart in *Troilus and Criseyde*: The Eye of the Breast, the Mirror of the Mind, The Jewel in its Setting," *The Chaucer Review* 18.4 (1984): 316-28.

insignificant, but they are negotiable in ways that material objects are not. In contrast, the ruby brooch takes material form and the structure of exchange renders it “real” in much the same way as any currency becomes real—through the ritual of transaction. Once she reaches Greece, she—after a brief moment of inner conflict—transfers her allegiance to Diomede, pinning the ruby brooch, an objectified heart, that Troilus had given her, onto his collar. The heart brooch as a symbol has such a profound effect on Troilus because it can be lost, and its absence is tangible in terms of weight, temperature, etc., in addition to its sentimental and symbolic value. Similarly, even in the context of a dream, the eagle’s heart is given shape and heft. His claws tear open Criseyde’s body and invade it. Subsequent emotional changes occur *in addition to* the material alterations of the body, and the effects of the transplant that extend outside of the dreamscape into Criseyde’s waking life substantiate the link between the dream and Criseyde’s reality.

The landscape of this poem is predominantly literal, but a microcosmic wilderness takes shape in the wood that fuels the fire of love in Troilus, manifesting both growth and dangerously unregulated heat:

But as we may alday ourselven see,
 Thorough more wode or col, the more fir,
 Right so encrease hope, of what it be.
 Therwith ful ofte encresseth ek desir;
 Or as an ook comth of a litil spir,
 So thorough this lettre which that she hym sente
 Encrescen gan desir, of which he brente.

II:1331-1337⁷⁰

If Pandarus takes the role of the nightingale with Criseyde, he takes the role of the bellows with Troilus, blowing hot air into the fire of Troilus’ desires. As much as

⁷⁰ Benson, p. 507.

Pandarus encourages Troilus to ignite desire in Criseyde, the same process causes his own desires to begin to burn out of control. The trouble with Pandarus's strategy for helping Troilus to win over Criseyde is that he has mixed his wood metaphors. He begins by stoking fires of desire, but acknowledges that Criseyde is a sturdy oak:

“Peraunter thynkestow: though it be so,
That Kynde olde don hire to bygynne
To have a manere routhe upon my woo,
Seyth Daunger, ‘Nay, thow shalt me nevere
Wynne!’
So reulith hire hir hertes gost withinne,
That though she bende, yeet she stante on roote;
What in effect is this unto my boote?
II:1373-1379

He then goes on to say that even the sturdy oak can eventually be felled with enough persistence and luck:

“Thenk here-ayeins: whan that the stordy ook,
On which men hakketh ofte, for the nones,
Receyved hath the happy falling strook,
The greete sweigh doth it come al at ones,
As don thise rokkes or thise milnestones;
For swifter cours comth thyng that is of wighte,
Whan it descendeth, than don thynges lighte.
I:1380-1386

This is true enough for chopping down a tree, but Troilus is instead trying to start a fire in Criseyde, and he himself is already engulfed in flames. Patience in this situation is more likely to destroy the kindling than the oak.

However unlikely, according to these terms, Troilus' efforts are eventually successful. Although the implication here is that Criseyde's heart has turned to even stronger stuff by this point, Troilus is able to generate the heat necessary to melt Criseyde's heart, as we see in Book III:

“Thus much as now, O wommanliche wif,
I may out brynge, and if this yow displese,
That shal I wreke upon myn owen lif
Right soon, I trow, and do youre herte an ese,
If with my deth youre wrethe may apese.
But syn that ye han herd me somewhat seye,
Now recche I nevere how soone that I deye.”

Therwith his manly sorwe to biholde
It myghte han mad an herte of stoon to rewe.

III:106-114

In accordance with the tradition of the *stilnovisti*, Troilus assigns blame to Criseyde for his troubles rather than blaming Cupid for shooting him and thus setting off this torturous chain of events. As we find out shortly hereafter, Criseyde’s heart is in fact made of stone, and she gifts it to Troilus:

Soone after this they spake of sondry thynges,
As fel to purpos of this aventure,
And pleyng entrechaungeden hire rynges,
Of whiche I kan nought tellen no scripture;
But wel I woot, a broche, gold and asure,
In which a ruby set was lik an herte,
Criseyde hym yaf, and stak it on his sherte.

III:1366-1371

In this scene, Criseyde has the power over the movement of the symbolic heart. In the same way that the eagle was previously able to remove its own heart, Criseyde is now transplanting a heart, and the language of “sticking” in which the act is couched recalls the thorn that Criseyde had previously “caught” and the eagle’s claws that deposited it. We might read this as Criseyde’s gentle distancing of her heart from herself, although I don’t think this negates the exchange as a gesture of love and loyalty. It does, however, render the heart more external and portable, and make it easier to understand how Criseyde feels free to transfer it to Diomedes. If the heart was never truly hers, re-gifting it

to Diomede is less of an act of treachery than if she were giving the center of herself to him. Criseyde's objectified hearts are notably malleable in some way, which indicates that she is affected by external forces and subject to affections. They are, however, unusually distant, portable, and foreign, which suggests that her affections are similarly distant, portable, and foreign to her. This does not mean that she is cold or heartless, but that the heat and proximity of her heart have largely been manipulated by external forces, until she learns to manipulate them in similar ways herself.

Disorientation in *Troilus and Criseyde*

Troilus, on the other hand, is utterly unhinged by the raging of his heart. When Criseyde is traded for Antenor, his metaphorical tree loses all of its leaves and he goes mad in the "black bark of care":

And as in winter leves ben biraft,
Ech after other, til the tree be bare,
So that there nys but bark and braunche ilaft,
Lith Troilus, byraft of ech welfare,
Ibounden in the blake bark of care,
Disposed wood out of his wit to breyde,
So sore hym sat the chaungynge of Criseyde.

IV:225-231

This madness and disorientation in the forest, as I have explained, is one of the prominent dangers of medieval travel.⁷¹ Like the *Vita nuova*'s lover when Love overtakes and disorients him, Troilus' environment becomes hostile and he begins to lose his identity in favor of animalistic and aggressive behavior. Shortly after Criseyde's departure, Troilus begins acting like a wild bull and beating his brains out on the walls and the floor. In the

⁷¹ Verdon, p. 1.

following stanza, he loses his ability to speak and curses Nature for giving him life. Near the end of the second stanza, Troilus begins to lose the human capacity for language:

Right as the wylde bole bygynneth sprynge,
Now her, now ther, idarted to the herte,
And of his deth roreth in compleynynge,
Right so gan he aboute the chambre sterte,
Smytyng his brest ay with his fistes smerte;
His hed to the wal, his body to the grounde
Ful ofte he swapte, hymselfen to confounde.⁷²

His eyen two, for piete of herte,
Out stremeden as swifte welles tweye,
The heighe sobbes of his sorwes smerte
His spech him refte; unnethes myghte he seye,
“O deth, alas, why nyltow do me deye?
Accorsed be that day which that Nature
Shop me to ben a lyves creature!”

IV:239-252

Reduced to a speechless, animalistic creature, Troilus curses Nature for creating him and keeping him alive. In this state, Troilus focuses singularly on Criseyde. Disoriented by the “blake bark of care,” Troilus no longer cares where he steers, as long as he can be with her:

“If the Criseyde allone were me laft,
Nought roughte I whiderward thow woldest me steere;”

IV:281-2

Even though Criseyde is the one who is physically displaced in this narrative, Troilus becomes utterly lost and denaturalized in his own emotions. He loses his human faculties

⁷² The use of the word chamber in this stanza, after he is “darted” a few lines above, suggests that Troilus is flailing inside of his heart.

and sense of place, beating himself against his physical surroundings to rid himself of emotional pain.

The Written Word: The Substance and Potentiality of Love in *Troilus and Criseyde*

Consistent with the traditional *stilnovisti*, Criseyde, rather than Love, is generally described as the aggressor in Chaucer's version of this tale. Criseyde assaults Troilus with her indifference and lack of fidelity, and he suffers as a result. Chaucer's version is not so simple or one-dimensional, however. Troilus also frequently assaults himself, weeping, flailing and threatening suicide at numerous points throughout the poem. Troilus blames himself for being caught by Love, and Criseyde for refusing to be caught. When Pandarus is trying to convince Criseyde that no one will suspect anything if Troilus frequently visits her house, he casts Troilus as the aggressor:

“What, who wol demen, though he se a man

To temple go, that he th'ymages eteth?

I:372-373

Troilus' generally passive role in the narrative is altered to some extent by his role as consumer with regard to Criseyde. As Ann Astell explains, the idea of eating beauty is ambiguous:

It carries, on the one hand, a sinister meaning, for the eating of beauty denotes its frightening, mythic consumption, whether by cunning serpents, monstrous beasts, cannibals, or machines. It recalls the vicious abuse of food and drink and the concomitant destruction of health and humanity, emblematically represented in the gaping glutton and the drunkard sprawled on the sidewalk. Finally, it evokes the devouring mouth of the grave, the sepulcher that swallows every beautiful

person and thing (in Latin, *pulcher*), and the horrific mouth of Hell. On the other hand, [eating beauty] awakens an almost magical hope.⁷³

Pandarus is careful to assure Criseyde that Troilus is a gentleman, so it is unlikely that he would commit these violent acts against Criseyde, but whatever connotations the act of eating in this context might have, it is explicitly not passive. In addition, as I've said, the persistently external nature of Criseyde's transplanted organ indicates that it was possibly never truly hers to give, that it ultimately does in fact belong to Troilus—which makes it unfair for her to give it to another, but not in the sense that she has grievously wronged him. Instead, it highlights the differences between transplanted and natural affections—that removing or escaping our own heart is easier than removing or escaping a transplanted heart. There is a significant distinction between the two texts' treatments of Love: The earthbound characters in *Troilus and Criseyde*—humans and animals—largely orchestrate their own, or each other's, suffering, so Troilus' lamenting that Fortune is cruel and unavoidable rings slightly false in context, even though he has so much trouble escaping, and later finding, himself.⁷⁴ Troilus blames nearly everyone in the course of his lamenting, however, so it is not surprising that Love and Fortune should be listed among the culprits. At the end of the poem, Chaucer even derides the gods for their failure to intervene:

⁷³ Ann Astell, *Eating Beauty* (London: Cornell University Press, 2006), p. 1.

⁷⁴ Love is also referred to in the lower case—"love"—at points in the poem.

Lo here, of payens corsed olde rites!
Lo here, what alle hir goddes may availle!
Lo here, thise wrecched worldes appetites!
Lo here, the fyn and guerdon for travaille
Of Jove, Apollo, of Mars, of swich rascaille
Lo here, the forme of olde clerkis speche
In poetrie, if ye hire bokes seche.⁷⁵

For all of the wailing and pleading Troilus directs at the gods, it seems that Troilus is the architect of his own demise. Although Cupid originally shoots Troilus, it is not clear whether the arrow ever reaches Troilus' heart; he ultimately sets his own heart on fire. Pandarus is there to fan the flames with his lengthy and impassioned speeches, but he does not climb inside Troilus and operate him like a fleshy automaton, as Love does to the lover in the *Vita nuova*. My conclusion is that Criseyde's hearts in *Troilus and Criseyde* are foreign objects, introduced from the outside and temporarily disruptive to the identity of the person to whom they are affixed/into whom they are implanted, but never completely incorporated—characterized by rejection. Troilus' heart is organic, but his trauma is largely environmental. He is shot, provoked (by Pandarus), and lost in the forest.

Conclusion

The theoretical payoff from putting these two narratives and their divergent relationships with travel and incorporation in conversation with each other is that they highlight the tension between the identification and abjection inherent in the relationship between bodies and travel. Travel is always an exercise in taking in what is desirable and

⁷⁵ Benson, p. 584-5.

affirming, and keeping out what is threatening and destabilizing. The *Vita nuova* demonstrates the former—although the lover realizes after it is too late that Love is a threat to his identity after all. *Troilus and Criseyde* emphasizes the latter—Criseyde keeps her love temporary and external. Travel is damaging to bodies in both narratives, but the external forces in *Troilus and Criseyde* are earthbound and environmental. They influence, but do not fully incorporate, the lovers. Taking seriously the physical dynamics that govern the hearts in these narratives not only allows us to talk about the experiences of *travel* and *travail* in material terms, but it also deepens our understanding of the cultural significance of the ways in which the lovers and their hearts interact with, and react to, their environments.

The Cant of Simulated Pilgrimage

The Body and its Members

cant, v.¹ 1. trans. To part, divide, share, parcel out, apportion.¹

Corpus Christi pageants in late Medieval England were a community endeavor. Members of the community had prescribed roles to play, whether they participated in the production of the plays or joined the audience. If all went as planned, these members moved together in concert to recreate biblical history in the guise of a spiritual pilgrimage without having to leave the safety of their own community. Much has been made of the body as a metaphor for community in medieval literature, but the connections between the thematic content of many Corpus Christi plays and the guilds that produced them give us a unique opportunity to investigate the effects of severing a member from such a community. As Clifford Davidson has observed:

While the plays have most frequently been treated as literary and theatrical *texts*, they also need to be understood to have been made possible by the social organization of the English towns in which they were played and by the material culture which produced the elaborate theatrical displays of costumes, pageant wagons or fixed stages, properties, and effects.²

I will examine the cultural implications of these simulated pilgrimages, performed either on pageant wagons that had limited movement along prescribed routes or fixed stages

¹ "cant, v.1." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, December 2014. Web. 20 February 2015.

² Clifford Davidson, *Material Culture and Medieval Drama* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1999), p. 1. See also Clifford Davidson, "York Guilds and the Corpus Christi Plays: Unwilling Participants?" *Early Theatre: A Journal Associated with the Records of Early English Drama* 9.2 (2006), pp. 10-33 and Alan D. Justice, "Trade Symbolism in the York Cycle." *Theatre Journal* 31.1 (1979), pp. 47-58.

that did not move at all, as amputated limbs of the travel experience in the later Middle Ages. Bodily movement and displacement in the Corpus Christi plays were framed in a liminal space between real and figurative movement.³ The cycles were performed as simulated pilgrimages, the pageant wagons that served as stages moving short distances, but staging forms of cultural contact one might expect to find only on long distance journeys to foreign lands. For instance, Jewish bodies figured prominently in these plays, even though the majority of the Jewish population had by this time been expelled from Europe. These pilgrimages were thematically tied to material culture by the guilds that produced them, but severed from the material realities of travel by their relative immobility. This is not to say that the bodies in these plays or in their audiences are not able to function in culturally significant ways, but that they are characterized by their disability in terms of the geographical movement and physical encounter with other lands and other people that is inherent to pilgrimage. In fact, this disability is actually the source of their cultural agency. I will extend this discussion to damage, elision, and amputation in the structure and form of physical manuscripts in chapter four. In this chapter, I will confine my examination to how bodily integrity implies social coherence in the texts of the York Plays, whereas amputation indicates disconnection from the social body. Seemingly paradoxically, the amputated nature of simulated pilgrimage I have described above facilitates social coherence among the plays' audience because the

³ For more on simulated pilgrimage in the York Cycle, see Margaret Rogerson, *The York Mystery Plays: Performance in the City* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: York Medieval, 2011) and Pamela M. King, *The York Mystery Cycle and the Worship of the City* (Woodbridge, UK: D.S. Brewer, 2006). For more on realism in medieval drama, see Jody Enders, *Death by Drama and Other Medieval Urban Legends* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005) and *The Medieval Theater of Cruelty: Rhetoric, Memory, Violence*, (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1999).

narrative is carefully constructed and controlled—except for when the simulation breaks down and reveals material realities, such as in the case of the missing *Fergus* play, removed from the cycle because it failed to communicate a clear spiritual message to its audiences.⁴ In these places, the narrative most nearly approaches the physical reality of encounter.

In broad strokes, the “cant/can’t” of simulated pilgrimage is the culturally controlled narrative constructed by civic and economic leaders of the community. The audience’s perspective is restricted by the careful orchestration of events and environments in the plays, as well as by the limited movement of the stages. At the same time, these elements endow producers of the plays with greater cultural mobility in that they are not restricted by physical environments or spontaneous events a pilgrim would inevitably encounter along his or her journey. The danger of spontaneity only exists in the risk of material corruption or miscommunication—the fact that material has limitations and tends to break down in ways that exist outside of cultural norms. As much as the organizers of the pageant might want to make their materials mimic their intended religious messages, material inability or disability, of human or object, can generate alternate cultural significations. These generative inabilities and disabilities are the focus of this chapter.

Since the chief categories of agency associated with these plays are movement and material production, I will focus on the body parts associated with these functions:

⁴ Alexandra F. Johnston and Margaret Rogerson, *Records of Early English Drama: York. Vol. 2* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1978). See also Rosemary Woolf, *English Mystery Plays* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1980), p. 287.

limbs. In Middle English, the word *lyme* could include “any distinctive constituent part or organ of the body” or specifically “the extremities of the body excluding the head; a leg, foot, arm, hand, wing, etc.”⁵ The word was also used to demonstrate allegiance in the way that we commonly use the word *member* in Modern English:

(a) A Christian or good man considered as a member of the body of Christ; cristes ~, ~ of crist (holi chirche, the regne of god); also, by analogy, a follower or agent of the devil, a heathen, a sinner; antecristes ~, develes ~, fendes ~, ~ of satanas (antecrist, the fend); (b) a social dependent, a liegeman; (c) hores ~, a follower of whores; theves ~, a member of the thieving fraternity.⁶

This definition includes a number of key connotations. The first is “follower or agent,” one who either moves or performs an action according to the will of a central power like Christ or Satan. This is central to plays like *The Flood*, in which Noah is too old and frail to perform the work God requires of him without supernatural help. Here the physical weakness is not a consequence of sin, but an opportunity for God to demonstrate his ability to transcend human limitations of age and infirmity:

DEUS Nooe, as I byd thee, doo fulfill.
A shippe I will have wroght in hye;
All yf thou can litill skylle,
Take it in hande, for helpe sall I.

NOE A, worthy Lorde, wolde thou take heede,
I am full olde and oute of qwarte,
That me liste do no daies dede
Bot yf gret mystir me garte. (9:45-52)⁷

Of course, this story is meant to demonstrate Noah’s obedience, but it has the feeling of forced labor since God threatens Noah with pain if he refuses. Another key connotation

⁵ *Middle English Dictionary*. Robert E. Lewis, Hans Kurath, and Sherman M. Kuhn, eds. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1952).

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Clifford Davidson, *The York Corpus Christi Plays* (Kalamazoo, MI: TEAMS, 2011).

of the word *lyme* is “social dependent,” a constituent part of a community—in this case a guild or the city of York. Finally, the idea of a fraternity indicates a familial relationship more specifically. Familial relationships, criminal and otherwise, are essential to these plays, and severing—or the threat of severing—those relationships, whether by a God-fearing hand like Abraham’s or a vengeful hand like Cain’s, creates culturally significant distance between members, particularly in light of the pageant’s role in reinforcing community.

As Margaret Owens has observed, the various forms of medieval violence are encoded differently.⁸ While removal of the heart from the body has a decentralizing effect on subjectivity, removal of the hands and feet has a debilitating effect on the subject—the intellectual and spiritual center of the individual remains intact, but he loses his ability to function in society, either because he cannot work or because he cannot move freely. To make this distinction explicit, references to limbs are frequently set in opposition to vital functions, such as the exclusion of the head in the preceding definition and the numerous references to “lyfe and lyme” throughout the texts of the York Plays that make clear that these are distinct categories. In the Middle Ages, criminals’ limbs were amputated for precisely this reason: to prevent them from committing similar crimes in the future without ending their lives. Thieves’ hands were cut off. Deserters lost a foot.⁹ “Lenient” punishments were disabling but not deadly. Owens makes the argument for specificity in her study of medieval violence, focusing on dismemberment and decapitation and citing the importance of examining how each category of violence is

⁸ Margaret Owens, *Stages of Dismemberment* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005), p. 13.

⁹ Irina Metzler, *A Social History of Disability in the Middle Ages* (New York: Routledge, 2013), p. 18-19.

encoded. Given the importance of the lethal/nonlethal distinction in the context of medieval punishment, my focus in this chapter is only on dismemberment. Analyzing how amputated limbs signified to audiences of medieval mystery plays requires a multi-pronged approach that accounts for not only the cultural influences on medieval stage production, but also the theater's influence on late medieval culture and identity.¹⁰ Owens is right to emphasize popular as well as material culture, since these plays were so entwined with both, and argues for the generative power of wounding on the medieval stage.¹¹ Whereas she focuses on healing as the locus of generation, I take a disability studies approach to these scenes, teasing out the meaning of the disabled bodies and detached limbs themselves as sites of cultural generation, without requiring healing or wholeness (unity) to create cultural significance. Disability does things to communicate and resist culture on the medieval stage that do not require wholeness. I share a great deal in common with Owens' theoretical approach to these plays, but my study is narrower on three points. The first is that I am focused on only York plays rather than late medieval and early Renaissance drama more broadly. The second is that I am analyzing damage to non-vital limbs rather than all extremities. Finally, I am confining my analysis to the disabilities themselves rather than extending into scenes of recuperation, although I will talk about scarring, particularly as it relates to damaged manuscripts, as I transition into the next chapter.

Disability studies scholars continue to wrestle with the concept of normalcy in relation to the disabled body. Focusing on scenes of recuperation reinforces cultural

¹⁰ Owens, pp. 13-14.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 15.

compulsions to privilege the functions of “whole” bodies over those of disabled bodies.

Robert McRuer’s critique of “compulsory able-bodiedness” helps to pinpoint the problems with approaching disabled bodies with a focus on restoring them to wholeness:

[T]he desire for definitional clarity might unleash more problems than it contains; if it’s hard to deny that something called normalcy exists, it’s even harder to pinpoint what that something is. The *OED* defines able-bodied redundantly and negatively as “having an able body, i.e. one free from disability, and capable of the physical exertions required of it; in bodily health, robust.” Able-bodiedness, in turn, is defined vaguely as “soundness of health; ability to work; robustness.”¹²

The trouble with normalizing bodies according to specific shapes and functions is that it elides the possibility that the disabled body might succeed where the “able” body fails.

McRuer concludes from this definition that the concept of the “normal” body is tied up with industrial capitalism, but it is certainly also tied up with guild economies in late medieval England. The entire festival, and all of the material and dramatic elements that come together to create it, serve to reinforce the cultural structures of the communities that participate in it.¹³ The cultural trappings are different, but there is a common emphasis on productivity in both historical contexts. Mc Ruer goes on to describe “the able-bodied need for an agreed-upon common ground,” which he says reveals “more about the able-bodied culture doing the asking than about the bodies being interrogated”:

The culture asking such questions assumes in advance that we all agree: able-bodied identities, able-bodied perspectives are preferable and what we all, collectively, are aiming for. A system of compulsory able-bodiedness repeatedly demands that people with disabilities embody for others an affirmative answer to

¹² Robert McRuer, *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability* (New York: NYU Press, 2006), p. 24-25. This is quite close to another contemporary Middle English definition of *cant*:

Bold, brisk, courageous, hearty, lusty, lively, hale. The Sc. sense leans to ‘Lively, merry, brisk’; cf. Jamieson, who compares ‘cant men’ (armed followers) with ‘merry men’ of the ballads.

¹³ See Clifford Davidson, *Material Culture and Medieval Drama*. See also Claire Sponsler, *Drama and Resistance: Bodies, Goods, and Theatricality in Late Medieval England* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

the unspoken question “Yes, but in the end, wouldn’t you rather be more like me?”¹⁴

If we resist the compulsion to compare the bodies being fragmented onstage in the York plays to “able” bodies, instead looking for significations that do not depend on eventual healing or unity, we can construct a more complete picture of the shapes and abilities these bodies represent in the plays, and understand more fully how they contribute to the able-bodied culture that produced them.

Makers: Unmade, Made, and Unable to Make

cant, n.¹ 1. (probably) Edge, border, brink. *Obs.*¹⁵

The role of craft guilds in producing the plays and the thematic links between their crafts and the plays’ subject matter highlights the constructed nature of these productions and the importance of material to the identities of the craftsmen and the identities of the characters in the plays. Unlike God, the craftsman is not a “maker unmade” (1.2).¹⁶ The first play of the cycle, *The Creation of the Angels and the Fall of Lucifer*, creates a landscape that is subject to spiritual forces. The play establishes God as the “master craftsman,” the “maker unmade.” God’s architecture governs spatial arrangements in addition to the ways in which the material behaves in the play:

Here underneth me nowe a nexile I neven,
Whilke ile sall be erthe, now all be at ones
Erthe haly and helle, this hegheste be heven;

¹⁴ McRuer, p. 25-26.

¹⁵ “cant, n.1.” *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, December 2014. Web. 20 February 2015.

¹⁶ Davidson, *The York Corpus Christi Plays*.

And that welth sall welde sall won in this wones.
This graunte I yowe, mynysters myne,
To whils yhe ar stabill in thoghte,
And also to thaime that ar noghte
Be put to my presone at pyne. (1:25-32)¹⁷

Stability is highly prized in this passage, and the punishment for instability is banishment from God's earthly structure and imprisonment in a prison of pain. This characterization sets the tone for a festival organized and constructed by craftsmen. God's soliloquy also foreshadows the fall with his use of the word "stabill."¹⁸ He again uses repetition of the language of construction to explain to Lucifer that he has set him in a place of happiness and that he nothing will injure him as long as he remains obedient:

I beelde thee here baynely in blys for to be,
I name thee for Lucifer, als bearer of lyghte.
Nothing here sall thee be derand;
In this blis sall be yhour beeldyng. (1:35-38)¹⁹

The word *beelde* has specifically architectural connotations. It means to construct, found, or build—to "bring into being" or provide living quarters. In places in the plays where the focus turns away from structural concerns, the word *wone* replaces *beelde*. The play sets these terms in opposition to language of injury, saying that nothing in this place of obedience will wound Lucifer. When Lucifer forgets the craftsman and begins to revel in the exquisite craftsmanship of his own body, the ground breaks under the weight of his pride. Weakness in his and the fallen angels' hands and feet demonstrate their spiritual deficiency. First Lucifer loses his footing and falls:

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ *Middle English Dictionary*. Lewis, et al, eds.

¹⁹ Ibid.

Owe, what I am derworth and defte²⁰
Owe, Dewes, all goes downe!
My might and my mayne es all marrande.
Helpe, felawes, in faythe I am fallande. (1:92-94)²¹

The word *defte* can be used literally or ironically, meaning either humble and noble or boorish and awkward. The focus on physical stability throughout this play suggests that while Lucifer most likely intends to call himself noble, he unwittingly foreshadows his own fall. His angelic compatriot then “falls on all hands,” demonstrating physical weakness, imbalance, and possibly also a gesture of forced penitence:

Fra heven are we heledande on all hande.

To wo are we weendande, I warande. (1:95-96)²²

The word *weendande* indicates a loss of direction, a loss of the structure and protection afforded them by obedience to God, which renders them vulnerable to misdirection and injury. This characterization of the structure and divine scaffolding of the spiritual realm sets the tone for a pageant produced by craftsmen.

Constructed and deconstructed bodies also mattered in these plays, not only in terms of their instructive religious value for audiences, but economically as well, since many plays were thematically linked to the trades of the guilds that produced them. A guild’s reputation in the community and even its economic success could be influenced by how the guild is reflected to the audience through its creation.²³ The idea of

²⁰ According to the *Middle English Dictionary*, *defte* can either mean “noble and exalted” or “awkward.” It is clear that Lucifer intended the former here, but considering the context, it might be a play on words. *MED*. Lewis, et al, eds.

²¹ Davidson, *The York Corpus Christi Plays*.

²² Ibid. “fallen to honde(s and fot (fet), prostrate oneself before (sb.), submit to.” *MED*. Lewis, et al, eds.

²³ See Davidson, “York Guilds and the Corpus Christi Plays: Unwilling Participants?” and Justice, “Trade Symbolism in the York Cycle.”

membership was key to these productions, as guilds were charged by the city with the production of a particular play, and were penalized should they refuse. Although repercussions for a bad production could affect a guild individually, the pageant was a community endeavor. As Claire Sponsler notes, the structure of community in medieval England as a whole was closely associated with the body:

Modeled on the *corpus Christi* as described by Paul in Corinthians, the urban community in particular was often envisioned as an organic entity within which each of the community's members, like each part of the human body, had a specific and hierarchically determined function leading to the survival of the whole. The head ruled the hands and feet, which worked in turn to sustain the head, and the whole organism was ruled by God. Within this scheme, individuals were assumed to exist primarily to further the survival of the whole.²⁴

With the cosmos constructed as wings of a building with earthen floors that crumble to unseat errant angels and a model for urban community based on the human body, the structural elements and processes of the earth and the body quickly begin to overlap. Sponsler claims that material culture was instrumental in constructing late medieval subjectivities.²⁵ A person's occupation was inextricable from his identity, and productivity was highly valued and intensely physical. Inability to work separated individuals from the community, at best signifying dependence on the productive bodies in the community and at worst marking them as criminals, since torture and dismemberment were common punishments for lesser crimes.²⁶

This close relationship between body, identity and commodity set against a backdrop of simulated pilgrimage sets the stage for a compelling conversation about the

²⁴ Claire Sponsler, *Drama and Resistance: Bodies, Goods, and Theatricality in Late Medieval England* (Minneapolis, MN: U of Minnesota, 1997), p. xiii.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Trevor Dean, *Crime in Medieval Europe, 1200-1550* (London: Pearson Education Limited, 2001), p. 16.

criminalization, disability and dismemberment of bodies in late medieval English drama, and about how simulated cultural contact zones served to enforce and reinforce imagined pilgrim identities and cultural notions about travel. Irina Metzler explains how judicial mutilation rendered flesh criminal:

[T]hrough the effects of legal proceedings, the law itself was making bodies disabled, through judicial mutilations. The term ‘judicial’ is used in the widest sense, so that not just corporal punishments as the result of (criminal) trials are discussed, but also the deliberate use of impairment as part of military actions inflicted by the victors on the vanquished. Mutilation literally inscribed a record of misdemeanour on the body of the defeated or convicted criminal [...] A disabled body could stand under the suspicion of association with a criminal body.²⁷

Disabled bodies exist on the margins of medieval communities, and the permanence of their marginal status depends on whether or not they will heal from their illness or injury. Metzler explains her preference for the term “liminal” when discussing medieval disability:

I have chosen liminal over marginal since it better describes the in-between phase that physically impaired people found themselves since they are *between* normatively fixed positions (such as healthy or ill, alive or dead, male or female) rather than completely *outside* of traditional structures.²⁸

As Metzler acknowledges in her second chapter, however, disability in the Middle Ages was frequently linked with fixed marginal categories such as Jewishness or outlawry. In these cases, disability became a permanent indicator of otherness. The stigma of disability as a burden on the productive members of society also contributed to a more fixed marginal identity for disabled individuals in medieval England. As Trevor Dean has noted, outsiders were far more likely to be convicted and mutilated as examples to the

²⁷ Irina Metzler, *A Social History of Disability in the Middle Ages* (New York: Routledge, 2013), p.9.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

community than were members of the community. This didactic form of punishment served to further marginalize traveling laborers.²⁹ This correlation between guilt, injury, and outsider status extends to Adam and Eve, who are banished and disabled after the fall, and especially to the figures of Jews throughout the Corpus Christi plays who frequently lose their limbs or the use of their limbs when they come in contact with a Christian body. In *The Prohibition of the Tree of Knowledge*, God warns Adam and Eve not to touch the tree. The specific prohibition reads as follows:

Luke nother thowe nor Eve thy wyf
Lay ye no handes theretyll.
Forwhy it is knowen
Bothe of good and yll,
This frute but ye lett hyng
Ye speyd yourself to spyll. (4:84-89)³⁰

The closest corresponding definition in the *Middle English Dictionary* is “leien to: stretch out the hand, begin an act.”³¹ This is appropriate, since eating, not touching, the fruit is the actual transgression. Laying a hand on the fruit enables one to commit the transgression, which leads to self-destruction. In Play Five: *The Fall*, Eve does in fact take hold of the fruit of the forbidden tree:

Than wille I to thy techyng traste

And fange this frute unto oure foode. (5:78-79)

²⁹ Dean, p. 125.

³⁰ Davidson, *The York Corpus Christi Plays*. The implications here are more bodily than they might first appear. The word “spylen” in the *MED* can mean to strip (e.g. of clothing), skin (e.g. sheep), pillage, plunder, deprive, or carve (e.g. a fowl). In essence, what they do to the fruit with their hands and mouth will be done to them. *MED*. Lewis, et al, eds.

³¹ *MED*. Lewis, et al, eds.

The *MED* definition of *fange* is “[t]o grasp or seize (something), take hold of, pick up.”³²

Here again, the action that signals her doom is her grasping of the apple—the hands enable her to complete the illicit act of eating the fruit. The Latin stage directions reinforce this point: “Et tunc debet accipere pomum.” [And then she should take the apple.] Satan then tells Eve to take it to Adam, again emphasizing the action of the hands in addition to the ultimate consumption of the apple as the evil deed:

Byte on boldly, be nought abasshed,
And bere Adam to amende his mode
And eke his blisse.
[Tunc Satanas recedet.] (5:80-2)³³

Eve’s hand is made criminal when she picks the apple from the tree and again when she carries it to Adam, while Adam’s hand is made criminal through his acceptance of the apple from his mate. Their punishment at the close of the play is the pain and struggle of sowing and harvesting their own food from the soil:

Adam and Eve alsoo, yhe
In erthe than shalle ye swete and swynke³⁴
And travayle for youre foode. (4:160-162)³⁵

Adam’s hand-wringing lament is appropriate in this context:

Allas, for sorowe and care,
Owre handis may we wryng. (4:175-176)³⁶

³² Ibid.

³³ Davidson, *The York Corpus Christi Plays*.

³⁴ *MED*. Lewis, et al, eds.

³⁵ Ibid. The *MED* definition for *swynke* means both to engage in physical labor (mentioning specifically the labor incurred by the Fall) and to labor in childbirth. It can also indicate mental distress or pain, which means that it parallels the definition for *travaylle* in some key aspects.

³⁶ Davidson, *The York Corpus Christi Plays*.

Adam and Eve's hands are given more laborious and painful tasks as punishment for sin. In contrast, Jewish hands in these plays are either amputated completely or rendered useless and/or motionless through injury. These disabling and immobilizing punishments set them apart from the other characters in the play.

The contrast between punishment of insiders versus outsiders is evident in the cycle's treatment of Jewish hands that transgress. While Adam and Eve's hands must now labor in pain and filth to earn food that was previously freely provided, Jewish hands are completely incapacitated. The concept of amputation is unambiguous. Deriving from the Latin *amputare*, it simply means to cut off, eradicate, or exclude. The implications of an amputated hand in relation to the margins of medieval culture, however, can exercise considerable agency as a *de facto* manicule, drawing attention to an absence, silence, or lack of mobility. By virtue of its inability to signify properly or contribute to the medieval economy in any meaningful way, the amputated limb exists outside the confines of community identity, but its existence in the margins draws attention to and challenges the stability of that collective identity.³⁷ According to Anthony Bale, the severed limb itself can actually function independently of the body to impede the reader or audience in his or her journey through the narrative:

Jephonius' ripped-off hand is, first, a grotesque. Secondly, it is an abbreviation, a part, without proportion, which functions independently of the whole from which it originates. Thirdly, it is interruptive—the hand sticks, it adheres, it arrests progress, a bodily disarticulation which is also a moral dislodgement.³⁸

³⁷ The exception here is the saintly body, which is evidence of work completed.

³⁸ Bale, "The Jew's Hand and the Virgin's Bier: Tangible Interruption," *Feeling Persecuted*, p. 91-92. Bale goes on to list the instructive powers of the active hand ("gesticulating wildly" as evidence of a lack of reason) and the amputated hand.

This attractive property of the severed hand is a potential source of conflict or confusion for medieval audiences, whose attention is momentarily redirected to the hand as an object, violently removed from the body and therefore particularly memorable.

The connection between the materiality of the human body and the urban economy of the late Middle Ages locates the disfigured body in opposition to the marketplace. Because a disfigured body was not considered “useful to the patterns of production,” Sponsler suggests that it contained in its broken form the specter of social resistance:

[T]heatrical representation of damaged and disappearing bodies could . . . suggest for some spectators under the right circumstances ways of evading power. Especially since within late medieval urban communities power often took for itself the image of the body corporate, damaged bodies might have served as gestures of resistance to themes of social unity.³⁹

As integral as community is to the York Plays, those excluded from community by the law, religion, or a combination of the two were also instrumental in constructing and reinforcing social codes of belonging or exclusion for audiences of the plays.⁴⁰

Social Stability and Simulated Mobility

d. negative cannot /'kænət/ ; *famil.* **can't** /kɑːnt/ . (*Sc.* **canna**). (The earlier mode was to prefix *ne*.)⁴¹

The idea of pilgrimage might seem to depend on long-distance travel, but in fact it is generally a practice of reinforcing previously held religious beliefs through visits to

³⁹ Sponsler, p. 138.

⁴⁰ For more on the importance of community to the York Plays, see Rogerson's introduction to *The York Mystery Plays: Performance in the City*, pp. 1-23.

⁴¹ A slightly anachronistic turn, but the construction was in use as far back as 1400. See "can, v.1." *OED Online* (Oxford University Press, December 2014). Web. 20 February 2015.

various well-known sites of religious significance.⁴² Aside from the struggle of getting from place to place, the spiritual elements of pilgrimage can be achieved without traversing long stretches of the physical landscape. In fact, it is arguable that the *travylle* of constructing the stages and scenes of the York Cycle plays replaces the travel of traditional pilgrimage, turning audiences into passive objects of travel, like the lover in *Vita nuova*. This is consistent with the portrayal of acts of creation throughout the cycle. The fact that the pilgrim has limited mobility gives the divine intervener the opportunity to showcase his power: miracles are miracles precisely because of material resistance to certain processes. It is the “If you build it, [H]e will come” of medieval spiritual journeys. The fact remains, however, that medieval craftsmen were technologically and financially limited. Their backdrops, special effects, and costumes constructed rough approximations of biblical figures, behaviors, and environments.⁴³ Fortunately, this falls in line with the theme of most biblical stories, which seems to be that inept or physically inferior humans begin a formidable task, fumble with it, and God steps in to enable the human body to complete it. While it is important for the violence in the plays to be graphic enough to be memorable, the props need only display the skill of the craftsmen and preserve their reputation in the community while communicating the spiritual message of the assigned play.

The hand enables the medieval worker with regard to direction and purpose or productivity, while the foot performs a similar function with regard to mobility—the

⁴² For more on the emphasis of religious objects over place in medieval Christianity, see Carolyn Walker Bynum, *Christian Materiality* (New York: Zone Books, 2011).

⁴³ Davidson, *The York Corpus Christi Plays*.

severed foot “arrests progress” in the sense that it hampers the amputee’s ability to walk.⁴⁴ This enables greater external control of the injured body, making the amputee easier to confine or track. It also draws attention to the way progress is made. A severed or bound foot draws attention to an imbalance in the affected body. The tension between mobility and immobility in the production of the York pageant is central to its framing of encounter and otherness within the text of the plays. The near-immobility of the pageant wagons and complete immobility of fixed stages enabled organizers of the pageant to control the pilgrimage experience in ways that physical travel to distant lands would render impossible. The significant dangers posed by simulated pilgrimage are reduced to two:

- 1) Ineffective communication on the part of the performers, producers, or the text itself
- 2) Unruly or spiritually immature audiences who miss or misinterpret the lessons of the plays

Having eliminated most of the environmental threats posed by travel and nearly all of the threat of foreign influence, the capacity of pilgrimage for spiritual instruction is carefully distilled by the pageant’s producers. Unfortunately, as many plays in the cycle demonstrate, material can break down, resist signification, or fail.⁴⁵ Unintentional material corruption can signify in ways that may not fall in line with the tidy spiritual narrative constructed in medieval religious dramas. As Anthony Bale’s discussion of amputated Jewish limbs makes clear, the thingness of flesh when it is removed from the body can cause confusion and contradiction in the ways that it signifies. Similarly, the

⁴⁴ Notions of difficulty in travel recur in *The Flight to Egypt*, *Christ and the Doctors*, and *The Smiths’ Play*.

⁴⁵ For more on the effects of material breakdown, see Bill Brown, “Thing Theory,” *Critical Inquiry* 28:1 (Autumn 2001), pp. 1-22.

thingness of the immobile or barely mobile stage reveals the physical limitations of simulated pilgrimage.

The production of the plays was a balancing act between two powers: the craft guilds and the civic administrators.⁴⁶ The guilds were accountable to the administrators for performing the plays, but they also had their own economic concerns to consider, so there was an appeal process for situations in which the guilds' concerns were sufficient to change time, venue, or even the play assigned to them in the cycle.⁴⁷ Identifying these correlations between bodily disability and social instability does not establish a causal relationship between the two; there is archival evidence, however, of such a causal relationship between medieval drama and culture. As Jody Enders observes in her discussion of urban legends, dramatic performances reinforced the beliefs of medieval audiences, but they also created beliefs:

Although not *all* medieval legends were about the theater—nor did the medieval theater in every instance give rise to legends—there was clearly something about the genre that caused storytellers to stage it time and time again in their folklore. Specifically, each story staged the tenacious beliefs that lives are changed forever when people go to the theater and that dramatic representations are directly linked to the real actions and real sentiments of real life.⁴⁸

The idea that somehow performances that are not clearly coded as spiritual instruction can be confusing or detrimental to the spiritual growth of audiences persists throughout the later Middle Ages and into the early modern period. The theater not only inspired legends, but it blurred the boundaries between fiction and reality to such a degree that

⁴⁶ See Rogerson, pp. 2-3.

⁴⁷ This includes the reassignment of two pageants to different guilds (both plays were eventually removed from the cycle): *The Purification of the Virgin* and *The Funeral of the Virgin*. Rogerson, p. 11.

⁴⁸ Enders, *Death by Drama*, p. xxiii. Although Enders focuses on Medieval French drama, she comments on similarities in English drama as well and frequently characterizes medieval drama more broadly in these terms.

they at times became difficult to distinguish. Testing these boundaries is commonly considered a postmodern turn, but the medieval stage employed many of the same techniques to grab audiences' attention:

Death by Drama could be a response to my own unceasing surprise each time I read the lavish praise heaped upon some avant-garde production by a theater critic because of a director's use of real violence, real pleasure, real sex, or real audience participation. The medieval and Renaissance theater had long boasted such spectacular "innovations." Much in the same way that the postmodern theater, cinema, and television stimulate viewers to cross even the fuzziest of boundaries, so too did the medieval stage.⁴⁹

Certain audiences, particularly women and children, were cast as incapable of distinguishing truth from staged dramatic action, and were often excluded from these arenas as a form of social control.⁵⁰ There was a risk inherent in medieval performance that the events taking place on stage would not be received in the manner that they were intended. The Church took advantage of this danger in order to steer people away from stage productions:

Whether the spectators were naïve or learned, whether the threat of theological uncertainty was real or unreal, theater audiences were presumably God's children. The problem was that they were *children*, into whose dangerous hands both theater and theology might fall. Therefore, it was important to prove that childlike audiences were intellectually incapable of pondering complex theological arguments about realism, reality, and the interpretation of signs. In that respect, even Protestants and Catholics could occasionally agree as they denounced one perceived peril that stood out above all the rest. Ecclesiastics expressed their terror—itsself terrifying—that immature spectators would be unable to distinguish between Christianity and Judaism.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. xxvii.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 113.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 116.

Enders concludes by saying that “in any theatrical ministration to God’s children, belief itself was at stake.”⁵² Mikhail Bakhtin and V.A. Kolve famously disagreed about the degree to which audiences risked spiritual sacrilege when laughing at stage performances, but they all agree that there is some slippage between truth and representation in medieval drama, and rules of engagement when reacting to staged events whose purpose is to shield audiences from perceived psychological and spiritual dangers.⁵³

The staged cycle plays were also capable of upending audiences’ faith in the stability of the earth beneath their feet without having to physically transport them to foreign lands. The figurative use of *hande* in several places in Play Nine: *The Flood*, symbolizes Noah’s availability and readiness:

UXOR:
Wher arte thou, Noye?
NOE:
Loo, here at hande. (9:75-76)⁵⁴

This emphasis on Noah’s availability also serves to show the contrast between Noah’s quiet obedience and his wife’s loud arrogance in the play, especially when she tells Noah that she wants to go into town even though there is a flood coming. Noah asks his sons to “hold her here” so that she will not wander off and get herself killed “For tille hir harmes she takes no heede.” (9:102)⁵⁵ In *The Flood*, firm ground becomes a symbol for instability, whereas water is the source of stability because it becomes the symbol for obedience to God:

⁵² Ibid., p. 117.

⁵³ V.A. Kolve, “Religious Laughter,” *The Play called Corpus Christi* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1966), p. 130, and Mikhail Bakhtin, “Rabelais in the History of Laughter,” *Rabelais and His World* (Cambridge, MA: M. I. T., 1968), pp. 59-144.

⁵⁴ *MED*. Lewis, et al, eds.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

NOE O, woman, arte thou woode?
 Of my werkis thou not wotte;
 All that has ban or bloode
 Sall be overeflowed with the floode.
 UXOR In faithe, thee were als goode
 To late me go my gatte.
 We owte, herrowe!
 NOE What now, what cheere?
 UXOR I will no nare for no kynnes nede.
 NOE Helpe, my sonnes, to holde her here,
 For tille hir harmes she takes no heede.
 II FILIUS Beis mery, modir, and mende youre chere.
 This worlde beis drowned, withouten drede. (9:93-104)⁵⁶

This is a reversal of traditional medieval ideas about sea travel, which was generally regarded as treacherous and unstable:

For a land civilization like that of the Middle Ages, the sea could only provoke fear, anxiety, and repulsion. Of course, the men of the age were acquainted with water through river navigation, but on rivers they could see the banks, *terra firma*. Once they had left the continent, there was nothing solid to hold onto. The traveler saw an enormous liquid expanse. The imagination and reality joined to make the sea an object of fear.⁵⁷

The notion that Noah's wife might wander were she granted access to *terra firma* is set in opposition to Noah's steadfast commitment to venturing into the unsteady waters of the ocean, steadied by God's hand. As in Play One: *The Creation of the Angels and the Fall of Lucifer*, the hard ground is made unreliable by spiritual forces. In both plays, the weakness of the landscape mirrors the weakness of the characters, whose only recourse is to call out to God for support.⁵⁸ This passage conflates bodies with earth by juxtaposing the two in its description of the flood. Bodies—anything with bone or blood—will be flooded, it says, as the world is drowned. Tools, the things granted to Adam and Eve to

⁵⁶ Davidson, *York Plays*.

⁵⁷ Jean Verdon, *Travel in the Middle Ages* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), p. 55. For a more complete discussion of medieval ideas about ocean travel, see pp. 55-96.

⁵⁸ God says Noah is stable in all places: Lewis, et al, *MED*.

ensure their survival after the fall, in turn become symbols for dependence on the instability of the material world:

UXOR Nay, nedlyngis home me bus,

For I have tolis to trusse. (9:109-110)⁵⁹

Noah characterizes his wife's practical suggestion as "myscheve" because it has become impractical in light of impending spiritual events that will wreak havoc on the material world. All of this steadying emphasizes the role of (male) social control over individual (female) potential to wander.⁶⁰

In a puzzling turn, after having rendered tools impractical and the world unreliable, Noah returns to the idea that his family's survival will depend on hard work now that the world has been destroyed:

Nowe travaylle sall ye taste

To wynne you brede and wyne,

For alle this worlde is waste. (9:317-9)⁶¹

This works seamlessly as a thematic thread leading into the story of Abraham, Sarah, and Isaac, all blank slates whose play is staged by the bookbinders and parchmenters, whose business is to produce and compile blank slates upon which have been or will be inscribed messages of profound spiritual or cultural import. Abraham is a frail old man, Sarah is a barren old woman, and Isaac is a blindly obedient son who remains entirely

⁵⁹ Davidson, *York Plays*.

⁶⁰ For more on the perceived female potential for wandering, see Dean, "Women and Crime," pp. 73-95.

⁶¹ Davidson, *York Plays*.

unaware of his fate for much of the play. The opening lines of Play Ten make the thematic link between maker and made in this play explicit:

ABRAHAM:

That thus fro barenhede has me broghte,

A hundereth wynter to fulfille (10:5-6)⁶²

It is no mistake that this play is assigned to the parchmenters and bookbinders, and the language throughout the play alludes to both guilds' crafts:

Thou graunte me myght so that I mowght
Ordan my werkis aftir thi wille.

For in this erthely lyffe

Ar non to God more boune

Then is I and my wyffe,

For frenshippe we have foune. (10:5-12)⁶³

Like the manuscript, Abraham and his wife are "brought from barrenhood," ordered after the will of their maker, and bound. Continuing the manuscript metaphor, the play describes Sarah as a syllable added to Abraham's name:

Abram first named was I,

And sythen he sette a sylypp ma,

And my wiffe hyght Sarae

And sythen was scho named Sara. (10:25-8)⁶⁴

The manuscript described in this passage is profoundly flawed and ill-suited to its purpose, according to these descriptions. Its material is frail and it is incapable of reproduction, and so far it only contains two words: "Abram" and "Sara." Relationally, however, it is strong. Abraham and Sarah are bound tightly with "frenshippe" and they

⁶²Ibid. Here again, the use of the word *beelde* ties the raising of the child to the concept of construction. See previous note on the *MED* entry.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

are both bound to God. Abraham's trust that God will give them a son forms the foundation for the truth of God's promise:

And for I trowed this tythyng
That God talde to me thanne,
The grounde and the begynnyng
Of trowthe that tyme beganne. (10:49-52)⁶⁵

The word *grounde* here can mean the physical foundation for a building, confirmation or evidence of a claim, the basis of a book or sermon, or to strike ground.⁶⁶ Here again, the word choice links Isaac's conception with the physical act of creation as well as the creation of a manuscript. All that stands between the promise of God's truth and its incarnation is a sacrifice. An angel comes to Abraham with the news that he must sacrifice his son, and Abraham is bound by his obedience to God to carry out the task.

Throughout the journey, Isaac demonstrates an eagerness to work, not knowing that the work he will ultimately be asked to do is not the product of his efforts. His body, dismembered and burned, is the intended product. This eagerness, however, proves the value and the magnitude of Abraham's sacrifice:

Even as God ordand has
To wyrke we will begynne. (10:111-2)⁶⁷

Not only is Abraham willing to sacrifice his son, he is willing to sacrifice an obedient and industrious son. Confirming his value as a worker, he consents to his own death in economic terms. Isaac is willing to be dismembered and burned because he is "well-paid

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ MED. Lewis, et al, eds.

⁶⁷ Davidson, *York Plays*.

to work” God’s will, reinforcing the economic significance of dismemberment. Isaac makes clear that he can afford to be dismembered because God will compensate him:

ISAAC
And I sall noght grouche ther agayne;
To wirke his wille I am wele payed.
Sen it is his desire
I sall be bayne to be
Brittynd and brent in fyre,
And therefore morne noght for me. (10:196-9)⁶⁸

Even the most diligent and obedient son, however, has a survival instinct, so Isaac encourages his father to bind him, since he might try to resist being killed and fears his father is too frail to physically subdue him:

I knaw myselfe be cours of kynde,
My flessche for dede will be dredande;
I am ferde that ye sall fynde
My force youre forward to withstande.
Therefore is beste that ye me bynde
In bandis faste, boothe fute and hande.
Nowe whillis I am in myght and mynde,
So sall ye saffely make offerrande,
For fadir, when I am boune
My myght may noght avayle.
Here sall no fawte be foune
To make youre forward faylle. (10:209-220)⁶⁹

This scene emphasizes again the importance of social control in the narrative of spiritual obedience. In preparation for the sacrifice, Abraham gives Isaac specific instructions regarding his hands and feet:

Therefore lye downe, hande and feete;

Nowe may thou witte thyn oure is nere. (10:277-8)⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Isaac also calls himself “wilde of thought,” which implies savagery or beastliness. See *MED*. Lewis, et al, eds.

In the context of numerous mentions of binding, helplessness, and incapacitation throughout the play, it is reasonable to assume that the mention of limbs here is reinforcing Isaac's complete surrender. He will not run from or fight his fate. In the moments before he is to be killed, Isaac turns white with fear and his words wet his father's cheeks, again reinforcing the connection between Isaac's relationship with Abraham and the parchment and ink of a manuscript:

ISAAC Nowe farewele, all medilerth,
My flesshe waxis faynte for ferde.
Nowe, fadir, take youre swerde,
Methynke full lange ye tarie.

ABRAHAM Nay, nay, sone, nay, I thee behete
That do I noght, withouten were.
Thy wordis makis me my wangges to wete
And chaunges, childe, ful often my cheere.
Therefore lye downe, hande and feete;
Nowe may thou witte thyn oure is nere.

ISAAC A, dere fadir, lyff is full swete,
The drede of dede dose all my dere.
As I am here youre sone,
To God I take me till.
Nowe am I laide here bone,
Do with me what ye will. (10:269-284)⁷¹

Ultimately, this play communicates the frailty of the materials out of which Abraham's family is constructed, but tells the audience over and over that the binding is the most important element here, strong enough to keep the family together and acting in accordance with God's plan. Labor and movement are also strongly coded here. Sarah and Isaac are both ill-suited to the tasks with which they are charged. Sarah is barren, but

⁷⁰ Davidson, *York Plays*.

⁷¹ Ibid.

must bear a child, while Isaac is active and eager to venture into the wilderness and work, but he must lie still and submit to his own destruction. Abraham, meanwhile, is old and frail, but he must travel into the wilderness, subdue his much younger son, and kill him. God's triumph over the material is evident in the extent to which he is able to overwrite their innate physical characteristics and bind them to his will.

In *The Appearance of Christ to Mary Magdalen*, Mary's mourning causes all of her light and glee to be locked in the earth beneath her. Continuing the anti-Semitic tones of the previous play, she blames the "false Jewes" for his death, who took him from her, apparently leaving her unable to stand, as she stumbles in line fifteen:

MARIA Allas, in this worlde was nevere no wight
Walkand with so mekill woo.
Thou dredfull Dede, drawen hythir and dight
And marre me as thou haste done moo.
In lame is it loken, all my light,
Forthy on grounde onglad I goo.
Jesus of Nazareth he hight,
The false Jewes slewe hym me froo. Mi witte is waste nowe in wede;
I walowe, I walke, nowe woo is me,
For laide nowe is that lufsome in lede:
The Jewes hym nayled untill a tree.
My doulfull herte is evere in drede,
To grounde nowe gone is all my glee;
I sporne ther I was wonte to spede.
Nowe helpe me, God, in persones three. (39:1-16)⁷²

Jesus asks her to look at his wide wounds that were caused by monstrous (rough, fierce, crude) nails.⁷³ Mary laments that Jesus' hands and feet were damaged for others' sins:

⁷² Ibid. According to Davidson's footnote, in depictions in the visual arts in the late Middle Ages, Jesus may appear in this scene with a spade in hand like a gardener, hence accounting for the Magdalen's failure to recognize him.

⁷³ See also the Anglo-Saxon dictionary for connection to landscape. *unrīde* (adj.) Also *unrid*(de, *unrede*, *unrude*, *unruide*, *onrid*(d)e, (N) *unrode*, (SW) *ounride*, (early SWM) *ounrede*.

Nayled thou was thurgh hande and feete,
And all was for oure synne.
Full grissely muste we caitiffis grete,
Of bale howe schulde I blynne? (39:114-7)⁷⁴

The Travelers to Emmaus take on this tale of suffering to guide their travels. They identify Christ as the one who gives them direction and tell stories of his suffering as they go. They talk in graphic detail about his suffering, and then he joins them on the road:

JESUS What are thes mervailles that ye of mene
And thus mekill mournyng in mynde that ye make,
Walkyng thus wille by thes wayes? (40:67-9)⁷⁵

They do not recognize him and ask him why he does not know about what happened. Jesus asks pointedly if there was any violence done: “Was ther any hurlyng in hande? Nowe late me here.” (40:76) Their state of mind aligns with their “wild” travel—there is some paranoia and confusion in their description of their journey:

II PERIGRINUS To the dying thei dight hym that defte was and dere,
Thurgh prokering of princes that were ther in prees.
Forthy as wightis that are will thus walke we in were,
For pechyng als pilgrymes that putte are to pees.
For mornyng of oure maistir thus morne wee
As wightis that are wilsome thus walke we,
Of Jesus in telling thus talke we;
Fro townes for takyng thus turne we. (40:81-8)⁷⁶

They talk about the women that saw Jesus’ empty tomb: “Thei wende ther that foode to have fonne.” (126) Jesus calls them faulty for their lack of faith (130)⁷⁷ But Jesus is persuaded to stay and take a seat. He is described as their *geste*, which has a dual

⁷⁴ Davidson, *York Plays*.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ MED. Lewis, et al, eds.

meaning of visitor or stranger, and can also mean traveler explicitly.⁷⁸ After he is gone, they realize who it was, and curse the Jews for the torment they put him through. They talk about how seeing Jesus was the most marvelous thing they had seen on their travels:

Such wondirfull wais as we have wente
Of Jesus the gente was nevere none seene.

I PERIGRINUS Sene was ther nevere so wondirfull werkes,
Be see ne be sande, in this worlde so wide, (181-4)⁷⁹

They end the play talking about how they will tell everyone of the most mighty Lord.

“Sande” is used to describe the landscape as well as to describe messengers in the play, which may not be an intentional thematic link, but is certainly interesting in the context of plays like this one that are so focused on travel.

The use of hands beginning in *The Death of Mary* sets up a very specific division between ingroup versus outgroup contact—here, specifically Christian versus non-believer, since Jews and Muslims are grouped together in the terminology used to characterize them in the plays. Hands within the community are framed as supportive, providing Mary with comfort as she dies:

MARIA Jesu, my darlyng that ding is and dere,
I thanke thee my dere Sone of thi grete grace
That I all this faire felawschip atte hande nowe has here,
That thei me some comforte may kythe in this case.
This sikenes it sittis me full sare;
My maidens, take kepe nowe on me
And caste some watir uppon me.
I faynte, so febill I fare.

⁷⁸ Ibid. See Kilgour for explanation of dual meaning: visitor/stranger--also, traveler explicitly.

⁷⁹ Davidson, *York Plays*. “Sande” is used to describe the landscape as well as to describe messengers in the play, which may not be an intentional thematic link, but is certainly interesting in the context of plays like this one that are so focused on travel.

I ANCILLA Allas, for my Lady that lemed so light
That evere I leved in this lede thus longe for to lende,
That I on this semely schulde se such a sight.

II ANCILLA Allas, helpe, sche dyes in oure hende.
A, Marie, of me have thou mynde

...
Some comforte us two for to kythe,
Thou knowes we are comen of thi kynde. (44:88-102)⁸⁰

Directly after this play comes the absent *Fergus* play, also called *The Funeral of the Virgin*, which provides a sharp contrast to this use of hands that creates community and potential healing. The encounter between Fergus' hands and Mary's bier results in Fergus' hands being mangled and possibly remaining stuck to the bier as it rises in the play. I will discuss in greater detail the functional connections between this amputation and the amputation of the play from the York pageant in the coda. It is sufficient here to note that touching among members of the Christian community is depicted as uniting and healing, whereas contact with an outsider is depicted as graphically violent and divisive, even to the perpetrator's own body.

In Thomas' wailing speech at the beginning of *The Assumption of the Virgin* (*Thomas Apostulus*), his comments on the breaking of branches oddly seem to attempt to naturalize the amputation of the *Fergus* limbs in the previous play. He talks about how Christ was beaten and branches were broken around him in the process:

What harlyng and what hurlyng that hedesman he hadde,

What breking of braunches ware brosten aboute hym,

What bolnyng with betyng of brothellis full badde. (45:5-7)⁸¹

⁸⁰ Davidson, *York Plays*.

He performs an interesting reversal of punishment when talking about how Christ was beaten, saying that Christ was pulled apart in the process of his assailants' treason:

Thai toke hym with treasoune, that turtill of treuthe;
Thei fedde hym with flappes, with fersnesse hym feste,
To rugge hym, to riffe hym: ther reyned no rewthe.
Undewly thei demed hym,
Thei dussched hym, thei dasshed hym,
Thei lussched hym, thei lassched hym,
Thei pussched hym, thei passched hym,
All sorowe thei saide that it semed hym. (45:32-9)⁸²

The "foode" in this play is eating beatings. Repetition of the word "foode" throughout the play reinforces the idea of intimacy and dependence on Jesus for basic needs. Thomas is the ideal person to talk about Jesus in this way that involves the wounding of the savior to make the follower whole, since he needed to insert parts of his body into Jesus' wounds in order to believe he was risen. Thomas' final words in the play combine separation and unity to communicate the new ability Jesus gave to believers to be present while they are gone and gone when they are present through the holy spirit:

THOMAS The Lorde of all lordis in lande schall he lede youe
Whillis ye travell in trouble, the trewethe for to teche,
With frewte of oure feithe in firthe schall we fede youe,
For that laboure is lufsome, ilke lede for to leche.
Nowe I passe fro youre presence the pepull to preche,
To lede thame and lere thame the lawe of oure Lorde.
As I saide, us muste asoundre and sadly enserche
Ilke contré to kepe clene and knytte in o corde
Off oure faithe.
That frelye foode
That died on rode
With mayne and moode,
He grath yowe be gydis full grath. (45:300-12)⁸³

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

This continues in *The Coronation of the Virgin*, in which the stomach and womb are conflated in the second angel's description of Christ's gestation:

Hevene and erthe nowe gladde may be
That frely foode nowe for to see
In whome that thou did light. (46:30-2)⁸⁴

Jesus' opening speech in *The Coronation of the Virgin* alternates use of the word "beilde" with "wonne" in descriptions of Mary's body ascending. This is in contrast to his own ascension, which is described with the word "wonne."

JESUS Myne aungellis that are bright and schene,
On my message take ye the waye
Unto Marie, my modir clene;
That berde is brighter than the daye,
Grete hir wele haly bedene
An to that semely schall ye saye,
Off hevene I have hir chosen quene
In joie and blisse that laste schall aye.

I wille you saie what I have thoughte
And why that ye schall tille hir wende;
I will hir body to me be brought
To beilde in blisse withouten ende.

Mi flesshe of hir in erthe was tone;
Unkindely thing it were, iwis,
That scho schulde bide be hire allone
And I beilde here so high in blis.

Forthy tille hir than schall ye fare
Full frendlye for to fecche hir hedir;
There is nothyng that I love more
In blisse thanne schall we belde togedir. (46:1-20)⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

There is a glimmer in the space between Christ's body and his mother's in this passage of the classical struggle with the illogic of Christ's incarnation. Roberto Esposito has deftly articulated the dilemma:

With regard to the distinction (and also the opposition) vis-à-vis the logic of incorporation: while incorporation tends to unify a plurality, or at least a duality, incarnation, on the contrary, separates and multiplies in two what was originally one. In the first case, we are dealing with a doubling that doesn't keep aggregated elements distinct; in the second, a splitting that modifies and subdivides an initial identity [...] [T]he Word that becomes flesh establishes the copresence of two diverse and even opposite natures in the person of Christ: the perfect and complete nature of God and the suffering and mortal nature of man. How can a God alter, disfigure, and expropriate himself to the point of really taking on the flesh of a mortal? The accent here ought to be placed on the adverb *really* because it is precisely there, on the material substantiality of a flesh that is identical to ours in all and for all, that the Christian fathers [...] fought a difficult battle against a series of heresies [...] each aimed at negating the insurmountable contradiction implicit in the idea of Incarnation: to cancel either the nature of God or that of man and therefore the line they share.⁸⁶

While medieval theology postdates the debates that Esposito references, he also argues that this dilemma has persisted and suggests that biotechnology could be seen as a secular form of incarnation. Because the York plays recall materiality to the forefront of their productions, the biotechnology of Christ's body as prosthesis for the faulty human body becomes a secular material reality alongside the theological metaphysics of the incarnation of Christ.

What appears logically unthinkable for classical culture is the two-in-one or the one-that-is-two through a slippage of the body out of itself, which coincides with the insertion within that doesn't naturally belong to it.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Roberto Esposito, *Bios: Biopolitics and Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), pp. 167-8.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 168.

When Christ describes his body dwelling with his mother, he uses the material term, “belde”. This conception of Christ’s body as a material building aid persists throughout the cycle and becomes particularly noteworthy in the scenes leading up to his crucifixion. It makes sense that Christ should want to help the faithful, and certainly that he should want to help his mother, but Christ’s body even compensates for the poor craftsmanship of his killers, as I will explain in the final section of this chapter.

Imprisonment and Social Isolation

d. negative cannot /'kænət/ ; *famil. can't* /kɑ:nt/ . (*Sc. canna*). (The earlier mode was to prefix *ne*.)⁸⁸

The lessons of simulated pilgrimage were not always disseminated through narratives of travel. Prohibition of movement also taught audiences about environmental and cultural threats. *Pharaoh and Moses* tells the story of the pharaoh’s stubborn refusal to release the Israelites. As a result of their affront to God, the Egyptians suffer several environmental plagues. This reversal again reinforces the notion that God can reverse the natural order to suit his will. Extraordinary environmental hardships are generally encountered on long journeys to diverse geographical locations. In this play, the Israelites are prevented from traveling, so the hardships are visited upon the Egyptians in their homeland:

II EGIPTIUS Swilke poudre, lord, apon us dryffe,
That whare it bettis it makis a blayne.

⁸⁸ "can, v.1." *OED*. A slightly anachronistic turn, but the construction was in use as far back as 1400.

I EGIPTIUS Like mesellis makis it man and wyffe.
Sythen ar they hurte with hayle and rayne
Oure wynes in mountaynes may noght thryve,
So ar they threst and thondour-slayne. (11:315-8)⁸⁹

Dean asserts that the prison was born in the later Middle Ages, countering Foucault's claim that it arose in the nineteenth century. Prisons at this time exposed prisoners to the elements, did not always provide for basic needs such as food or water, and frequently provided care according to the prisoners' rank, so the idea of prison as a functional shelter for those it held is largely inaccurate at this point: "[W]e need to remember that to late medieval people even a fortnight behind bars was intolerable."⁹⁰ Medieval prisons were also breeding grounds for disease, in part because of exposure to other prisoners, and in part because they were often shackled until their limbs fell off or housed in leaky cells.⁹¹

The similarities between these conditions and the conditions to which the Egyptians are subjected in Play 11 also prefigure the Harrowing, according to Davidson, which might make the suffering of the Egyptians in this play especially cathartic for medieval audiences.⁹² Although the scenes take place in distant lands, it is reasonable to assume medieval audiences' understanding of captivity in their own communities informed how they processed and produced imprisonment in the plays. The story expediently differentiates between transgression, in its early stages, and defiance near the end. The punishments in the biblical source for this play's narrative cast the

⁸⁹ Davidson, *York Plays*.

⁹⁰ Dean, p. 122.

⁹¹ Dean, "Punishment," pp. 118-43.

⁹² Davidson, *York Plays*.

punishments as natural consequences. Similarly, medieval law tried its best to align punishments with the crime committed:

There were certainly some enduring features of public execution across late medieval Europe. For the most serious crimes, the most serious penalties were reserved: the mutilation of ears, lips, and tongue, the amputation of hands, feet and ears, the gouging out of eyes, or death by hanging, beheading or other means (dismemberment, burning, drowning, burial alive, the wheel). There was a code to the assignment of mode of capital execution. Dismemberment was reserved for traitors and conspirators, and would be preceded by dragging the culprit to the scaffold at a horse's tail or on a hurdle. Burning was for crimes requiring 'extreme purification by the total elimination of the offender's body': sodomy, incest, sorcery, infanticide.⁹³

The Jews' transgression against the Pharaoh is that they multiply so quickly, which ostensibly threatens his rule:

The Jewes that wonnes here in Jessen
And er named the childir of Israell.
They multyplye so faste
That suthly we suppose
Thay are like, and they laste,
Yowre lordshippe for to lose. (11:31-6)⁹⁴

He orders that those "felons" be stopped before they "lose our layse."⁹⁵ He then decrees that all Hebrew male children should be killed and all others put to hard labor:

For of the other have I non awe,
Swilke bondage sall we to tham bede
To dyke and delfe, beere and drawe,
And do all swilke unhonest dede.
Thus sall the laddis beholden lawe,
Als losellis ever thaire lyff to leede. (11:73-8)⁹⁶

This might be read as a large-scale social amputation of all able-bodied members of the Israelite population as a preventative measure against seizure of power by the enslaved

⁹³ Dean, p. 124.

⁹⁴ Davidson, *York Plays*.

⁹⁵ Davidson, *York Plays*.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

Israelites. It is also an act of imprisonment, however, in that it ensures limited movement and agency by eliminating the most socially mobile members of the captive population.

The distinction between keeping out and keeping in—social amputation versus isolation—is often unclear. The plays (12-14) that portray Mary and Joseph’s struggle with the news of the impending birth of Christ and their subsequent journey to Bethlehem focus primarily on the concept of social exclusion, but the inside/outside dynamics, particularly with regard to the Christ child, foreshadow the “who eats whom” confusion surrounding the ritual of the sacrament. Roberto Esposito uses the term *extravasation* to describe this spillage:

The role that the sacrament of the Eucharist had in this salvific passage from flesh to body has been noted as the double extravasation [*travaso*] of the body in Christ in that of the believer and of that of the believer in the ecclesial body. With all the variants as well as the conflicts that are derived from an initial competition, we can say that first the empire and then the nascent nation-states activated and secularized the same theological-political mechanism; but also here they did so in order to save [*riscattare*] themselves from the risk associated with “bare life,” which is implicit in that extralegal condition defined as the “state of nature”—namely, the “flesh” of a plural and potentially rebellious multitude that needed to be integrated in a unified body at the command of the sovereign.⁹⁷

In order to preserve community under medieval law, amputation of feet could be as effective for keeping interlopers out of medieval communities as it was for keeping prisoners in. Dean notes, for example, that a foot could be amputated for entering a city contrary to a security order.⁹⁸ In Play 14 *The Nativity* (The Tile Thatchers’ Play), Joseph’s opening dialogue focuses appropriately on shelter, particularly “symple” shelter. His fears center on exposure:

⁹⁷Esposito, p. 164-5.

⁹⁸Dean, p. 128.

JOSEPH All weldand God in Trinité,
I praye thee, Lord, for thy grete myght,
Unto thy symple servand see,
Here in this place wher we are pight,
Oureself allone;
Lord, graunte us gode herberow this nyght
Within this wone.

For we have sought bothe uppe and doune
Thurgh diverse stretis in this cité;
So mekill pepull is comen to towne
That we can nowhare herbered be,
There is slike prees.
Forsuthe I can no socoure see
But belde us with there bestes.⁹⁹

In this line, the risk of associating with “bare life” is clear in the fear of resorting to dwelling with the beasts, and the material risk is emphasized with the use of the word “belde” instead of “wonne” as well as in the structural framing of the rest of this passage:

And yf we here all nyght abide
We schall be stormed in this steede;
The walles are doune on ilke a side,
The ruffe is rayved aboven oure hede,
Als have I roo. (14:1-19)¹⁰⁰

The play ameliorates this fleshly threat by casting the Christ child as a source of food in this play and light in this one and the next, since the material world is able to offer little material comfort.

JOSEPH Wele is me I bade this day
To se this foode. (14:90-1)¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Davidson, *York Plays*.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Davidson, *York Plays*.

The God that constructed the *nexile* of the universe in the first play of the cycle now emerges from the shelter of Mary's womb into a *herberow* created by man to shelter beasts. In the plays to come, he will reenter the human body as nourishment. At the end of the play, the beasts kneel together to warm the child, becoming his shelter. (14:127-133) In *The Offering of the Shepherds* (The Chandlers' Play), the focus is once again on light and food, with the shepherds following the star to find the Christ child, and the second shepherd offering Christ a spoonful of forty peas:

But lo, an horne spone, that have I here,
And it will herbar fourty pese;
This will I giffe you with gud chere,
Slike novelté may noght disease. (14:124-7)¹⁰²

In essence, the shepherds are feeding the *foode* that will eventually feed them. This cyclical process of establishing community falls in line with Esposito's ideas on birth,

In contrast to Play 15, Play 16: *The Masons and Goldsmiths' Play*, is about power and exclusion. Early in the play, Herod makes his policy on crime and punishment clear:

HERODES In welthe sall I wisse you to wonne or I wende,
For ye are wightis ful worthy, both witty and wighte.

But ye knawe wele, ser knyghtis, in counsaill full conande,
That my regioun so riall is ruled her be rest;
For I wate of no wighte in this worlde that is wonnande
That in forges any feloune, with force sall be fest;
Arest ye tho rebaldes that unrewly are rownand,
Be they kyngis or knyghtis, in care ye thaim cast.
Yaa, and welde tham in woo to wonne, in the wanyand,
What browle that is brawlyng his brayne loke ye brest,
And dyngye ye hym doune. (16:29-39)¹⁰³

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

Herod's paranoia is not limited by class distinctions, at least between kings and knights.

Any threat should be eliminated. The soldiers respond that they will seize any young/immature person and do physical harm to him:

I MILES Sir, what foode in faith will you feese,
That sott full sone myselfe sall hym sesse.
II MILES We sall noght here doute to do hym disesse,
But with countenance full cruel we sall crake her his croune.¹⁰⁴

When the kings are introduced, it is clear that they are committed to God with both heart and hand, which in this context means in their being and in their deeds, as well as that Christ will be the "lord in land":

I REX A, Lorde, that levis, everelastande lyff,
I love thee evir with harte and hande,
That me has made to se this sight
Whilke my kynrede was coveytande.
Thay saide a sterne with lemys bright
Owte of the eest shulde stabely stande,
And that it shulde meffe mekill myght
Of one that shulde be Lorde in lande, (16:57-64)¹⁰⁵

Along the journey, God's encouragement to the third traveling king is described as "hertyng," which is either a gesture of violence or of creation.¹⁰⁶ When Herod confronts the Kings about their plans to seek the Christ child, his counselor speaks of balance in bodily terms:

II CONSOLATOR Mi lorde, to fell this foule defame,
Late alle there hye wordis falle on hande
And spere thaim sadly of the same,
So sall ye stabely undirstande

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ The following stanzas make clear that the star that indicates Christ's birthplace does not move, but draws them.

¹⁰⁶ Davidson, *York Plays*.

Thaire mynde and ther menyng,
And takes gud tente therto. (16:193-8)¹⁰⁷

He advises Herod to let their words fall on hand, meaning to the side, rather than taking them in immediately. Instead, he should contemplate their meaning soberly. Like the scene in the garden where Eve's premeditation is evidenced in her first taking, then eating the forbidden fruit, Herod is told to first take, then digest the kings' words. Herod agrees, then explains to the kings that they are no longer in their native land and must learn the laws of the land to which they have traveled, going on to explain that both life and limb would be in jeopardy should they run afoul of these laws:

HERODES I thanke thee of thys thing,
And certis so sall I doo.
Nowe, kyngis, to cache all care awaye
Sen ye are comen oute of youre kyth,
Loke noght ye legge agaynste oure laye,
Uppon payne to lose both lymme and lith.
And so that ye the soth will saye
To come and go I graunte you grith,
And yf youre poyntes be to my paye
May fall myselfe sall wende you with. (16:199-208)¹⁰⁸

Those who transgress against Herod's law are in danger of losing their lives and limbs. Conversely, if they obey the laws, they are granted freedom to come and go as well as protection from harm. The first king's response to Herod is an intriguing blend of metaphors, mixing healing with misdirection:

I REX Sir kyng, we all accorde
And sais a barne is borne
That sall be kyng and lorde,
And leche tham that ar lorne. (16:209-212)

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

When the kings reach their destination, the first king repeats the use of “bylde” to describe Christ’s protection of mankind:

II REX We seke a barne that all shall bylde;
His sartayne syngne hath saide us soo,
And his modir, a mayden mylde,
Her hope we to fynde tham twoo. (16:289-92)¹⁰⁹

The servant of the house describes them (or their trajectory) as wild, traveling to and fro:

ANCILLA Whame seke ye, syrs, be wayes wilde
With talkyng, travelyng to and froo?
Her wonnes a woman with hir childe,
And hir husband; her ar no moo. (16:285-8)¹¹⁰

When the kings meet the Christ child and express their reverence, their words are framed in a structure that acknowledges Christ as the alpha and omega. His reach extends into the past as well as the future:

II REX Hayll, foode that thy folke fully may fede;
Hayll, floure fairest that never shall fade;
Hayll, Sone that is sente of this same sede
That shall save us of synne that oure syris had; (16:321-4)¹¹¹

Christ is the food that will feed the people and the son of the seed that shall save us from the sins of our fathers (and in the lines following: “and made your mother from a sinless maid”). As in other plays, Christ’s body works to reverse the effects of disability on the body:

III REX Hayll, barne that is best oure balys to bete,
For our boote shall thou be bounden and bett;
Hayll, frende faithfull, we fall to thy feete,
Thy fadiris folke fro the fende to thee fette. (16:333-6)¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

Christ's body heals through its injuries and its weakness, in contrast to the physical dynamics of other wounds in the plays. Although in many ways Christ's body serves to reinforce notions of able-bodiedness in these plays, the glaring disability of the consumed—eaten, stripped, pierced, beaten, and dragged—body of Christ persists in the literature, drama, and iconography of the Middle Ages, fetishized as an open, broken thing to be devoured in worship and fragmented to mark pilgrimage destinations.¹¹³ Scholars frequently focus on divine material as operating in different ways than human flesh. The divine substance of Christ's flesh may not be as large a stumbling block to discussions of materiality in the context of crip theory, however, since the cultural function of material processes, rather than the material itself, is its primary concern.

McRuer explains the distinction in his introduction:

I argue that critical queerness and severe disability are about collectively transforming (in ways that cannot necessarily be predicted in advance)—about crippling—the substantive, material uses to which queer/disabled existence has been put by a system of compulsory able-bodiedness, about insisting that such a system is never as good as it gets, and about imagining bodies and desires otherwise.¹¹⁴

In the context of the York pageant, the materiality of Christ's body matters, in ways that are specific to guild culture and the production of the plays. Its openness and transgressive properties perform a useful resistance to the boundaries of the body, sublimating individual human bodies into its larger cultural body as it is consumed. Christ's flesh is profoundly material to cultural identity in the York economy—as is Jewish, Christian, and criminal flesh.

¹¹³ For more on Christ's body and medieval interpretations, see Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*, Bettina Bildhauer, *Medieval Blood* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2006), and Lisa Lampert-Weissig, *Gender and Jewish Difference from Paul to Shakespeare* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania, 2004).

¹¹⁴ McRuer, p. 33.

Despite the overtly violent tone of Herod's speech throughout *The Gyrkillers* and *Nailers' Play*, in which he demands that his subjects stand "stille as stone" like idols, his impotence as captor as well as punisher is revealed time and again. He has ordered the three kings killed, but his men fail to execute his order. Nuncius tells Herod of marvels he has seen on his travels, but must give him the news that the three kings have returned safely to their homelands.¹¹⁵ Herod's rage upon hearing the news drives him to threaten the messenger:

HERODES Thou lyes! false traytoure strange,
 Loke nevere thou negh me nere.
 Uppon liffe and lymme
 May I that faitour fange,
 Full high I schall gar hym hange,
 Both thee, harlott, and hym. (19:125-130)¹¹⁶

He reacts with the order to beat to death all of the boys of a certain age in order to ensure Christ's death. At the end of this play, the impotence of Herod's savagery is again reinforced: although his men massacred every child they found, they produced no proof that Jesus was killed, so they had no assurance of victory. Herod's inability to penetrate or imprison the body of Christ despite wiping out the entire corresponding demographic of male children indicates a structural failure in his campaign and implies a lack of cohesion within his own ranks, as he begins to accuse his messenger of treachery.

The Conspiracy begins with a similar verbal tirade and a string of assertions by people in power that they are able to incapacitate Christ with their hands. Pontius Pilate

¹¹⁵ Davidson, *York Plays*.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

opens with a speech in which he establishes his ruthlessness and power over punishment.

He makes clear that he holds the fate of rebels in his hands:

Do and late us wete if ye wate
Owthir, sirs, of bayle or debate,
That nedis for to be handeled full hate
Sen all of youre helpe hanges in my hande. (26:25-8)¹¹⁷

Cayphas charges Jesus with *movyng* men, implying power, influence, ability, and motion:

CAYPHAS Loo, sir, this is a perjurye
to prente undir penne,
Wherfore make ye that appostita,
we praye you, to plye.
PILATUS Howe mene ye?
CAYPHAS Sir, to mort hym for movyng of men.
PILATUS Than schulde we make hym to morne
but thurgh youre maistrie.
Latte be, sirs, and move that no more
But what in youre Temple betyde? (26:75-80)¹¹⁸

In, Cayphas begins by asserting that he holds authority and “wields” the law. He claims that it is his authority to teach them the law. By the end of *The Agony and the Betrayal*, the Jews are confident that they have Jesus secured:

I JUDEUS Do, do, laye youre handes
belyve on this lourdayne.

III JUDEUS We, have holde this hauk in thi handis. (28:301-2)¹¹⁹

Worries persist, however, that Christ’s capacity for movement might exceed the strength of their grasp. In *The Trial before Cayphus and Anna*, A woman expresses quite a bit of concern and goes on for a while about making sure that Jesus is bound and cannot escape:

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

MULIER Itt were grete skorne that he schulde skape
Withoute he hadde resoune and skill,
He lokis lurkand like an nape;
I hope I schall haste me hym tille.

Thou caytiffe, what meves thee stande
So stabill and stille in thi thoght?
Thou hast wrought mekill wronge in londe
And wondirfull werkis haste thou wrought.

A, lorell, a leder of lawe,
To sette hym and suye has thou soght.
Stande furth and threste in yone thrawe,
Thy maistry thou bryng unto noght.

Wayte nowe, he lokis like a brokke,
Were he in a bande for to bayte,
Or ellis like an nowele in a stok
Full prevaly his pray for to wayte. (29:102-117)¹²⁰

These fears reinforce the idea that Christ has magical powers, one of the accusation Cayphas repeatedly brings against him. The power Christ wields over materiality, however, is used to facilitate his crucifixion rather than to avoid it. This paradoxical relationship between the movement of the imprisoned savior's body and hampered movement of the faulty bodies of the humans working toward its destruction is the focus of the next chapter.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

Divine *Travail*: Christ's Conflicting Mobilities in the York Plays

Sacred and Profane Flesh

If, as I have argued, travel in the York Plays is geographically limited, Christ's travel in the plays is even more limited. The narrative of Christ's journey toward crucifixion is yet another in which the landscape moves to compensate for a fixed human body. Christ is not the passive object of travel, however, like the lover in *Vita nuova* or the audiences watching the virtual pilgrimage of the York plays. He orchestrates the movement of his physical environment using the material objects and bodies around him, including his own. In this sense, he is a bit like Saint Christopher, incorporating medieval concepts of travel—including the cultural encounter between Christian and Jewish flesh—within his own body. As the previous chapter has shown, the York Cycle is preoccupied with humankind's physical impotence in the face of Christ's power. Each play demonstrates the faulty craftsmanship attempted by man before the creator steps in to compensate for inevitable shortcomings. In dealing with the way Christ moves in the plays that lead up to and include his crucifixion and resurrection, the pageant makes the fascinating move of extending this dynamic to Christ's relationship with his own human body as well as the bodies of his persecutors. Christ's captors are depicted as incompetent and weak, constantly fearing that they will be unable to contain Christ. Throughout these plays, Christ's body acts like the flesh of a wound, opening and closing, alternately drawing nearer to humanity and pulling away. The directionality of his journey, likewise, is circular rather than linear, arranged in a series of returns with earth as the center point.

Shifting from a discussion of human traveling bodies in the previous chapter to Christ's journey through crucifixion and resurrection in this chapter, the focus here will be the plays that deal most intensely with the *travail* of his journey. The first section of this chapter is concerned with involuntary movement and begins examining the physical power dynamics between Christ and the soldiers in *The Second Trial before Pilate*, the play in which Christ first demonstrates his ability to physically manipulate the bodies of the soldiers who are holding him captive. Throughout the play, the soldiers mock Christ, boasting of their physical strength and earthly power, but Pilate and the soldiers ultimately find themselves unwillingly bowing before him. The next play in the cycle, *The Road to Calvary*, emphasizes the soldiers' shoddy workmanship as they hurriedly construct the cross. This play, as Davidson notes, takes place on the ground, and a blood-covered Christ passes through the audience twice as the soldiers brutally beat him. The title of this play indicates that it is concerned with travel, but the bulk of the action in the play centers on the work of execution, from carrying Christ's wounded body to taking measurements to ensure that his body fits on the cross. The next play, *Crucifixio Christi*, continues the theme of hasty workmanship as the soldiers attach Christ to the cross. To compensate for their incorrect measurements, they pull Christ's body apart to align his limbs with the holes they bored.

The second section of this chapter deals with the physical work and movement involved in the process of redemption. In *Mortificatio Christi*, Christ uses his suffering on the cross as a teaching tool. Most medieval executions served a didactic purpose, but Christ's active role in his own execution casts him as teacher rather than example to

potential criminals. Positioned between two thieves, Christ remains the voice of moral authority for travelers passing by because he is guiltless. In the following play, *The Harrowing of Hell*, the travel element of the journey to mankind's redemption begins in earnest. Also described as the *Descensus*, Christ's journey to hell to rescue imprisoned souls has a definite direction and course, and the stage for this production required to have a hellmouth with doors that fall as Jesus approaches. Christ pays Satan for the souls with his blood—the keyword in this transaction, *wynne*, encompasses the purchase, Christ's victory, and the labor involved in his “tearing up” of the prisons of hell. In this and the next play, the theme continues of Christ's blood traveling outside of his body to save humankind. In *The Resurrection*, the Marys seem confounded by the physical difficulties of their situation—the stones are too heavy and the grave is too deep—but the first Mary still has faith that Christ's wet wounds are “medicyne” enough to heal all who ask him.¹ Play 41, *Doubting Thomas*, picks up the theme of Christ's blood as a point of contact between the sacred and the profane. Thomas must put his fingers inside of Christ's wounds in order to find faith. This foreshadows the final York play, which locates all of humanity within the protective, bloody walls of Christ's wounds.

Having completed the downward trajectory of the first part of his redemptive journey, Christ embarks upon his *Ascension*, frustrating Peter, who has difficulty not knowing when or how Christ will come and go. Christ, of course promises to come back down, intriguingly using the word *fell* to describe his return to earth and to human form. As a stopgap between incarnations of Christ, of course, the Holy Spirit descends, and this

¹ Davidson notes that the grave was almost certainly not below ground, but the directionality works figuratively, in reference to the harrowing of Hell.

descent is the focus of Play 43: *Pentecost*. This play features a group of murderous Jewish doctors who serve as foils to the healing and protective functions of Christ's salvific body. Finally, Play 47: *Doomsday* closes the cycle, both literally and figuratively. Images of enclosure are everywhere in the play, from Christ's return to earth to his "wide wounds." In this play, the faithful are surrounded with his protection while the wicked are surrounded to prevent them from escaping judgment. These plays demonstrate that Christ's travels in the journey to redemption have some corollary in the internal movement of flesh and bodily fluids caused by his wounds and injuries, and the journey is to some extent made possible by Christ's physical incapacitation.

In general, the shackles and ties with which a prisoner is held immobile are considered disabling. They prevent a body from the natural movements of which it is normally capable. In the context of the incarnation, however, a considerable portion of the divine project is for the son of God to become physically limited by the material constraints of the human body and take the place of the condemned on a torture device used to execute criminals. In order for this process to take place, God has to undergo several disabling processes. The first is that he must assume a fleshly form, subject to pain and imprisonment. This flesh is Jewish, which, as I have explained, is not a conflict in the original sequence of events because Jewish bodies are not condemned until after Christ's death, but it becomes a problem in a cycle of anti-Semitic medieval passion plays that weave the material elements of their crafts into the thematic fabric of the plays they produce. "Good" Jewish flesh and "bad" Jewish flesh, borne of two different historical periods, become more difficult to parse when they are presented

simultaneously. Steven F. Kruger explains the role of the Christ's Jewish body in medieval Christian theology:

[Christ's] body occupies center stage, the place where old, Jewish, and new, Christian, traditions meet and diverge. This body, like the "Old Testament," is marked by its Jewish origin (physically marked, we know, by circumcision), and yet, in the moment of the crucifixion, it is transformed into a new kind of body—a body to be resurrected, a body that can descend into death and hell but now to "conquer death" rather than to be conquered.²

The York plays generally adhere to this configuration of Christ's transcendence over his Jewish body except for the fact that "spectral" Jewishness, a concept Kruger adapts from Derrida to describe the "becoming-body" of Christ—a spiritual form between phenomenon and body—becomes much more difficult to portray in plays as preoccupied with materiality and craftsmanship as the York plays. Denise L. Despres describes the overlap between capabilities of Christian and Jewish flesh in terms that highlight its culturally liminal role:

[R]ather than being entirely "other" or monstrous in the *Disputation*, the Jew shares the Christian's 'epistemological limitation and potentiality' indicative of the self-defining purpose of anti-Jewish polemical writings.³

This shared "limitation and potentiality" is a source of confusion in the York Cycle. Throughout the cycle, Christ's body is, in various ways, simultaneously immobilized and transcendentally mobile—meaning that it is able to move in ways that are not restricted by material constraints. While chronology neatly divides sacred from profane Jewish flesh in certain late medieval texts, the York plays encounter difficulty in trying to retain the

² Steven F. Kruger, *The Spectral Jew: Conversion and Embodiment in Medieval Europe*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), xv.

³ Denise L. Despres, "The Protean Jew in the Vernon Manuscript," *Chaucer and the Jews: Sources, Contexts, Meanings*. (New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 153.

material significance of Christ's body and the cross in the context of craftsmanship while simultaneously demonstrating Christ's mastery over the material. Despres lists some of these competing essentialisms:

[T]he Jew [...] emerges from these narratives simultaneously as intellectual, criminal, convertible (sic), and equally resistant to genuine conversion.⁴

These cultural infusions bring the material—along with its various spiritual virtues and vices—to the forefront of the pageant. Finally, Christ's body must be broken and killed, which is a complicated material process for the son of God and for those who are charged with instructing the public on how to interpret his death.

These disabilities, however, are instrumental to the plan of salvation. In the context of divine sacrifice, the flesh, shackles, and nails that prevent or compel the movement of Christ's body and eventually fasten it to the cross and break it all serve as prosthetics that enable him to stand in for the human criminal. The most common conception of prosthesis is the object that takes the place of a limb, which is certainly applicable here. I will talk about the ways that disabling objects enable Christ to make his sacrifice. There are also ways to talk about flesh as prosthesis, however, and I will draw upon studies by Roberto Esposito, David Wills, and Katie L. Walter to talk about how Christ's body and blood act as prostheses to compensate for humankind's inferior craftsmanship, tearing his flesh to provide structure for the instruments of his own torture when it is lacking and infusing his followers with spiritual as well as physical health by touching them with his blood.

⁴ Ibid., p. 160.

The phenomenon of incarnation was a legitimate material concern for medieval thinkers. Late medieval literature and culture puzzled over the complexities of Christ's flesh in ways that become especially fraught in the context of the cycle plays. Sarah Beckwith has articulated this meeting of the sacred and profane particularly clearly:

The body of Christ was self-consciously elaborated in the late Middle Ages as the very meeting place of the sacred and the profane. In the eucharist it was at once the rationale of what has come to be known as medieval sacramentalism. As disseminated in the vernacular devotional writings of the late Middle Ages it offered itself in postures of love, sacrifice and suffering as the object of passionate identification. Its precise relation to the Godhead (sign, figure, representation, Real Presence, accident, substance) was furiously debated in the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries; the understanding of this relation informed and affected attitudes toward the ecclesiastical establishment, particularly in the peculiarly English heresy—Lollardy.⁵

The York plays engage with Christ's body and the crucifixion in ways that are particularly concerned with criminality and workmanship. It is clear that Christ's body is not criminal, but that it needs to stand in for the collective criminal body of humanity, which makes its material—especially in the final stages of the trial and execution—ripe for a discussion of prosthesis: Christ's "criminal" body is artificial in the sense that it is an sinless body standing in for sinful multitudes. When Esposito explains his conception of biotechnology, he focuses on removing the Christian terms of the biological equation:

[T]he notion of flesh needs to be rethought outside of Christian language, namely, as the biopolitical possibility of the ontological and technological transmutation of the human body. One could say that biotechnology is a non-Christian form of incarnation. What in the experience of prosthesis (of the transplant or the implant) penetrates into the human organism is no longer the divine, but the organ of another person [*uomo*]; or something that doesn't live, that "divinely" allows the person to live and improve the quality of his or her life.⁶

⁵ Sarah Beckwith, "Making the World in York and the York Cycle," *Framing Medieval Bodies*. Sarah Kay and Miri Rubin, eds. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 12.

⁶ Esposito, p. 168.

He goes on, however, to say that there are instances in Christian art where the transcendent character of divine flesh coincides with the raw meat of earthly corporeality:

But that this new biopolitical feature (which inevitably is technopolitical) doesn't lose every point of contact with its own Christian archetype is witnessed by the artist who, perhaps more than any other, has placed the theme of flesh outside of the body (or of the nonorganic body) at the center of his own work. We know that classical images of the Incarnation, above all at the moment of the Crucifixion, mark a break or rupture in the figural regime of the *mimesis* in which Christian art is framed—as if not only the Christ (for example, Dürer's), but also rather the entire order of figuration must slip through the open folds of its martyred body, damaged and disfigured, without any hope of restoration.⁷

Esposito goes on to describe the incarnation as a “journey to the limits of the body” that links the transcendent spiritual form of Christ in the art of Francis Bacon to the profoundly earthbound matter of butchered meat. Since the project of crucifixion is the destruction of the flesh, Christ's journey in the cycle consists primarily of *travail* rather than *travel*. His crucifixion renders his flesh suitable for substitution, since, as Esposito argues, flesh is flesh at the moment of death, which means that Christ's flesh, although remarkable in a number of ways, operates like human flesh in response to lethal violence. The more difficult reconciliation is between the over-arching theme of God's compensation for the weakness and disability of material bodies and Christ's incapacitation at the hands of the soldiers. The first concern is that Christ's body must remain blameless, yet become a criminal body in order to complete the act of salvation. The second is that the workmanship of the men who orchestrate Christ's death must be revealed as inadequate in order to emphasize Christ's obedience to his father's will. Finally, there are two prosthetic processes operating in the scenes of abuse and torment

⁷ Ibid.

leading up to Christ's death in these plays: 1) Christ's body as a prosthetic criminal body, and 2) objects or bodies that act as prostheses for Christ's incapacitated body. The cross, for instance, acts as prosthesis for Christ's hands and feet—enabling him to perform the accompanying works and movement such as healing others and wounding his own body.

The word *prosthesis* contains some internal etymological conflicts that are useful for discussion of Christ's suffering in the York plays. The root, *thesis*, originally meant “[t]he setting down of the foot or lowering of the hand in beating time,” which extended to “the stressed syllable of a foot in a verse; a stressed note in music.” Later Latin writers, however, used it in reference to “the lowering of the voice on an unstressed syllable,” reversing its connotation in certain texts.⁸ The word *prosthesis*, then, can refer to an object that enables proximity (stressed) or distance (unstressed). The most pressing question of this chapter may be to what extent prosthesis creates or accentuates distance at the same time as it forecloses the space created by disability. The healing capacities of Christ's flesh that enable him to take the place of a criminal and stand in for a host of human sacrifices raise questions about the material characteristics of that flesh and threaten to undermine the project of divine incarnation. In a dramatic production so consumed with and tied up in the materiality of the craftsman's body and of the book, the profane flesh of the human and the animal—along with the laws that govern it—has a presence even as it encounters the divine stuff of God, particularly when the profane flesh appears criminal. The more damaged Christ's flesh becomes, the more important it is that the plays emphasize Christ's innocence.

⁸ The definition of *thesis* in the *MED* retains this meaning. <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=id&id=MED45219>

Involuntary Movement

In *The Second Trial before Pilate*, the search begins for strong men who can beat Christ into submission, but the search begins ominously, with references to an emasculating scene from *The Gospel of Nicodemus* in which the soldiers struggle to hold their banners high as Christ approaches. The “shafts shake” and lower in reverence to Christ’s status:

CAYPHAS A, ser, saugh ye noght this sight, how that ther schaftes schuke
And thez baneres to this brothell thai bowde all on brede?

ANNA Ya, ther cursed knyghtes by crafte lete them croke
To worshippe this warlowe unworthy in wede. (33:168-71)⁹

In the second round of attempts to hold the banners high, the soldier’s description is more specific, and shows the material twisting and shattering under God’s power, threatening to “hack off his hand”:

II MILES I, certayne, I saie as for myne,
Whan it sattles or sadly discendis
Whare I stande,
When it wryngis or wronge it wendis.
Outher bristis, barkis, or bendes,
Hardly lat hakke of myn hande. (33:246-51)

In an embedded stage direction, Pilate finds himself involuntarily bowing to Christ shortly after this scene (33:274-5). These movements reveal disabilities in the burly soldiers’ bodies by the power of God moving in them, but they also transform those bodies into fleshly prostheses that move material into positions of reverence before

⁹ Davidson, *York Plays*.

Christ. Throughout much of the play, the soldiers mock Jesus by pretending to worship him as king of the Jews:

I MILES Ya, it is gode inowe in this nede,
Late us gudly hym grete on this grounde.

Ave, riall roy and rex Judeorum!
Hayle, comely kyng, that no kyngdom has kende;
Hayll, undugthy duke, thi dedis ere dom,
Hayll, man unmyghty, thi menye to mende. (33:406-11)

This raises, but does not answer, the question of Christ's Jewish flesh. We could assume its innocence prior to the crucifixion if it weren't for the presence of pejorative references to Jews earlier in the cycle. In his discussion of the Luttrell Psalter, Anthony Bale talks about the common association of Jewishness with the flesh in medieval images of Christ's passion, setting them in opposition to the spiritual realm.¹⁰ Steven F. Kruger complicates the conversation by talking about Christianity as particularly embodied:

The body that Christianity constructs as the Jewish specter interferes with, and is interfered with by, the insistent incarnational body—tortured and torn apart, past and buried but reviving itself as a spirit (but also still a body), reanimated and reincarnated over and over again in the present through the miracle of the Eucharist that is at the heart of Christianity itself. It cannot be, then, body per se as opposed to spirit that represents Jewish otherness. The polemic centered on Jewish (dis)embodiment must construct a debased Jewish body somehow essentially different from the (Jewish) body of Christ that stands at the founding moment of Christianity.¹¹

In this stage of Christ's life where his flesh is nearing death—and decreased differentiation—what precisely is the threshold between its capacity for transcendence and that of other Jewish flesh? Bale also notes that physical strength is a marker of difference between Jews and Christians: whereas Jews possess physical strength, the

¹⁰ Anthony Bale, *Feeling Persecuted* (London: Reaktion Books, 2010), p. 15.

¹¹ Kruger, p. 68.

physically weak Christians are stronger in spirit.¹² Kruger identifies as a central problem in medieval anti-Semitic literature this ambivalence toward the physicality of the human body. Christ's bodily functions are revered in some places and reviled in others.¹³ In this scene, the first soldier mocks Jesus' lack of property and his physical weakness and tells him to thank them for working to lift him and "heve up" his hands since he is too weak to work:

III MILES Hayll, lord without lande for to lende,
Hayll, kyng, hayll knave unconand.

IV MILES Hayll, freyke, without forse thee to fende,
Hayll, strang, that may not wele stand
To stryve.

I MILES We, harlott, heve up thy hande,
And us all that thee wirschip are wirkand
Thanke us, ther ill mot thou thryve. (33:412-419)¹⁴

This brings Jesus' material worth as well as his physical strength into question. The material issue here is whether Christ is overcoming the strength of his Jewish flesh using other Jewish bodies as prosthetics. This differentiates and politicizes Christ's flesh. Drawing attention to the soldiers' compensation for Christ's weakness, the second soldier complains that carrying Jesus' damaged body is taking a toll on their strength:

II MILES We ar combered his corpus for to cary,
Many wightis on hym wondres and wary.

Lo, his flessch al be beflapped that fat is. (33:429-31)¹⁵

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Kruger, p. 59.

¹⁴ Davidson, *York Plays*.

¹⁵ Davidson, *York Plays*.

This scene demonstrates the soldiers' ignorance, since they clearly misjudge their cargo's power. It also, however, inserts Christ's flesh into the late medieval economy of land and labor, as the soldiers compare his works with their own. Having bruised and penetrated Christ's body with their hands as well as their weapons, the soldiers conclude that he has been rendered powerless as well as speechless. This idea of speechlessness being equated with damage to or removal of the skin prevails in modern theories of the body, and Katie L. Walter argues that a "skin-flesh binary" existed in the Middle Ages as well, dictating that "[i]f skin is legendary, then flesh—undifferentiated, closed in on itself—breaks discourse down."¹⁶ She goes on, however, to expose the artificiality of this binary, grouping skin and flesh with limbs according to medieval taxonomies that classify them as "sites of interaction with others":¹⁷

The understanding that the human persists as a lump of flesh in the process of "becoming," evident in medieval traditions, is also where Esposito (following the lead of Maurice Merleau-Ponty) begins to locate the possibility of a more expansive taxonomy of flesh; since flesh "precedes the body and all its successive incorporations," it is in common with the animal and the nonhuman—that is, with plants, food, and so with "the flesh of the world."¹⁸

This, drawing from Agamben's theories of *zoē*, or "bare life," and *bios*, or political existence, indicates that Christ's flesh at the moment of his death is the undifferentiated flesh that gives voice to redemption, but lies outside of the political realm.¹⁹ This

¹⁶ Katie L. Walter, "The Form of the Formless," *Reading Skin in Medieval Literature and Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 120. Pain is another possible cause of Christ's speechlessness. For more on the inexpressibility of pain, see Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

¹⁹ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer*. Daniel Heller-Roazen, trans. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 11.

relationship with the beginning of human life and the sanguine nature of flesh gives it a prosthetic function, allowing it to stand in place of the body:

[The] prosthetic function of flesh—where its very difference from skin and the rest of the body means it can stand in its place—rewrites the relationship between skin and flesh, since flesh not only supports and gives form to skin, but is capable of substituting it.²⁰

Christ's flesh, whether embodied or disembodied, communicates and acts with agency that exceeds the generative capacity of human flesh, but these superhuman capacities raise questions about the ways in which Christ's flesh performs its substitutions. In order to stand in for the criminal, Christ's body does in fact become political, especially within the material culture in the text and production of the York Plays. Christ's body speaks in the plays in ways that complicate and potentially confuse the spiritual messages they impart.

Given the idea of the soldiers' bodies as fleshly prosthetics for the execution of God's plan, the damage to Christ's body might be read as self-flagellation, bringing it to the undifferentiated state that enables proximity with the other flesh of the world and readies it for a process of "becoming." Elaine Scarry has described how religious self-flagellation erases certain physical definitions within the body, and between the body and the world:

The self-flagellation of the religious ascetic, for example, is not (as is often asserted) an act of denying the body, eliminating its claims from attention, but a way of so emphasizing the body that the contents of the world are cancelled and the path is clear for the entry of an unworldly, contentless force. It is in part this world-ridding, path-clearing logic that explains the obsessive presence of pain in the rituals of large, widely shared religions as well as in the imagery of intensely

²⁰ Ibid., p. 126.

private visions, that partly explains why the crucifixion of Christ is at the center of Christianity.²¹

Here Christ, immobilized by the beatings that have enabled him to begin the process of becoming undifferentiated flesh, uses the soldiers as prosthetic arms and legs to beat and carry him. Scarry makes a distinction between the world-destroying pain of being tortured and the religious experience of torturing oneself, but there is some overlap here, since Christ ultimately cries out in anguish at his father for turning him over to these men. Whatever world exists in the distance between the son and the father at that moment is rifting, and Christ feels victimized by someone other than himself and his human agents of self-flagellation.

Emphasizing their lack of investment in their work, the soldiers' complaints continue throughout the next play, *The Road to Calvary*, and their claims to diligence in the previous play are undermined by their inability to measure Christ's cross correctly. The third soldier assures the others that there is no need to double-check:

III MILES To loke theraftir it is no nede.

I toke the mesure or I yode,

Bothe for the fette and hande. (34:79-81)²²

This tension between haste and professed pride in craftsmanship continues in *Crucifixio Christi*, with the soldiers up against a strict deadline of noon for finishing their work. They accuse Christ of wicked works, but their own work is revealed to be faulty:

²¹Ibid., p. 34.

²²Davidson, *York Plays*.

IV MILES Owe, this werke is all unmeete.

This boring muste all be amende. (35:127-8)²³

In particular, they are unable to get Christ's hands and feet to reach the holes they have bored in the cross. In order to remedy their situation, they decide to tie a rope around Jesus and pull his body apart until it fits the measurements.²⁴ This section reveals the soldiers to be especially irresponsible workers. They are more concerned with their fault being found than about the actual quality of their work:

I MILES Have done, dryve in that nayle
So that no faute be foune.

IV MILES This wirkyng wolde noght faile,
Yf foure bullis here were boune.

I MILES Ther cordis have evill encressed his paynes
Or he wer tille the booryngis brought.

II MILES Yaa, assoundir are bothe synnous and veynis
On ilke a side, so have we soughte. (35:142-8)

As they secure Jesus on the cross, they grumble again about the toll all of this has taken on their own bodies, and end up wedging his foot to fit their faulty design:

Goode wegges schall we take this tyde

And feste the foote, thanne is all fitte. (35:235-6)²⁵

The *thesis* confusion between proximity and distance—stress and unstress—is particularly relevant here, where the responsibility for the spiritual significance of the scene alternates between the various players and objects involved. The workers' lack of

²³ I will talk more about spiritually instructive humor in my comments on *Fergus* in the coda.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

investment causes Christ more pain, which actually makes them more effective as prosthetic agents of Christ's self-sacrifice. The fact that they pull apart his body while forcing it to fit the dimensions of the cross indicates not only that the workers are inept, but that Christ's body is not fit for criminal crucifixion.

This ill-fitting wooden prosthesis that represents the criminal behavior for which Christ is sacrificing himself shows at the same time that this sacrifice is profoundly imperfect. The soldiers' violent project of creating undifferentiated flesh begins to unravel as their shoddy work again illuminates the particular dimensions of Christ's human form as well as the chasm between his diligence and perfection and their appalling sloth and imperfection. While the workers busy themselves justifying their work and lamenting the physical cost of their labor, the play is clearly communicating the converse: that the quality of their work is poor and that the work Jesus is doing, although he is physically still, is worth far more than their hasty construction, however backbreaking.

When Christ is raised up on the cross, the scene unfolds as a typical warning to passers-by of what comes of criminal behavior, but the dynamics are profoundly different. Jesus verbally addresses passers-by—including the pageant audience—from the cross to warn them of the consequences of sin. Here, however, he is highlighting the iniquity of his killers. In this context, his statement that the soldiers "know not what they do" is particularly apt—they are clearly clueless and terrible at their jobs, as his off-kilter, wedged position on the cross no doubt reveals to any onlooker:

JESUS Al men that walkis by waye or strete,
Takes tente ye schalle no travayle tyne.
Byholdes myn heede, myn handis, and my feete,
And fully feele nowe, or ye fyne,

Yf any mournyng may be meete
Or myscheve mesured unto myne.
My Fadir, that alle bales may bete,
Forgiffis thes men that dois me pyne.
What thai wirke wotte thai noght.
Therefore, my Fadir, I crave
Latte nevere ther synnys be sought,
But see their saules to save. (35:253-64)²⁶

Christ warns onlookers to avoid the suffering he is enduring, but these warnings are coming from the victim rather than the criminal. The “record of misdemeanour” typically inscribed on the criminal body is instead inscribed on the mutilated cross. Christ’s body, broken and stretched to fit, only serves to emphasize the iniquity of the instrument of torture—his body has to endure pain and instability in order to make use of this ill-fitting prosthesis.

Davidson talks in his notes about how the soldiers’ attitude toward their work calls to mind Hannah Arendt’s concept of “the banality of evil,” but he notes that their enthusiasm about the more sadistic elements of their work mark them as complicit rather than simply diligent. I would add that they are clearly less concerned with doing their work correctly than with talking about doing it correctly, and contend that their sadism tends to pale in comparison to their laziness, waning under the weight of Christ’s body and the tedium of cross construction. The tortured son of a carpenter ultimately becomes the material that makes the cross functional. In a final confirmation of what the play has intimated all along, the second soldier utters the final lines of the play:

II MILES Goo we thanne hense tyte;
This travayle here we tyne, etc. (35:299-300)²⁷

²⁶ Ibid.

Clearly, the soldiers are not doing their job effectively—certainly not with the skill of a craftsman. Christ is better left to his own work compensating for their structural errors. Demonstrating the contrast between the soldiers' charade of productivity and Christ's passive compensation, the hurried soldiers concern themselves with conserving their efforts while Christ works in his stillness to save the souls of mankind.

The End of the Roode: The *Travail* of Redemption

Although, as Beckwith notes, the pageant is much more than just a vehicle for religious instruction, the *Mortificatio Christi* frames the cross explicitly as a teaching tool:

Transgressours als

On the crosse schalle be knytte for to knawe. (36:25)²⁸

This recalls the medieval practice of punishment as example that Dean describes, which usually involved killing someone from outside of the community as an example to members of the community:

Although these convicts were marginal [...] their deaths were far from marginal events. Rather, executions were seen as having great power as warning examples to others. These exemplary and didactic functions of public executions seem to become more evident with time [...] Capital punishment was thus both likened to and differentiated from preaching: its message was one of moral edification; and it was a message that people really attended to.²⁹

As discussed above, Jesus' innocence sets him apart from other executed men, particularly since he preaches from the cross, but his death serves as a form of spiritual

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Beckwith, p. 255. Davidson, *York Plays*.

²⁹ Dean, p. 126.

instruction to those who might commit sinful acts. Bale examines the Latin origin of the word *emotion* (*e+movere*, meaning “to transport, to move out”) and expounds upon the emotional impact of violence in medieval and modern contexts:

Susan Sontag has acutely described how ‘for two thousand years, among Christians and Jews, it has been spiritually fashionable to be in pain. Both contemporary horror and medieval images of Jewish violence cause their audiences to gasp in revulsion, stimulating (and simulating) anger, disgust, fear, a whole world of intense but studied emotional and physical reaction. As with other texts and images from the Middle Ages, those which have been described as ‘anti-Semitic’ are invested in their own ‘rhetoricity’ and violent aesthetics, their capacity to be read and to move their audience, to bring the feeling of persecution into their audiences’ intellectual worlds, turning the affliction of pain into its assumption.³⁰

Because of the framing and pageantry of the entire production, the “movement” of the audience in response to this display of violence was likely more than simply affective. In the context of simulated pilgrimage—lest we forget that the travelers in the play are not the only ones receiving this instruction—these performances have the ability to transport York play audiences rather than just emotionally “moving” them. In another accusation-as-edification from the villain, Cayphas reinforces Christ’s role as teacher by leveling this charge against him:

With fraudes oure folke gan he feede

And laboured to lere thame his laye. (36:42-3)³¹

This structure reminds audiences that the primary functions of Christ’s body are to feed and to teach, but it also frames Jesus as a worker. As for the work of his crucifixion, Jesus claims that for himself:

³⁰ Bale, pp. 18 and 20.

³¹ Davidson, *York Plays*.

My Fadirs wille to be wirkyng,

For mankynde my body I bende. (36:146-7)

The assertion that he bends his own body again introduces a gray area with regard to his role as a human sacrifice. He has clearly enlisted the material forms of the soldiers and the cross to orchestrate his own death. Like Isaac, he is working in accordance with his father's will, but Christ claims an active role in his demise rather than asking to be bound so that he won't resist, and God ultimately abandons or hands over his son to the work he has assigned, as evidenced in Jesus' moment of outcry on the cross.³² Until the sacrifice is completed, Christ performed it separate from God. This moment of undoing or disconnection is followed by Jesus' expression of thirst and Garcio's comment on its value: "To spede for no spence that ye spare" (36:241).³³ The final line returns the responsibility to God's hands, which raises the question of proximity once again—until the sacrifice is completed, Christ performs it separate from God, and when it is completed, he places his spirit in God's hands.:

JESUS Thi drinke it schalle do me no deere,
Wete thou wele, therof will I none.
Nowe, Fadir, that formed alle in fere,
To thy moste myght make I my mone.
Thi wille have I wrought in this wone.
Thus ragged and rente on this roode,
Thus doulffully to dede have thei done.
Forgiffe thame be grace that is goode,
Thai ne wote noght what it was.
My Fadir, here my bone,
For nowe all thyng is done.

³² Ibid., 36:213-15

³³ Ibid.

My spirite to thee right sone
Comende I *in manus tuas*. (36:248-60)³⁴

Christ, who is the son of a carpenter as well as of God, is the workman. Christ's blood is not only figuratively healing, however. When Longinus spears Jesus, he comes in contact with his blood, which gives him spiritual sight, according to the Gospel of Nicodemus.

At line 300, Longinus again calls him "o maker unmade." This time, the phrase implies the unmaking of Christ's body more strongly, since the unmaking of Christ's body spills the blood that restored Longinus' sight. At this point, Christ makes himself a sacrifice, using the bodies of soldiers and the wood of the cross as prosthetics. In so doing, he has orchestrated his unmaking. All of this emphasizes Christ's triumph over material as he gifts the products of his labor to his father.

The play ends with a return to the politics of execution—Pilate, depicted here as a Jew wanting the burial to be finished before the sabbath. In return for granting him permission to give Jesus a proper burial, Joseph assures Pilate he will do so quickly:

PILATUS Joseph, sir, I graunte thee that geste.
I grucche noght to grath hym in grave.
Delyver, have done he were dreste,
And sewe, sir, oure Sabott to saffe.

JOSEPH With handis and harte that I have
I thanke thee in faith for my frende.
God kepe thee thi comforte to crave,
For wightely my way will I wende
In hye.
To do that dede
He be my speede,
That armys gun sprede,
Mannekynde be his bloode for to bye. (36:339-51)³⁵

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

This saves him from the undignified burial of an outcast, allowing him some connection to community in death.³⁶ Also in this passage, Joseph turns the stretching of Christ's arms into an offer of payment for the purchase of mankind's redemption. As much as the cycle emphasizes Christ's transcendence of the material world, these transactions are instrumental to his triumph over evil. *The Harrowing of Hell* continues this theme of the worth of Christ's blood, valuable enough to buy the bound sinners' freedom:

All that in werke my werkemen were,

Owte of thare woo I wol thame wynne (37:17-8)³⁷

The Middle English connotations of the word *wynne* include labor, conflict, and material gain, just as they do in Modern English.³⁸ Sattan seems confused about Jesus' claim to power because of his father's profession (carpenter):

SATTAN Thy fadir knewe I wele be sight;

He was a write his mette to wynne, (37:229-30)³⁹

This play is a more figurative exchange of bodily fluid, but the elements of labor and the work of bleeding frame the transaction between Christ and Satan. In *The Resurrection*, the first Mary calls Jesus "medicyne," which echoes Longinus' experience with Jesus' body as a literal healing substance being transferred to his own flesh. (38:195-6)⁴⁰ She laments how his limbs were punished although he was guilt-free:

Allas, what schall nowe worthe on me?

Mi kaytiffe herte will breke in three

³⁶ See Dean, p. 127.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Lewis, et al, *MED*.

³⁹ Davidson, *York Plays*.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

Whenne I thynke on that body free
How it was spilte.
Both feete and handes nayled tille a tre
Withouten gilte. (38:271-6)⁴¹

The repeated emphasis of the innocence of Christ's body—and specifically his hands and feet—continually cast him as an artificial criminal. He is more of an antidote to criminality than a criminal himself, and his blood passes on that immunity to mortals. This function of transfusion raises questions about how Christ's Jewishness figures into the materiality of his body in these plays—and whether the suspicion of guilt placed on Jewish flesh was ascribed to the material of Christ's body, another obstacle his divinity was able to overcome. In other words, was Christ immune to his own Jewish flesh?

In Play 41: *The Scriveners' Play*, Peter begins by talking about the Jews as *fell*.⁴² In addition to alluding to the fall in a spiritual sense, the word *fell* connotes criminality through its relationship to the word *felon*. The definition also encompasses a number of references to trickery, violence, and disease—all common elements of medieval blood libel:

- 5.(a) Of persons, the mind, emotions, etc.: disposed to, aroused by, or engaged in, violence against others; wrathful, ruthless, brutal, cruel; fers and fel, fel..as fir; (b) of actions, words, etc.: marked by violence, rage, anger, or cruelty; fierce, angry, cruel; (c) of an animal: ferocious, savage, cruel.
6. Of things, conditions, etc.: (a) cruel, terrible, deadly (weapon, instrument of torture, etc.); strong (tempting vision); pain-filled (day); (b) grievous, virulent (disease); painful, deadly (wound); intense, great (pain, hunger, fright); (c) strong, rank (poison); strong, harsh (medicine); of food: hard to digest.⁴³

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² fel (adj.) Comp. feller, sup. fellest.

[OF fel (beside felon).] Lewis, et al, *MED*. See also "felon, adj. and n.1." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, December 2014. Web. 20 February 2015. Can also mean "abscess or boil".

⁴³ Lewis, et al, *MED*.

The disciples in this play also talk about being stuck where they are (*lende*) because of the threat of the Jews, waiting for the savior to send them relief.⁴⁴ In this play, Jews are portrayed as unstable, dangerous, and obstacles to Christian movement. I will revisit these ideas in depth in my discussion of *Fergus* in the coda, with particular attention to the way that the remnants of and references to the absent play disrupt the order of the manuscript and the record of its performance and removal.

In contrast to the harshness of the Jewish presence represented in the cycle, Jesus is depicted as gentle and quiet. When Jesus appears to the disciples in this play, they think he is a ghost. Jesus offers the wounds on his hands and feet as proof of his material presence:

I ame Criste, ne drede you noght,
Her may ye se
The same body that has you bought
Uppon a tre.
That I am comen you here to mete,
Behalde and se myn handis and feete,
And grathely gropes my woundes wete
Al that here is;
Thus was I dight youre balis to beete
And bring to blis. (41:45-54)⁴⁵

One might think that a specter issuing an invitation to grope Christ's bloody wounds would be unappetizing, but James reacts by offering Christ a meal, recalling the consistent association of food with Christ's communion with his followers. Christ's wounds also serve as physical anchors' for the disciples' faith. With his body, Christ overcomes their disbelief. He says that his flesh and bones prove that he is not a spirit,

⁴⁴ Ibid. *Lenden* can also mean to travel.

⁴⁵ Davidson, *York Plays*.

and his wounds confirm it. His abilities to eat and to be eaten are further proof. The mete/mette wordplay here is noteworthy. Jesus links words with food in his comments about leftovers:

And takis the remenaunte sone to you
That her is lefte.

For youe thus was I revyn and rayst;
Therefore some of my peyne ye taste
And spekis now nowhare my worde waste,
That schall ye lere (41:83-8)⁴⁶

Christ's pain is the meal in this scene, and the Holy Ghost will be the spiritual leftover.

Far from comforted by the thought of a ghostly presence that will remain after Christ ascends, however, Thomas, who has missed the tactile proof of Christ's resurrection, then enters saying that they will complain in every land of their mourning:

Of mournyng may we make oure mone
In ilka lande.
God blisse you, brether, bloode and bone,
Same ther ye stande. (41:122-6)⁴⁷

Peter tells him they saw Jesus walking on the ground, coupling the material—and mobile—presence of Christ with his material contact with earth (his *thesis*):

PETRUS Welcome, Thomas, where has thou bene?
Wete thou wele withouten wene,
Jesu oure Lorde than have we sene
On grounde her gang. (41:127-30)⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

Although the expectation of Christ's followers is that their faith sustains their belief, material confirmation continues to be crucial to convincing Thomas. James tells him they felt his wounds, so they know it was him (and that he was real):

JACOBUS Thomas, trewly he is on lyve
That tholede the Jewes his flessch to riffe;
He lete us fele his woundes fyve,
Oure Lorde verray. (41:139-42)

Thomas of course has to actually feel the wounds and make physical contact with Christ's blood to believe it:

THOMAS What, leve felawes, late be youre fare.
Till that I see his body bare
And sithen my fyngir putte in thare
Within his hyde
And fele the wounde the spere did schere
Right in his syde,
Are schalle I trowe no tales betwene. (41:157-63)⁴⁹

In addition to being an anchor for Thomas' faith, Christ's blood is a "locus of creation," as Bynum has noted: "The blood Christ shed on the cross is analogous to the blood of birthing, and this birthing, paradoxically, precedes conception."⁵⁰ Because Christ's wound is filled with generative blood, the flesh that Thomas probes is of the same variety as the flesh of the fetus, according to medieval embryology.⁵¹ The exchange here mirrors the exchange between the sacred and profane in the incarnation—Christ's bloody wound infuses Thomas with faith. Katie L. Walter has explained how flesh can function as prosthesis by Esposito's definition:

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Bynum, p. 197. The erasure of the proper historical chronology in the production of these plays may also have caused spiritual confusion among audiences, since male bleeding like Christ's in this scene later became a sign of the inherent wickedness of Jewish male bodies. For more on this connection, see Bildhauer, *Medieval Blood*, pp. 91-96 and 132.

⁵¹ Walter, p. 124.

In medieval understandings, human flesh, in conjunction with medicine [...] plays out daily something akin to the mystery of divine Incarnation. It does so in ways that accord with Esposito's exploration of "the one-that-is-made-two through a slippage of the body out of itself, which coincides with the insertion of something that doesn't naturally belong to it. These incarnations—natural, artificial, divine—do not lead to the interiorized body, closed in on itself, described by Nancy, but rather create an opening—to difference, but also, in Esposito's terms, to life. This prosthetic function of flesh—where its very difference from skin and the rest of the body means it can stand in its place—rewrites the relationship between skin and flesh, since flesh not only supports and gives form to skin, but is capable of substituting it.⁵²

In this moment, Christ's prosthetic flesh connects Thomas with the divine, a material compensation to a spiritual disability.⁵³

At the beginning of Play 42: *The Tailors' Play*, the apostles are still very confused about the ascension, especially how Jesus comes and goes mysteriously. Jesus makes a long prayer to his father that he has done what was requested and now wants to come be with him. Repeating the assurance he gave onlookers from the cross, Jesus says that as a result of his sacrifice, none of his peoples' struggles will harm them: "Schall none of them ther travaile tyne." (42:52) The work Christ has done to redeem humanity has clearly caused him considerable pain, and here Christ appears to be placing his damaged flesh figuratively in the space between humans and the pain of their labor as a kind of protective barrier. Christ subsequently warns the disciples that faith and triumph over the physical body are essential, since the body will eventually decay and pass away. Christ's use of the word *fell* here to describe his own body is curious in context:

⁵²Ibid., p. 126.

⁵³ I say compensation rather than solution here, because the prosthesis does not grant Thomas genuine faith, but material assurance. In this sense, it establishes a temporary connection to the divine that Thomas will have to supplant with faith in order to commune with the Holy Spirit in Christ's absence.

The thirde skille is, trewly to tell,
Right als I wende als wele will seme,
So schall I come in flessch and fell (42:121-3)⁵⁴

In context, *fell* simply means “body,” but the word has negative connotations specific to Jewish bodies, as I’ve explained. The trouble with undifferentiated flesh is that it does have difficulty speaking, which makes it nearly impossible to portray in a didactic religious pageant performed by guilds desperate to display their skill at their craft and reinforce their cultural norms simultaneously. It is unclear whether those connotations apply to Christ’s body, but the possibility is relevant to the larger discussion of the potential Jewishness of Christ’s flesh. He then says his journey is over:

Nowe is my jornay brought till ende,
Mi tyme that me to lang was lende. (42:153-4)⁵⁵

This use of *lende* also appears to connote a feeling of being stuck. It does not attribute that “stuckness” to the Jews, although that connection could be implied in context. As might be expected, when Christ ascends, he does not talk about the dwelling place in heaven in material terms. He uses *wonne* instead, eschewing material terms for heavenly dwelling employed elsewhere in the plays:

Therefore fareswele, ilkone seere.
I goo make youe a stede redye
Endles to wonne with me in feere. (42:170-2)⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Davidson, *York Plays*.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ John says: Yitt is he salve of ilka sare (192).

The fourth apostle says that Jesus will hide them from harm, returning to rhetoric of shelter, and that he will hold in health “both head and hand”:

He highte us fro harme for to hyde

And holde in hele both hede and hende (43:51-2)⁵⁷

It is difficult to ignore the numerous structural parallels between Christ’s salvific actions and the Jews’ evil ones in the play. Here, it is rhetoric of enclosure. While “the gentle Jew,” Jesus, holds them in protection, other Jews surround them to trap them. The apostle describes the Jews as enemies as well as physical obstacles to Christ’s faithful:

The Jewis besettis us in ilke a side

That we may nowdir walke nor wende. (43:57-8)⁵⁸

Similarly, the Mohammed-worshipping Jewish doctors in *Pentecost* are portrayed as killers rather than healers:

I DOCTOR Harke, maistir, for Mahoundes peyne,
Howe that thes mobbardis maddis now;
Ther maistir that oure men have slayne
Hase garte thame on his trifullis trowe.

This conflation of Jews with Saracens again recalls the essentialized bodies of both groups in many medieval Christian texts, their monstrous bodies symbolizing a stubborn materiality that is not easily erased upon conversion.⁵⁹ The following stanzas, in contrast, highlight Christ’s transcendence of materiality:

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ For more on the physical difficulties of Muslim and Jewish conversion according to medieval theology, see Kruger, “Becoming Christian?” *The Spectral Jew*, pp. 67-109.

II DOCTOR The lurdayne sais he leffis agayne;
That mater may thei nevere avowe,
For as thei herde his prechyng pleyne,
He was away, thai wiste noght howe.

I DOCTOR They wiste noght whenne he wente;
Therefore fully thei faile
And sais tham schall be sente
Grete helpe thurgh his counsaile.

II DOCTOR He myghte nowdir sende clothe nor clowte;
He was nevere but a wrecche alway.
But samme oure men and make a schowte,
So schall we beste yone foolis flaye.

I DOCTOR Nay, nay, than will thei dye for doute.
I rede we make noght mekill dray
But warly wayte when thai come oute
And marre thame thanne, if that we may.

II DOCTOR Now, certis, I assente thertille,
Yitt wolde I noght thei wiste;
Yone carles than schall we kill
But thei liffe als us liste. (43:75-98)⁶⁰

The trajectory here mirrors the “doomed to failure” narrative of Jewish history as a whole from the medieval Christian perspective. The Jews in the play acknowledge Christ’s triumph over death, but hang their hopes on physically harming his followers anyway. This kind of stark contrast between Christ’s gentle, healing presence and the violent Jewish doctor also aligns with Jeffrey Cohen’s description of the instructive function of the Jew from a medieval Christian perspective:

The Jews’ rejection of Jesus constituted the ultimate trespass and allowed the Gentiles to enter into God’s covenant [...] The Jews have not entirely forfeited their election. They still serve a vital purpose, pedagogic and eschatological,

⁶⁰ Ibid.

which demands their survival until the end, when “all Israel [*pâs Israël*] will be saved.”⁶¹

In a biblical context, these events are chronological, but in the context of the York plays, the condemned Jews and the Jewish body of Christ share space on a stage, which makes the portrayal of the two distinct kinds of Jewishness a culturally complex business.⁶²

Included in the charges against the Jews was that they clung to an old law that was unable to save them.⁶³ This failure to reconcile old and new law can be seen in the soldiers’ inability to construct a cross to Christ’s dimensions—Christ’s body had to compensate for the cross’ material failures.⁶⁴ The extent to which medieval Christian theologians saw Jews as intentionally criminal varied throughout the Middle Ages, but they consistently portray Jews as limited by the flesh and the physical world, in contrast to Christ’s transcendence.

The final play, *Doomsday*, is based on the story of the final judgment from Matthew 25. God recounts the creation of the world and the fall of man, identifying gluttony as the reason for their pain:

He ete the appill I badde schulde hyng;
Thus was he begilid thurgh glotony.
Sithen both hym and his ospring
To pyne I putte thame all forthy. (47:21-4)⁶⁵

⁶¹ Jeffrey Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law: Ideas of the Jew in Medieval Christianity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), p. 8.

⁶² For more on categorical and chronological contradictions in medieval Christian conceptions of Jewishness, see Cohen, p. 88. Also, Gregory establishes spiritual battle as one between heaven and earth rather than spirit and flesh, but sin makes them desire what is perishable. (90)

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁶⁴ For more on Augustinian notions of the Jewish preservation and embodiment of the literal—the book, signpost, desk, etc., see Cohen, p. 59. A discussion of the assumption of Jewish spiritual blindness, confined to contemplation of the physical creature. (60)

⁶⁵ Davidson, *York Plays*.

These stanzas, one directly following the other in the play, set up a parallel construction between the fruit on the tree in the garden and Christ's body hanging on the cross:

I sente my Sone with full blithe moode
Till erthe, to salve thame of thare sare.
For rewthe of thame he reste on roode
And boughte thame with his body bare.
For thame he shedde his harte bloode,
What kyndinesse myght I do thame mare? (47:27-32)⁶⁶

This reinforces the persistent theme of transplant and transfusion recurring in the cycle.

The toxic flesh and blood of the sinful human race are healed by the innocent body and blood of Christ. Some stories circulating in medieval Europe even described cursed blood flowing out of the apple as Adam bit it, which remained in his body and in the bodies of his offspring.⁶⁷ The play continues with a description of the harrowing of hell, in which Christ bought the prisoners of hell "that were sunk in for sin" with his fleshly sacrifice.⁶⁸ Upon God's announcement that he will be gathering the people of the earth and issuing sentences to the unrighteous, both angels specify that every ghost coming to judgment will bring body and soul to be judged, but there is some debate as to whether this flesh is corruptible or not.⁶⁹ The wicked souls confess that they have rejected the flesh of Christ in the form of the Eucharist: "But ofte we have his flesshe forsworne." (47:119) In terms of transfusion or transplant, this would indicate that they remain materially corrupt as a result of the fall, having forgone spiritual healing through Christ's flesh and blood. Their punishment will also include bodily pain:

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ See Bildhauer, p. 94.

⁶⁸ 47:36

⁶⁹ 47:85-96

Nowe mon nevere saule ne body dye,

But with wikkid peynes evermore be betyne. (47:135-6)⁷⁰

And they wring their hands and weep, “[f]or cursidnesse and for covetise.” (47:147)

When Christ announces that he will return to earth to issue his judgment, he says that he will bring his body to earth with him so that all of mankind can see what was done to him, indicating that his body remains wounded:

To deme my domes I woll descende,
This body will I bere with me,
Howe it was dight, mannes mys to mende.
All mankynde there schall it see. (47:181-4)⁷¹

They function as reminders of his suffering, but also to bring the brotherhood of believers together, the idea of communion embodied in the gaping wounds of his unhealed body:

Here may ye see my woundes wide
The whilke I tholed for youre mysdede
Thurgh harte and heed, foote, hande, and hide
Nought for my gilte butt for youre nede.
Beholdis both body, bak, and side
How dere I bought youre brotherhede.
Thes bittir peynes I wolde abide
To bye you blisse thus wolde I bleede. (47:245-52)⁷²

Again he reiterates that he did not commit the crimes for which he was punished: “Mi body was scourged withouten skill” (253). This literally means that Christ was guiltless, but in the context of the cycle, it is reasonable to conclude that it also invokes the soldiers’ ineptitude, as encompassed in the Middle English concept of *skill*.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

Within this definition, law and craft are brought together under the umbrella of ability—there is an innate integrity assigned to both realms that the soldiers clearly lack, which emphasizes Christ’s superiority to them in both areas. In a subsequent moment of cognitive dissonance, Christ curses the Jews, decrying their unjust and barbaric treatment:

The Jewes spitte on me spitously;
Thei spared me no more than a theffe.
Whan thei me strake I stode full stilly,
Agaynste tham did I nothyngre greve. (47:261-4)⁷³

The pageant ends, appropriately for our purposes, with a stage direction indicating Christ’s movement “from a place to a place”: *Et sic facit finem cum melodia angelorum transiens a loco ad locum*. [And crossing from place to place, he makes an end with the melody of angels]⁷⁴ The only necessary movement in a pilgrimage occurs between the earthly and heavenly realms. The significance of geography is limited by the degree to which it communicates a spiritual message. As I hope to have shown in this chapter, that message is sometimes more clearly communicated through inability to move or obstruction of movement. Christ’s movement, with all of its openness, brokenness, and diffusion, moves between two realms—heaven and earth, or the sacred and the profane—and the degree to which those realms interact is negotiable based on various theological justifications. What complicates the discussion is the addition of specific cultural parameters which narrow the scope of certain definitions and blur the boundaries of others. Agamben’s explanation of the coincidence of *bios* and *zoē* is applicable here:

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Davidson, *York Plays*.

[T]ogether with the process by which the exception everywhere becomes the rule, the realm of bare life—which is originally situated at the margins of the political order—gradually begins to coincide with the political realm, and exclusion and inclusion, inside and outside, *bios* and *zoē*, right and fact, enter into a zone of irreducible indistinction.⁷⁵

The introduction of essentialized Jewish flesh into the narrative of Christ's death and resurrection and the cultural trappings of the medieval legal system politicize the material processes and characterizations of Christ's physical existence, which simultaneously enable and disable his spiritual redemption of humanity and the York pageant's didactic retelling of the story as a simulated pilgrimage.

The problem of representation in the York plays centers on the balance between spiritual instruction and cultural relevance. In order to deliver effective spiritual instruction, productions had to tell their part of an ancient story in ways that spoke to medieval cultural concerns and avoided contemporary cultural taboos. One of the most imminent threats, common to simulated as well as actual pilgrimage, is the threat of losing—or confusing—one's religion. Throughout most of the cycle, the risk of criminal behavior is initiated by the hands or feet. Christ's body operates differently, however. Although Christ's hands and feet are incapacitated, Christ can continue to move and work because, unlike humans, he can do so without his limbs. Using material objects and other human bodies as prosthetics, Christ can execute his father's plan with his hands and feet nailed to a cross. In this position, Christ demonstrates the ultimate stability, embodying stillness. His body—specifically the parts of his body that enable action—is absolutely anchored, even as it separates to incorporate and stabilize the soldiers' shoddy

⁷⁵ Agamben, p. 9.

workmanship. It is his flesh that moves, violently, opening to encompass and supplant the relic of a broken legal system.

The inherent contradiction raised by the discussion of criminality in relation to the body of Christ is that the divine ability to overcome material constraints such as amputation (isolation), weakness, imprisonment, and death invalidates—or at least weakens—the concept of immobility as it relates to the human body. If the same movement and work are possible without the use of limbs or with the assistance of prosthetic limbs, then the concept of imprisonment loses meaning.⁷⁶ Impressively capturing the impossibility of prosthesis, David Wills provides this careening description:

[A]n idiosyncratic master narrative creaking towards breaking, the expectation builds again but it will still manage to come from nowhere, there is no controlling it in spite of finally leaning way out against gravity with the weight of pure dissent, the candor of a protracted liminal pause that provokes its own interruption, dancing on the fluid edges of an affirmative no return, shifting until it tips, scales and all, flips and suddenly falls, there is no cause or origin for it[.]⁷⁷

In the context of the York cycle, Christ may actually be unable to employ material prosthetics to take the place of the criminal body according to the cultural definitions laid out in the texts, but his wounds are able to incorporate the entirety of the physical universe.

This project has thus far focused on material considerations within medieval narratives of travel. Moving into the final coda, which acts as a conclusion, the focus will shift to the *travel* and *travail* of the manuscripts that contain these narratives, whether—as in the case of the Nowell Codex Saint Christopher fragment—their meanings have

⁷⁶ See Cory James Rushton, *Disability and Medieval Law* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), p. 6.

⁷⁷ David Wills, *Prosthesis* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), p. 2.

been altered because of accidental damage or, like the absent York play *Fergus*, they have been intentionally excised from existence. The value in discussing manuscripts according the material concerns assigned to traveling bodies throughout this dissertation is a focus on the book as a historical object—one whose origin is absolutely worthy of sustained study, but whose current state, whether fragmented, prosthetically augmented, or amputated, tells its own story of travel and travail.

The Literary-Cultural Implications of Reading a Battered Corpus

Throughout this dissertation, I have focused on cultural associations between travel and bodily injury in the context of travel narrative. Instead of bringing this project to a formal conclusion, I want to close with a look forward to more concentrated study of medieval manuscripts whose structural damage and fragmentation augment the cultural meanings of the texts. There are important differences between the ways in which damage affects bodies and the ways in which damage affects manuscripts. Some conversations about pain, alienation, and agency are not applicable to a study of the dead skin of a manuscript page. Some ways of reading bodies, however, can also be used to talk about the cultural significance of damage to a literary work. Several of the texts mentioned in these chapters have sustained this kind of culturally productive damage, and I hope to highlight some of the most intriguing examples in this brief coda and explore the possibilities of this line of structural inquiry.

In my first chapter, I studied the conflicting identity characteristics of Saint Christopher that enabled him to embody the threat of incorporation commonly expressed in travel narratives. Although this monstrous form initially reads as a defect, the result, I argue, is the ideal body for a figure that represents travel. In the Nowell Codex version of the Saint Christopher legend, Christopher is beheaded, physically resolving the cultural conflict his hybrid represented by removing the monstrous part of his body. As I explained, however, the cultural residue of the conflict remained after his death, and even after other versions of the legend rewrote the narrative to give him a human form. The Nowell Codex Saint Christopher fragment has a similarly fascinating story to tell—one

that also ends with a beheading. Phillip Pulsiano estimates that the current form of the Saint Christopher text in the codex contains only a third of the original text, coming to this estimation by comparing it to the Latin text in the *Acta Sanctorum*¹. The fragment begins with Dagnus' encountering Christopher, described in this text as "healf hundisces manncynnes" [of a race of half-dog men].²

The Nowell Codex is not the only victim of the Cotton Library fire of 1731, which destroyed nearly all of the printed books and some of the manuscripts held in the King's and Cotton libraries. The extent of the damage is heartbreakingly surveyed by Andrew Prescott:

Although relatively few complete volumes were destroyed, many manuscripts lost important articles or survive only as charred fragments. In this sense, the details given by Whiston and Casley underestimate the damage. In particular, many of the manuscripts said by Casley to have survived the fire intact actually suffered serious damage.³

The damage to the Nowell Codex, however, was particularly severe, compounded by the treatment of the manuscript during collation after the fire:

One of the most famous victims of the fire was the manuscript containing the unique exemplar of Beowulf, Vitellius A. XV. The edges of this manuscript were badly scorched and the vellum left very brittle. Its subsequent handling caused serious textual loss.⁴

This kind of material parallel to the cultural meaning of a text gives scholars yet another angle from which to talk about the cultural incorporation of the body of Saint

¹ Phillip Pulsiano, "The Passion of Saint Christopher," *Early Medieval English Texts and Interpretations: Studies Presented to Donald G. Scragg* (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2002), p. 167.

² Pulsiano, p. 168.

³ Andrew Prescott, "'Their Present Miserable State of Cremation,'" *Sir Robert Cotton as Collector: Essays on an Early Stuart Courtier and His Legacy*. C. J. Wright, ed. London: British Library Publications, 1997: 391.

⁴ Ibid.

Christopher. It might be read as the continuation of the perpetual incomplete incorporation (through fire) integral to the cultural role Saint Christopher has played since the Middle Ages.

It is impossible to tell what exactly has been burned away or has crumbled from the text, but it begins in the middle of the events that lead to his death at Dagnus' hand, which means that the part of the narrative, the part that establishes his origins in every other version of the narrative, is among those destroyed by the fire. In addition to giving a structural dimension to the discussion of Christopher's beheading, the damage the eighteenth-century fire caused to the Anglo-Saxon manuscript anchors its form in two separate historical periods. Like the various versions of the narrative itself, the manuscript has taken different forms at different periods in time. Like Saint Christopher, this manuscript at one point had a distinct head that revealed his monstrous race and heritage, and the disappearance of that head has resulted in uncertainty with regard to how one can make sense of the remaining body.

The structure of Huntington Library manuscripts 114 and 143, both of which contain texts of *Piers Plowman* and *Troilus and Criseyde*, is perhaps less coincidental. Noelle Phillips established what she calls a "literary companionship" between the texts, explaining that the fragment of *Troilus and Criseyde* appearing on the flyleaf of the *Piers Plowman* manuscript HM 143 should not be understood as a disposable fragment, but rather as an integral part of HM 143.⁵ According to Phillips, the fragment has been denigrated by other scholars:

⁵ The passage is from Book I: lines 71-105.

The presence of Troilus in the early fifteenth century HM 143, however, has been largely overlooked because of its status as fragmentary flyleaves; one critic calls it waste material, and others ignore it because it was not part of the original collation.⁶

The most intriguing structural element of this manuscript in terms of this dissertation's discussions of travel is its theme of cultural embedding—particularly in light of the fact that, while both *Piers Plowman* and *Troilus and Criseyde* are preoccupied with social stability, the fragment of *Troilus and Criseyde* embedded in HM 143 is characterized by insidious cultural instability. First, Calkas turns traitor and his countrymen declare that he and his family deserve to be burned “fel and bones.”⁷ The end of the passage leaves Criseyde alone, troubled, and friendless. An alternate reading of this embedded textual fragment, based on the images of destruction and treachery that dominate the fragment, might read it as a literary Trojan horse existing as a literary counterpoint to *Piers Plowman* in the manuscript.

The York Cycle Marian play *Fergus*, removed from the cycle after producing “more noise and laughter than devotion,” has been a source of consternation for medieval guilds and modern scholars alike. The city corporation continued to pressure the Linenweavers to perform the play, even after they had been fined for not doing so in 1485.⁸ Another performance of the play appears in 1518, but by the 1550s the play has disappeared again from the records. I find its absence to be an undeniable echo of the same cultural interruptions Anthony Bale has identified in his work on the mnemonic

⁶ Noelle Phillips, “Fragments and Flyleaves: the Production and Ownership of Huntington Library MS 143,” New Chaucer Society Congress, Portland, Oregon, 23-26 July 2012.

⁷ I:91.

⁸ Clifford Davidson, “York Guilds and the Corpus Christi Plays: Unwilling Participants?” *Early Theatre: A Journal Associated with the Records of Early English Drama*, 9.2 (2006): p. 22.

function of amputated Jewish limbs. Bale explains how the medieval reader conceived of touch in relation to learning:

Medieval thought imagined seeing and reading as a kind of physical interpenetration; likewise, we often use vocabularies of touching and attaching to describe retaining a lesson—information we have *grasped*, a memory we have *held* or to which we *cling*, a point or insult that *stuck*, arguments that *applied*, *hanging* on to each and every word, attention-*grabbing*[, etc.].⁹

Bale has forged in this passage a link between medieval and modern conceptions of memory that is useful for my argument. Elsewhere he describes how Jewish limbs function as manicules, violently drawing attention to some spiritual lesson or another.¹⁰ Some depictions of such amputations have evidently been able to communicate their spiritual meaning clearly enough to remain in circulation. The problem with *Fergus*, given the description of the controversy in the historical record, appears to be that it confuses the message. As the 1431-2 civic record of petitions presented by the Goldsmiths and the Masons to the council states:

[T]he subject of this pageant is not contained in the sacred scripture and used to produce more noise and laughter than devotion. And whenever quarrels, disagreements, and fights used to arise among the people from this, they have rarely or never been able to produce their pageant and to play in daylight as the preceding pageants do.¹¹

Comic violence in religious contexts has a very specific function, and producers of the pageants took the risks of confusing the message very seriously, as I discussed in chapter three.

⁹ Anthony Bale, “The Jew’s Hand and the Virgin’s Bier: Tangible Interruption,” *Feeling Persecuted: Christians, Jews, and Images of Violence in the Middle Ages* (London: Reaktion Books, 2010), p. 90.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

¹¹ Alexandra F. Johnston and Margaret Rogerson, eds. *Records of Early English Drama: York*, Vol. 2: 732.

This idea of a literary presence conceived through tangible literary absence is the third and final signification of an amputated Jewish limb identified by Bale: “[I]t is interruptive—the hand sticks, it adheres, it arrests progress, a bodily disarticulation which is also a moral dislodgement.”¹² I contend that the hints at controversy in the historical records and the blank pages containing only the title of the *Fergus* play in modern collections of the York Cycle plays are similarly interruptive. The fact that a considerable body of scholarship has been written concerning *Fergus* even though there is no extant text of the play indicates that its absence has to some extent arrested scholarly progress through the York texts. The problem with amputated limbs, according to Bale, is that they are separated from the body, which is the locus of control. Removing the play from the cycle, but preserving records of the scandal, might be seen as a similar process of amputation—the body of the text has been removed from the cycle, but the record is still extant, pointing to the play’s absence in orphaned snippets of accusatory detail. In a sense, then, the scattered details in the historical record might be read as the severed limb of *Fergus*, a limb that can be seen, to use Bale’s wording, as “gesticulating wildly” and “signifying randomly and incorrectly.”¹³

By coupling structural readings of manuscript damage with parallel narrative elements of bodily damage in the text, I do not mean to suggest that there is a causal relationship between these phenomena. By applying the concept of *travail* to manuscript damage and deficiency, however, it might be possible to expand our cultural understanding of the ways in which a book, particularly one that has survived through

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Bale, p. 92.

significant historical shifts and controversies, might bear some marks of the journey.

Prescott's descriptions of rescue efforts following the Cotton Library fire reveal the very human grief literary scholars feel when confronted with the violence of such loss. He refers to "suffering" manuscripts and laments those that were disbound and hung up to dry.¹⁴ The idea that we've lost a piece of the literary connecting tissue that links us with our human past makes it somehow appropriate to refer to a literary disaster of that magnitude as "cremation."

What is written on the "bodies" of manuscripts through the language of damage in some ways acts more like the language of travail written on human bodies than like simple material damage to a literary work. It can strip or reassign the manuscripts history in important ways. By looking at books that have sustained some form of structural damage or restructuring in this way, I hope to establish that these new incorporations, rescue efforts, and even the mourning process involved in studying the gaps, scars, and "burnt lumps" of traveling and travailing manuscripts all contribute to literary culture in ways that can complement our study of the texts themselves.¹⁵

¹⁴ Prescott, Andrew. "Their Present Miserable State of Cremation." *Sir Robert Cotton as Collector: Essays on an Early Stuart Courtier and His Legacy*. British Library Publications, Apr. 2002. Web. 11 May 2015.

¹⁵ Ibid.

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