

**Last Supper, First Communion: Some
Staging Challenges in N. Town and the
Huy Nuns' Play based on Deguileville's
*Pèlerinage de la vie humaine***

Elisabeth Dutton and Olivia Robinson

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Some Staging Challenges in N. Town and
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Elisabeth Dutton and Olivia Robinson

In March 2020 the COVID pandemic closed shops and pubs and restaurants, libraries, cinemas, gyms and theatres, and churches across Europe. As everyone learnt to shop online and technologically baffled academics tried to teach via Zoom, many churches also started to broadcast their services, in variously adapted forms, so that people could listen along at home, but, though the prayers and sermons continued, the singing stopped and, crucially for many believers, the sharing of the Eucharist became impossible. For Catholics in particular it became imperative to find creative ways in which the faithful could receive the consecrated Host, the Body of Christ. In Chalons-en-Champagne, France, the 'drive through Mass' became the unlikely solution at the height of lockdown. Priests, having performed the Elevation and Consecration of the Host in a newly choreographed ceremony in a large car park, protected by masks and with their hands sanitised, delivered wafers through the car windows of attendees.¹

In England, the churches cautiously reopened as summer began, but government guidelines allowed only a single cantor – no choirs or congregational singing – and clergy had to find ways to administer the Eucharist that observed social distancing and appropriate hygienic practices. Communion was administered in one kind – wafers only – and, as the communicant inevitably had to remove his/her mask to receive the wafer, the priest had to be masked and silent. No 'The Body of Christ' whispered to each participant. Priests and worshippers sanitised their hands before Communion, and members of the congregation followed one-way systems around churches to avoid close contact with others in narrow aisles. It was all a rather sad inversion of what the Eucharist is meant to be: rather than bringing the community together into one body – 'Though we are many, we are one body, because we all share in one bread' – the participants in a COVID Communion were reminded that they must keep their bodies separate from the bodies of others, that it

1 *The Daily Telegraph*, 17 May 2020. Report by Johannes Lowe.

might bring them disease if they share one bread. For the devout who believe in the Real Presence, it was perhaps particularly distressing to see hand sanitising before receiving the Host, not out of reverence for the Body of Christ, but because it was a material health hazard.

COVID Communion highlighted, in surprising ways, two topics that we would like to consider in relation to medieval theatre's staging of the Eucharist: the complicated choreography of the participants and the multivalent materiality of the props involved. Theatre as a medium can allow performers and audiences to experience in time and space the relationships between Old Testament Passover and New Testament Last Supper, and between both of these and contemporary practice around the consumption of the Host. Clothing, movement, activity, or gesture, and performance locations and their implications or connotations, can all be mobilised to create a blend of these different occasions and activities, in which times and places are superimposed on one another. We would like to explore these issues in two very different plays: the first, better-known, example is N. Town Play 27, which stages the Last Supper in such a way as to draw attention to its roots in the Old Testament Passover as well as its future in the mass; the second, probably less familiar, example is the convent drama *Le jeu de pèlerinage humaine*, a verse morality play based on part of the first recension of Guillaume de Deguileville's c.1330 *Pèlerinage de Vie Humaine* (usually translated as *The Pilgrimage of the Life of Man*, though more literally meaning *The Pilgrimage of Human Life*) that was written and performed by Carmelite nuns in Huy (in modern-day Belgium) in the late fifteenth century. This play survives in the convent's manuscript playbook, which contains five complete plays: two of these dramatise Biblical material, and three are allegorical; of these three the *jeu de pèlerinage humaine* ('the play of the human pilgrimage') adapts closely an allegorical verse narrative for performance purposes.² The convent composers adapt Deguileville's text carefully, removing

2 Olivia Robinson 'Chantilly, Musée Condé MS 617: Mystères as Convent Drama' *Essays on Les Mystères: Studies in Genre, Text and Theatricality* edited Peter Happé and Wim Hüsken (Leiden: Brill-Rodopi, 2012) 93–108, and Aurélie Blanc and Olivia Robinson 'The Huy Nativity from the Seventeenth to the Twenty-First Century: Translation, Play-Back and Pray-Back' *Medieval English Theatre* 40 (2019) 66–97 offer further discussion of the Huy convent, its playbook, and some of its theatre. The two remaining allegorical plays in the manuscript are entitled *le Jeu des sept pechiés et des sept vertus*, and *l'Alliance de foy et de loyauté* ('the play of the seven sins and the seven virtues'; 'the alliance of faith and loyalty').

passages of description to leave dialogue among various personifications, thus drawing attention to the performative potential of Deguileville's multi-voiced allegory, but also leaving open the questions of whether, or how much, performers may have incorporated the non-dialogic aspects and descriptions of Deguileville's work into their performance(s). The section of the *Pèlerinage* that has been chosen for adaptation in the *jeu* covers discussion and debate among a range of allegorical characters concerning the nature and workings of the Eucharist: it therefore forms an intriguing counterpart to N. Town's treatment of the Last Supper and its significations.

Blocking the Last Supper in N. Town

N. Town, a collection of plays from various sources drawn together in a manuscript of the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century, possibly in imitation of the civic cycles, has the most developed and, in Rosemary Woolf's opinion at least, the most successful presentation of the Last Supper in medieval English theatre.³ The play conflates two events entirely separate in the Gospels: the Passover supper and the meal, two days before Passover, at the house of Simon the Leper in Bethany, at which a woman anoints Christ with oil.⁴ Although this conflation seems to be unique in the English dramatic tradition, it is perhaps justified by Gregory the Great's explicit connection between the foot-washing of the Last Supper and the scene in Bethany, typologically linked to Christ's death;⁵ a few plays in the French and German traditions have Simon as the host of the Last Supper,⁶ and the two dinners are presented as symbolically parallel in a German play of the Last Supper copied in the

3 Rosemary Woolf *The English Mystery Plays* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972) 234–7. N. Town is here cited from *The N-Town Play Cotton MS Vespasian D.8* edited Stephen Spector, 2 vols *EETS SS 11* and *12* (1991). Play 27, the Last Supper, occupies pages 264–85 of volume 1, and is cited here by line number. Spector calls N. Town Play 27 'the most elaborately detailed and reconstituted portrayal of the Last Supper in the Middle English drama' (2: 495).

4 See Mark 14: 1.

5 See Gregorius Magnus *Opera Omnia: PL 78* (1849) cols 725–850, cols 766–7.

6 See Yumi Dohi *Das Abendmahl im spätmittelalterlichen Drama. Eine Untersuchung der Darstellungsprinzipien der Abendmahlslehre in den englischen Mystery Cycle und ihren Vorlagen mit den französischen und den deutschsprachigen biblischen Spielen* (Europäische Hochschulschriften series 18 volume 95; Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2000) 327–9.

late fourteenth century in Silesian dialect.⁷ The N. Town play also has Christ drive seven demons out of the woman, here identified as Mary Magdalen, at this dinner, though in the gospels this is again a separate incident (and indeed it occurs on interpolated leaves in the N. Town manuscript).⁸ Simon *comyth ... owt of his hous to welcome Cryst* (68 sd) and Christ, having assured Simon that he will receive the bliss of heaven, enters that house and eats the Paschal lamb that is the Passover meal. Peter and John discuss the meal as Jesus' *sopere* (40) and his *Pasch* (44), which would indicate a Passover meal, but they also refer to the event, anachronistically, as *Maundé* (17), as does Jesus (366): *Maundy* is a contraction of the Latin *mandatum novum*, citing Christ's words that he is giving the disciples a 'new commandment', and it is the name given to the day before Good Friday on which the feet of the poor were washed in imitation of Christ's washing his disciples' feet and charitable coins were distributed. Given N. Town's relative lack of interest in the foot-washing,⁹ the word here seems primarily to signal the liturgical day, Maundy Thursday, as the day on which the Last Supper is commemorated.

- 7 See Cora Diel "Let Me Have the First Drink": Two Meals and One Table in the *Prague Ludus de Cena Domini* *European Medieval Drama* 12 (2017) 1–20. Diel hypothesises (16) that this play was written for the parish of St Mary Magdalene in the city of Wroclaw, to celebrate the feasts of the Conversion of Mary Magdalene and Maundy Thursday coinciding in either 1390 or 1401.
- 8 All four Gospels tell of the woman who anoints Jesus while he dines at Simon's house, but only John identifies the woman as Mary Magdalen (see Mark 14: 3–9, Matthew 26: 6–10, Luke 7: 35–50, John 12: 1–8). Luke 8: 2 and Mark 16: 9 identify Mary Magdalen as the woman from whom seven demons had been driven out, though neither presents this as happening during the dinner at Simon's house. In the Prague *Ludus* Mary states that she has been delivered from seven demons but it is not clear whether this action happens during the scene: see J.H. Kuné "In the Beginning was the Word ..." *Das Prager Abendmahlspiel: The Words Rendered into Action and Images* *Neophilologus* 87: 1 (2003) 79–96, at 86. Spector demonstrates (*N-Town Play* 495) that the Mary Magdalen episodes are interpolations, part of the 'O' quire added into the N. Town MS, but the choice to set the Last Supper at Simon the Leper's house is part of the play's original plan.
- 9 The foot-washing is presented at the end of N. Town's *Last Supper* play, but fairly briefly: Jesus declares that he will show 'another exawmpyl' of how to 'leve in charyté' (512–13); the foot-washing and discussion of it are completed within the next thirty lines (although of course the action itself would have occupied some time, particularly if Jesus did indeed wash each Disciple's feet). This contrasts with the number of lines, in excess of a hundred, devoted to the bread and wine.

The stage direction calls for simultaneous staging with separate mansions or scaffolds:

Here Cryst enteryth into þe hous with his disciplis and ete þe paschal lomb; and in þe menetyme þe counsel hous beforneyd xal sodeynly onclose schewyng þe bushopys, prestys and jewgys syttyng in here astat lych as it were a convocacyon 76 sd

From this it seems that Christ and his disciples are visible on a separate stage, eating the lamb, during the action of the Conspiracy among Annas, Caiphas, Gamalyel, Rewfyn, and Leyon that occupies lines 77–140. Attention then returns to Simon’s house as Mary Magdalen approaches Christ and anoints his feet with oil, and he casts ‘vij develys’ (174) out of her – after which he is apparently tired and hungry: *Here Cryst restyth and etyth a lytyl ... syttyng ...* (204 sd). It is not specified what he eats here, however. Jesus then predicts his betrayal, and Judas travels through *þe place* (268 sd) to meet the Conspirators.¹⁰ On his returning *sotylly whereas he cam fro the Conspirators partyn in þe place* and, in an apparently rather dramatic reveal, we return to Christ and his Disciples at dinner:

And than xal þe place þer Cryst is in sodeynly vnclose rownd abowtyn shewyng Cryst syttyng at þe table and hese dyscypulis ech in ere degré 348 sd

The sudden ‘unclosing’ implies that the stage has been hidden from view, perhaps with curtains,¹¹ during Judas’s encounter with the Conspirators, whereas during the earlier Conspiracy episode it was apparently open. There is no stage direction to indicate at what point the curtains are closed, and there is no immediately obvious practical reason for this – the scene is still a dinner, on the same stage and presumably using the

10 Hans-Jürgen Diller says ‘the interpolation allows ... the betrayed and the betrayers to be seen simultaneously, but the interpolated scene itself shows the “itinerant” on his way, allowing him to draw the audience into his confidence while crossing the *platea*’; *The Middle English Mystery Play: A Study in Dramatic Speech and Form* (Cambridge UP, 1992) 106. Diller’s idea is attractive but raises the question of at what point the place of the ‘betrayed’ is concealed in order to be ‘unclosed’ at 348 sd.

11 Philip Butterworth assumes that curtains were used: see his *Functions of Medieval English Stage Directions: Analysis and Catalogue* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2022) 144.

same table¹² – but there is perhaps a dramatic reason: when the stage is ‘suddenly’ opened again the audience are presented with an iconic ‘Last Supper’ image. A seating plan has been imposed, and the disciples have taken their seats (perhaps for the first time, as discussed below). Christ and his Disciples eating the lamb is now reformulated as Christ sitting at a table with his Disciples disposed around him according to a strict hierarchy: in comparing the staging of the meal at Bethany and the Last Supper in the Prague *Ludus Cora Dietl* notes, ‘the visual setting of all apostles and Christ taking a seat clearly plays on the association of the Last Supper’.¹³ The stage had been ‘closed’ in order to facilitate the reveal of this image which the audience must experience as a striking tableau,¹⁴ dining as spectacle, before Christ proceeds to discourse on ‘þis lambe that was set us beforn | þat we alle haue etyn in þis nyth’ (349–50).

Jesus declares that the Passover lamb was commanded of Moses and Aaron when they fled Egypt, it is eaten with unleavened bread (‘swete bredys’ 353) and bitter herbs (‘byttyr sokelyng’ 354), the head and the feet together (355), and that those present have their loins girded and their shoes on; they carry staves and eat in haste (357–60). Clearly, the meal has been celebrated in accordance with the Passover laws of Exodus 12: 8–11. But this means that the disciples have been *standing* during the eating of the paschal lamb (‘And as we stodyn so ded þei stond’, 357). The Gospels do not indicate that the disciples ate the Last Supper standing, but the idea appears in the pseudo-Bonaventuran *Meditationes Vitae Christi*, which Spector notes (498) is a model for the introduction of the Passover laws into the play, while Nicholas Love’s translation of the *Meditationes*, the *Mirroure of the Blessed Lyf of Jesu Christ*, an important source for N. Town, also alludes to the disciples standing and carrying staves at the Last Supper.¹⁵

12 In Lucerne the same table was used for the scenes of the meal at Simon’s house and the Last Supper, even though the scenes were there separated; see Kuné “In the Beginning” 95 note 23.

13 Dietl “Let Me Have the First Drink” 8.

14 Such ‘sudden’ actions are ‘contrived in such a way as to condition immediate after-effects’: Butterworth *Functions of Medieval English Stage Directions* 144.

15 Nicholas Love *Mirroure of the Blessed Lyf of Jesu Christ* edited Michael Sargent (Exeter Medieval Texts and Studies; Exeter UP, 2005) 146. Meg Twycross discusses relationships between drama and Love’s translation of ‘Bonaventure’ in the *Mirroure*, and notes that ‘Bonaventure’ tends to visualise ‘the gestures of the characters and their spatial relation to each other, so that the scene could be

How does this fit with the stage direction (348 sd) indicating that Christ and the Disciples are sitting in order around a table? They have finished the Passover meal and then sat down, presumably while the stage was closed. Certainly, they seem to have finished eating the lamb – ‘we alle haue etyn’ (350) – and indeed we ‘haue it ete’ with ‘swete bredys’ (353); and eaten it all, the head and the feet (355). But the meal is not over. Jesus now tells them:

Dis fygure xal sesse; anothyr xal folwe þerby,
 Weche xal be of my body, þat am 3oure hed,
 Weche xal be shewyd to 3ow be a mystery
 Of my flesche and blood in forme of bred. 361-4

Jesus makes explicit parallels between the ‘paschal lomb’ that they have eaten and himself as the ‘newe lomb’ (365–72), and then picks up an *oblé* (communion wafer, 372 sd) and looks up to heaven, thanking His Father ‘þat þu wylt shew þis mystery’ (378) of Transubstantiation: ‘Of þis þat was bred is mad my body’ (380). He then allegorises the physical details of the ritual of the Old Law as the spiritual ones of the New: He himself is the Lamb of God – ‘Ecce Agnus Dey’ (392); the sweet bread is ‘loue and charyté’ (399); the ‘byttyr sokelyng’ is ‘byttyr contrycyon’ (404); the head and feet are his Godhead and his Humanity (406–7); the girdle is chastity (417–20); the shoes are ‘exaumpyl of vertuis leuyng’ (422) handed down by their ancestors, with which they will follow in his footsteps (424); and the staff is a readiness to preach (428).¹⁶ Having explained the change of focus from carnal to spiritual, Jesus then tells them ‘Now I wyl fede 3ow all with awngellys mete’ (438), apparently the Eucharistic wafer, the *oblé*, which Peter describes as ‘gostly sustenawns’ (441).

To receive this they must ‘come forth seryattly’ – i.e. they go up to Christ in turn, like communicants. After Judas has received he ‘xal syt þer he was’ (457 sd) – so presumably all the Disciples return to their places. Judas then leaves and Jesus offers the Disciples his blood:

transferred onto the stage almost intact’; ‘Books for the Unlearned’ in Twycross *The Materials of Early Theatre: Sources, Images, and Performance* edited Sarah Carpenter and Pamela King (Variorum Collected Studies; London: Routledge, 2018) 135–84 at 141.

16 This exposition follows closely Rabanus Maurus’ *Commentariorum in Exodum, Liber I: PL 108* (1951) cols 48–52.

But now in þe memory of my Passyon ...
 3e xal drynk myn blood with gret devocyon ...
 Takyth þese chalys of þe newe testament ...

Than xal þe dysciplys com and take þe blod ... 482–9 and sd

The stage directions for consumption through the whole sequence thus seem to require:

- Paschal Lamb, served with unleavened bread and bitter herbs (eaten by Jesus and the disciples, standing);
- Some unspecified restorative food, eaten by Jesus, sitting;

after which the scaffold is ‘closed’. It is then opened for:

- The dramatic reveal of Christ and his Disciples seated in order around the table, while Christ talks about the Passover lamb but holds a Host;
- ‘Angels’ Meat’, actually the *oblé*, to receive which the Disciples go up to Jesus in turn.

Then a pause, during which the Disciples return to their seats;

- Finally ‘blood’, to receive which the Disciples, apart from Judas, go up to Jesus in turn.

This is, in other words, a Passover meal, staged as a Passover meal, followed by a Eucharist, staged as a Eucharist with the communicants going up to the priest to receive the wafer and wine. The unspecified restorative food complicates the picture, as it fits the ‘blocking’ requirements of neither Passover nor Eucharist; it seems to be a moment of unritualised consumption, a simple dinner at Simon’s house, in between the two ritual meals. Whatever Jesus eats at this moment cannot be the Passover lamb, as the stage direction specifies that he is *syttyng* (204 sd); furthermore, Mary Magdalen anoints him in this scene, and most representations in the visual arts of the anointing present Jesus sitting at a table and Mary kneeling before him.¹⁷ It is thus confusing that when we next see Jesus he is talking again about the Passover Lamb they have eaten that night (350), though he seems to have fitted in at least a snack since then; however, the confusing snack occurs in the interpolated O quire, the contents of which were perhaps imperfectly adapted to

17 Kuné “‘In the Beginning’” 84–5.

their new context.¹⁸ And, although *Jesus* has been seen seated before the dramatic reveal, the disciples, perhaps, have not, and it is the ordered seating of the disciples that is visually new.

Then, the Eucharistic staging, while theologically conventional in making the connections among Passover meal, Last Supper, and Mass, might be thought a more curious choice theatrically: the audience of *N. Town* watch the rather repetitive scene of each communicant receiving in turn – furthermore, since the disciples do not receive the wafer and wine at the same time, each Disciple must go forward to receive twice. *N. Town* perhaps here requires an audience attention somewhat different from that we now expect of the theatrical audience: indeed, members of the audience observe not drama but liturgy, and therefore must accept the different rhythm of liturgical time, the different nature of liturgical action. The Eucharist is not a spectator sport but requires participation; at the same time, ‘participation’ in the liturgy is not the same as ‘participation’ in a play. Matthew Cheung-Salisbury observes that medieval liturgy is characterised by ‘the *apparent* non-participation of lay people’ [*italics ours*] but that ‘It would be unheard of in the Middle Ages to restrict the notion of participation in the liturgy to vocalization’.¹⁹ Nicholas Orme explains that most people in medieval England did not receive communion very often, but attended Mass to see the Elevation of the Host, the moment which became known as ‘seeing God’ and ‘seeing one’s Maker’:²⁰ ‘for most people, most of the time the Host was something to be seen, not to be consumed’.²¹ As Cheung-Salisbury describes, the physical and auditory separation of the ministers in the sanctuary, the choir in the stalls, and the congregation in the nave meant that these three groups experienced the same service in different ways, but, although it was ‘not very easy for one segment to see what was going on in another’,²² it was essential, according to Orme, that the Elevation be visible: hence ‘the piercing of windows in the chancel screen ... and the openings of squints

18 See Spector *N-Town* 2: 496–7 note 27 (on lines 141–268 on the O quire).

19 *Medieval Latin Liturgy in English Translation* edited Matthew Cheung-Salisbury (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2017) 2.

20 Nicholas Orme *Going to Church in Medieval England* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2021) 243.

21 Eamon Duffy *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400–1580* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1992) 95.

22 Cheung-Salisbury *Medieval Latin Liturgy* 2.

into transepts'.²³ People participated in the Mass by watching, and the blocking of N. Town as a Mass at this point would quite probably have activated, in an audience strongly accustomed to such involvement in the Mass, expectations and modes of attention more appropriate to the liturgy than to the theatre.²⁴

As Kuné discusses, in many representations of the Last Supper in the visual arts 'the institution of the Eucharist is the subject'.²⁵ In terms of exegetical levels, this is complicated: the Mass invites us to see Christ's suffering body as the allegorical fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies of sacrifice, while also asking us to read the bread that Christ identifies as his body anagogically, as playing a role in the salvation of souls. Rosemary Woolf suggests that the N. Town *Passion Play's* Last Supper resembles Fra Angelico's fresco in San Marco, which presents liturgical act embedded within historical or biblical Last Supper.²⁶

Here Jesus offers the Host to his disciples in a scene at once domestic and liturgical: domesticity is suggested by a well, visible through an arched doorway in the background, benches and low wooden stools around a table that is covered in a white cloth, and some disciples sitting at the table;²⁷ a liturgical act is suggested as some of the disciples are kneeling in the foreground, away from the table; there is no food laid on the table, only a ciborium; Christ holds the Eucharistic wafer and offers it into the mouth of one disciple. Woolf writes: "This is in fact not the historical Last Supper but a liturgical act of communion" (234), but we would suggest that it is not one or the other, but, rather, both. Christ and

23 Orme *Going to Church* 243.

24 Even for modern audiences and the non-devout, this staging of the Mass can be surprisingly engaging: Meg Twycross recalls a production directed by Lynette Muir in which she was absorbed by the 'total conviction' of the participants, who at this point were perhaps not 'acting' in the conventional sense but behaving as they did at church (private correspondence).

25 Kuné "In the Beginning" 83. This is in spite of the fact that only the Synoptic Gospels narrate the institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper: John only describes the washing of feet.

26 Woolf *English Mystery Plays* 234.

27 Woolf states that 'the disciples are not seated at a meal, but standing or kneeling they await the Host which Christ is putting into each disciple's mouth in turn' (234). She does not mention that the majority of the disciples are arranged around a table, and indeed those on the left of the painting – perhaps those who have already received the host – are in fact clearly seated on a bench at the table.



FIG. 1. Fra Angelico *The Last Supper*. Florence: Museo San Marco, fresco 1437–46. Image online at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Fra_Angelico_015.jpg>. Reproduced under the terms of the GNU Free Documentation Licence 1.3.

the disciples wear robes, not vestments, and they are gathered not in a church²⁸ but in an ‘upper room’, as suggested by the roof arches. In fact, this Last Supper looks to be taking place in a room within the Florentine monastery of San Marco on whose walls it appears – the windows depicted resemble those of the monastery, and the view through them resembles that across the cloisters of San Marco. Fra Angelico visually conflates the Last Supper and the Mass that re-enacts it, but he also conflates the time and space of Christ and the disciples with the time

28 Coletti argues of Joos van Gent’s altarpiece painted for the Brotherhood of Corpus Domini in Urbino that the church setting ‘transforms the participants in the Last Supper into the celebrant and communicants of a Eucharistic service’; Theresa Coletti ‘Sacrament and Sacrifice in N-Town Passion’ *Mediaevalia* 7 (1981) 239–64, at 245.

and space of the monks' domestic lives, suggesting, perhaps, Christ's immanence in the daily routine, and in the mundane meal, not only in the Mass in a church.

Does Fra Angelico's painting in fact help us to understand N. Town, as Woolf suggests? There is, unsurprisingly, no evidence that the anonymous writer of an East Anglian play was directly influenced by a fresco in a Florentine monastery: the point is perhaps that the painting realises visually a conflation of exegetical levels that the text of N. Town also reflects. And, of course, a play is not simply a text on a page but a script for performance: as we have seen, N. Town in performance appears to require both seats and a dining table, and the Mass-like blocking of the disciples, that can be seen in Fra Angelico's painting. But although the several small stages on which N. Town was staged may each in themselves have been elaborate, and indeed could create intimacy for individual scenes,²⁹ the place-and-scaffold requirements of the N. Town *Passion Plays* as a whole, and especially their emphasis on playing in the place, would render impossible the sense of intimate and immediate location that Fra Angelico achieves; in Fra Angelico's painting, the world beyond the Upper Room is glimpsed only through doorways and windows, where in a place and scaffold performance it is always visible, all around the scaffold.³⁰ Even if it were performed in some sort of dining hall (which is highly unlikely),³¹ N. Town's upper room could not be mapped onto the entirety of that hall, co-terminous with it, since the playing area must also accommodate the scenes of Conspiracy in other stages; for the same reason, in the unlikely event that it were performed in a church, N. Town's Last Supper could not entirely be equated with

- 29 See, for example, the substantial staging requirements of play 31, *Satan and Pilate's Wife*, which calls for a raised scaffold with substantial scenery including a curtain and a bed: *Here shal the devyl gon to Pylatys Wyf. The corteyn drawyn as she lyth in bedde, and he shal no dene make, but she shal, sone after that he is come in, makyn a rewly noyse, coming and rennyng of the schaffald. And her shert and her kyrtyl in her hand, and sche shal come beforn Pylat leke a mad woman* (57 sd).
- 30 Meg Twycross discusses the sometimes distracting effect of movement in the place, or *platea*, in her review of the Toronto Passion Play in *Medieval English Theatre* 3: 2 (1981) 122–31.
- 31 On the possibilities of indoor and outdoor staging for different sections of N. Town, see Clare Smout and Elisabeth Dutton, with Matthew Cheung-Salisbury 'Staging the N-Town Plays: Theatre and Liturgy' *Research Opportunities in Medieval and Renaissance Drama* 49 (2010) 1–30.

the Masses held there at the high altar, because the space of the scaffold creates an artificial – theatrical – limit to the extent of the ‘upper room’.³²

N. Town also seems to call for a lamb, which is nowhere to be seen in Fra Angelico’s painting (we will return to the question of props presently), and furthermore requires that the lamb be consumed by the Disciples standing, before they sit to eat bread. N. Town’s staging of the Last Supper looks backwards, to the Old Testament roots of the Passover meal, before it looks forwards to the Mass which the Last Supper institutes. This exegetical level is missing from Fra Angelico’s painting entirely, and indeed from most French, Flemish, or English medieval representations of the Last Supper: we have been unable to find any in which the disciples eat standing,³³ though there are many that present lamb on the table, as we will discuss below.

Staging the Eucharist at Huy

In the *Pèlerinage* play, the sisters draw on a fairly early section from the first book of Deguileville’s allegorical narrative, in which the narrating Pilgrim character enters the house of the lady named *Grace Dieu* (‘The Grace of God’) and observes the preparations for a lavish meal there.³⁴ A table is prepared by the servants of a figure who represents, simultaneously, the Old Law and the New; he is sometimes referred to as ‘Moses’, and sometimes as a minister or vicar of Moses – a bishop or a pope. Grace Dieu assists the Moses-bishop by performing a miracle at

32 The effect of place-and-scaffold staging is in this respect very different from that of, for example, interludes played without multiple scaffolds in dining halls, where the hall can be simultaneously the hall itself and e.g. Ancient Rome; see Elisabeth Dutton ‘Secular Medieval Drama’ in *The Oxford Handbook to Medieval Literature* edited Elaine Treharne and Greg Walker (Oxford UP, 2010) 384–94.

33 In typological works, such as Dieric Bout’s *Holy Sacrament* altarpiece at Sint Pieterskerk, Leuven, and the *Speculum Humanae Salvationis*, this is presented as a separate though adjacent image. See, for the altarpiece, the Web Gallery of Art at <https://www.wga.hu/html_m/b/bouts/dirk_e/lastsupp/index.html>; for the block book illustration, *The Mirour of Mans Saluacioune: a Middle English translation of the Speculum Humanae Salvationis* edited Avril Henry (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1986) 104.

34 See Guillaume de Deguileville *Le pèlerinage de vie humaine* edited J.J. Stürzinger (London: Roxburghe Club, 1893) 30–2, 45–6. Medieval theology considered human beings as ‘wayfarers or wanderers (*viatores*) struggling with the consequences of sin and moving toward their eternal destinies’; Marilyn McCord Adams *Some Later Medieval Theories of the Eucharist* (Oxford UP, 2010) 35.

his request: the bread laid out for the meal is transformed into living flesh, and the wine into red blood. This is, of course, much easier said (written) than done (staged): Deguileville's narrative text can describe a miracle, but a play that turns his text to theatre must struggle to realise it. However, the *Pèlerinage* script records no stage directions or rubrics, but only the lines of each character, so stage action and props must be extrapolated.³⁵

The script begins with Pilgrim asking Lady Reason to teach him about *ce maingier* ('that meal', 4) and Reason complaining in reply that the transformation of bread into *char vive* ('living flesh') and of wine into blood is *Contre Nature et ses usage* ('against Nature and her laws', 14–16).³⁶ In Deguileville's poem, in an episode that occurs immediately before the beginning of the play, Moses wants to eat flesh and blood rather than bread and wine:

... nulle chose n'i avoit
 Fors pain et vin tant seulement,
 N'estoit pas mes a son talent;
 Char vouloit avoir a mengier
 Et sanc avec pour effacier
 La vieille loi qui dit auoit
 Que nul sang mengier ne devoit.³⁷

35 This is, of course, far from unusual in medieval drama: the script, which survives because written down, can represent only a tiny fraction of the performance and give little clue as to the accompanying spectacle. For an egregious example in medieval English drama, see Meg Twycross and Elisabeth Dutton 'Lydgate's "Mumming for the Mercers of London"' in *The Medieval Merchant: Proceedings of the 2012 Harlaxton Symposium* edited Caroline M. Barron and Anne F. Sutton (Harlaxton Medieval Studies 24; Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2014) 310–49.

36 The play is here cited from *Recueil général de moralités d'expression française, Vol 1* edited Marie Bouhaik-Gironès, Estelle Doudet, and Alan Hindley (Bibliothèque du théâtre français 9; Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2012) 589–648. The English translation cited is that prepared by Aurélie Blanc and Olivia Robinson as part of the Medieval Convent Drama Project; this translation will be published in 2024 edited Olivia Robinson, Aurélie Blanc, Elisabeth Dutton, and Matthew Cheung-Salisbury. There is no reason to suppose the script is acephalous, and it is introduced in the manuscript as follows: *Chi comenche le jeux de pelerinage humaine et premirement parole le Pelerin a dame Rayson et dist* ('Here begins the play of the human pilgrimage, and firstly the Pilgrim speaks to Lady Reason, and says'); Chantilly: Bibliothèque et Archives du Château MS 617, fol. 24r.

37 *Le Pèlerinage* edited Stürzinger 45–6, lines 1437–41.

‘there was nothing there [i.e. for his meal] except bread and wine only, [and] this food was not to his liking; he wanted to have meat to eat, and blood with it, in order to go against the Old Law, which had said that one must not eat blood.’

Even though ostensibly an Old Testament character, he is deliberately flouting the Old Law – ‘flesh with blood ye shall not eat’ – in favour of the New.³⁸ It also, of course, leads to a Eucharistic miracle, engineered by Grace Dieu, that apparently makes visible the mystery of Transubstantiation. We discuss below how this might have been represented.

The editors of the play propose that the deictic *ce* is accompanied by a gesture from Pilgrim towards the bread and wine of communion;³⁹ it certainly seems that there must be some sort of meal onstage, and one that includes bread and wine, though its Eucharistic status has only been implied by Lady Reason’s lines. The editors of the play suggest that a mimed scene of the Elevation of the Host may have originally preceded the first lines of the play as it survives; the play would thus offer a ‘paralitururgical meditation’.⁴⁰ We might be inclined to wonder if a mimed Eucharist would have been considered appropriate, or even possible, for a group of women religious to perform; however, this may well reveal more about our own preconceptions than about medieval conditions and practices, at least in some convents: performative Mass-like ceremonies omitting the sacrament of the Eucharist and involving pre-consecrated Hosts were certainly undertaken by nuns themselves in Spanish and

38 Genesis 9: 4 (God’s instructions to Noah); and Leviticus 7: 26 ‘You shall not eat the blood of any creature whatsoever, whether of birds or beasts’; 17: 14 ‘You shall not eat the blood of any flesh at all, because the life of the flesh is in the blood, and whosoever eateth it, shall be cut off’ (God’s instructions to Moses); Douai/Rheims translation.

39 *Recueil général* edited Bouhaik-Gironès and others, 589 note 3; see also the discussion in Olivia Robinson ‘Performance-Based Research in the Medieval Convent’ *European Medieval Drama* 21 (2018 for 2017) 21–42, 31–3.

40 *Le démonstratif ce a un sens déictique fort: le Pèlerin fait un geste vers le pain et le vin de communion. Il est possible qu’une scène d’Élevation, réelle ou plus certainement mimée, ait précédé le début de la pièce, qui s’offre ainsi comme une méditation paraliturgique* (‘The demonstrative *this* has a strong deictic force: the Pilgrim gestures towards the bread and wine of communion. It is possible that an Elevation scene, whether real, or more likely, mimed, preceded the beginning of the play, which thus would take the form of a paralitururgical meditation’; *Recueil général* 589 note 3).

Italian convents, including the royal house of Las Huelgas in Burgos.⁴¹ It is also possible, of course, that the play began with a more literal feast that included perhaps some special stage effect for the Moses-bishop's miracle, and that Pilgrim gestures towards a banquet. Lady Reason's words, while describing the 'unnatural' act of transubstantiation, remind us of the overlap between Eucharist and courtly or lavish feast: the wine that has been turned into blood is still explicitly *son beuvrage*, his beverage or drink – for her, the blood still retains its social function as wine, the meal is still a meal, even as it is also, of course, something else.

This distinction opens up the central question of the play: what is the nature of the Eucharist? Discussion heads in a number of directions: the hierarchical relationship between Nature and Divine Grace (represented here by the character Grace Dieu); the appropriate attitude of the sinner preparing for Mass; Aristotelian natural philosophy;⁴² an anatomisation of the virtues of the Christian pilgrim. As different characters debate these questions in abstract or conceptual terms, with more or less bad temper, the Moses-bishop character's opening 'meal' sometimes recedes from view, though its visual residue would presumably remain in performance, and discussion always eventually returns to it. It is first brought back into focus with the introduction of two characters who mediate access to the Eucharist: Penitence and Charity. Penitence describes *La table Moysi* ('the table of Moses', 321) as *chi* ('here', 320) signalling the moment at which the silent Eucharistic spectacle with which the play (possibly) began is integrated fully into its action, its table becoming an object with which Penitence and Charity physically interact, rather than being something that all characters observe from one side or silently watch alongside the audience.⁴³ Penitence and Charity situate themselves physically *Devant la table Moysi* ('in front of the table of Moses', 321), between it and the audience/Pilgrim; Penitence identifies herself as the *chancelier* ('chancellor', 324) of the Eucharistic

41 See David Catalunya 'The Customary of the Royal Convent of Las Huelgas of Burgos: Female Liturgy, Female Scribes' *Medievalia 20: 1* (2017) 91-160; downloadable from <https://www.academia.edu/27509173/The_Customary_of_the_Royal_Convent_of_Las_Huelgas_of_Burgos_Female_Liturgy_Female_Scribes>.

42 Aristotle appears as a character in the play. On the Aristotelian foundations of medieval theories of the Eucharist, see Adams *Some Later Medieval Theories* 4-28.

43 Robinson 'Performance-Based Research' 34 discusses this scene as a form of embodied or experiential learning for participants.

Host, indicating her juridical control of it,⁴⁴ and its *portier* ('porter', 325), indicating that she controls physical access to it; she then warns Pilgrim that nobody should approach it without her (*Sens moy approchier ne deveis*; 'without me, you should not approach', 326). Charity explains that she is the *almonier* ('almoner', 396) of the Host and its *dispensier* ('steward', 397) – that is, the person charged with dispensing it;⁴⁵ she then warns that she will be very offended by anyone who approaches it without *le joweal de paix* ('the jewel of peace', 409).

The blocking here seems to suggest again the action of a Mass, in which the congregation approach the altar to receive the Host. It is unlikely that Penitence or Charity actually distributes the Host: almost certainly this would be done by the priestly Moses character, as explained in Deguileville's text and demonstrated in the manuscript illustrations that accompany Deguileville.⁴⁶ These generally show at the altar a figure in a mitre, thus a bishop that could not be identified as Moses except by the text,⁴⁷ with a crowned woman, Grace Dieu: in all cases it is the

- 44 Bouhaïk-Gironès and others discuss the double sense of the term *chauncelier*: *Lié à sa fonction d'enseignante, il la désigne comme une autorité délivrant, après examen, une récompense, ici la communion. Lié à son rôle de gardienne, il lui donne le statut de responsable du sceau, de la garantie de foi que représentent le droit de communier* ('Linked to her function as a teacher, the term *chauncelier* designates her as an authority who delivers, after examination, a reward, here communion. Linked to her role as guardian, the term gives her the role of the keeper of the seal, and of the guarantor of faith, represented by the right to receive communion'; 604 note 1).
- 45 Bouhaïk-Gironès and others explain that the double sense here parallels that of Penitence's *chancelier*: *le dispensier désigne l'intendant qui distribue la richesse; au sense spirituel, il renvoie au «dispensateur des mystères», qu'est le fidèle animé par l'esprit charitable du partage et la foi* ('the *dispensier* designates the steward who distributes riches; on a spiritual level, it is connected to the "dispenser of the mysteries": that is, the faithful who are animated by the charitable spirit of sharing and by faith'; 607 note 2). See I Corinthians 4: 1–2.
- 46 Having passed by Penitence and Charité, the pilgrims then *du relief se receurent* | *Le quel Moises leur donna* | *Si com Charité l'ordenna* ('received relief, which Moses gave to them, just as Charity had ordered it'); *Pèlerinage* edited Stürzinger lines 2650–52.
- 47 An exception is the late fifteenth-century Parisian manuscript Soissons MS BM 0208 (194), which contains a prose reworking of Deguileville's *Pèlerinage* with an extensive programme of illuminations. On fol. 30v this manuscript shows a horned Moses administering wafers across an altar to kneeling pilgrims, while Grace Dieu, also behind the altar, chats to Pilgrim on one side. See Géraldine



FIG. 2. 'Moses', accompanied by Grace Dieu, distributes wafers to kneeling pilgrims. BNF MS Français 1577 (1345–77) fol 7r detail. Guillaume de Deguileville *Pèlerinage de la vie humaine*. Image online at <<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b10544595h/f19.item>> and used in compliance with the copyright rules of the Bibliothèque nationale de France.

bishop who distributes the Host. In the mid-fourteenth-century BNF MS Français 1577, once owned by Louis XIV, fol. 7r, a bishop stands in front of the altar⁴⁸ to distribute wafers to kneeling pilgrims; beside him a haloed lady Grace Dieu (identified in the illumination's rubric) assists.⁴⁹

Veysseyre 'Soissons, Bibliothèque municipale, 0208 (194)' in the Jonas-IRHT/CNRS database (permalink <<http://jonas.irht.cnrs.fr/manuscrit/57867>>) and for manuscript images: <<http://initiale.irht.cnrs.fr/codex/5113>> and <<https://bvmm.irht.cnrs.fr/iiif/6382/canvas/canvas-1236412/view>>.

48 Between the bishop and the pilgrims what appears to be another table is more likely to be the long cloth or 'houceling towel' that was stretched along in front of communicants to avoid crumbs falling to the floor – see Duffy *Stripping of the Altars* 94.

49 On this manuscript, see Géraldine Veysseyre 'Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Manuscrits, fr. 01577' in the Jonas-IRHT/CNRS database (permalink

Of course, if the nuns played all of the roles, then Moses would here be played by a woman and there is still some potential for subversion of gender roles in relation to the Mass. But what exactly are Penitence and Charity doing? Perhaps they simply lead communicants up to the altar to receive the Host. The mid-fifteenth-century BN MS Français 376, once owned by Charles VIII, fol. 14r, shows these two female figures leading a group of pilgrims towards a bishop, Moses, who receives a document from the hands of Charity.⁵⁰ This episode is included in the play: the document is presumably the Charter of Christ, read out and displayed by Charity, *le testament que Nostre Seigneur faist deuant sa mort* ('the testament which our Lord made before his death', 367 rubric): the Charter, and Charity's discussion of it, explain how, through Christ's love for mankind, he bestowed upon them as an inheritance the jewel of peace: *Le dons de pais: c'est mon joweal* ('the gift of peace: it is my jewel', 374) which is necessary for access to the Host. However, neither altar nor Host appears in this manuscript illustration. Possibly, some more pointed interaction is required between communicants and Penitence and Charity. In her opening speech, Penitence explains the significance of the props she carries, namely the mallet, the broom, and the rod: *De mailhet debrise et defrosse | Par contricion et angousse Les cuer* ('with the mallet I break down human hearts with contrition and anguish', 236–8); with the broom she sweeps clean the senses (272–84); with the rod she chastises the sinner (300–14). Did the nuns, prompted by these earlier lines of Penitence and Charity, enact some wordless ceremony by which the communicants approaching the altar were first touched by the rods of Penitence and then handed a document, or possibly a jewel (*joweal*) or even a toy (*jouet*) by Charity?⁵¹ Given the general lack of stage directions

<<http://jonas.irht.cnrs.fr/manuscrit/73629>> and for manuscript image: <<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b10544595h/f19.item>>.

50 On this manuscript, see Géraldine Veyssière 'Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Manuscrits, fr. 00376' in the Jonas-IRHT/CNRS database (permalink <<http://jonas.irht.cnrs.fr/manuscrit/73618>>) and for manuscript image <<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b84702013/f31.item>>.

51 Deguileville offers a complicated pun on *joweal* ('jewel') and *jouet* ('toy'). The plaything of Christ as a child was also 'Peace'. It is often depicted in Deguileville manuscripts as a form of set square with the word PAX on it (Stürzinger offers a representative illustration at 79). Could this have been the form that a *joweal* took in performance?

in the play, we cannot be sure how exactly Penitence and Charity were involved in providing access to the Host.

That the Host must be approached, and that access is controlled by a porter, gives heavy significance to its location, which seems to define the space that it occupies. The realisation of the significance of the Host in spatial terms is reflected also in the evolving design of medieval churches, which, with the emergence of the Gothic style, increasingly separated congregants from the Host with altar rails and rood screens.⁵² Furthermore, Pilgrim's lines here indicate the presence of a large number of people, for he explains to Grace Dieu that *point n'enteng | Coment autant de gens suffier puit | Che relief, qui est si petit* ('I can't understand at all how so many people can be satisfied by this relief, which is so tiny', 413–15). Again, this short exclamation within the script gestures obliquely to a physical activity, spectacle, or experience that is not recorded or prompted in explicit instructions to performers within the script but that does take place in the source text: in Deguileville's *Pèlerinage* a crowd of pilgrims approach the 'table of Moses' and receive the Host, and those pilgrims who pass by Charity and Penance, and carry the jewel of peace, are completely satisfied by it, while those who hide from Charity and Penance remain hungry after eating the bread. When the play was staged by the Huy nuns the communicants may have been the sisters without speaking roles, who otherwise formed part of the audience for the play and who returned to their places in the audience just as the congregation return to their places after receiving the Host. This moment, if considered as theatre, would then constitute a striking form of audience participation, blurring the lines between actor and spectator by simulating the liturgy.

These two plays, perhaps performed at broadly the same historical moment but produced in different countries, languages, and contexts, nonetheless present a similar challenge in their staging: how do you present, live on stage, a meal that is also a staged Mass? Of course, there are many dramatisations of the Last Supper that also present it as a Passover or as anticipating the Mass,⁵³ but these two plays seem

52 This is discussed in Andrew Sofer *The Stage Life of Props* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003) 36–7.

53 In the English tradition, several of the Last Supper pageants seem to have been altered or censored as a result of the Reformation, and surviving dramatisations of the Eucharist are rare. The Towneley Plays present a *paske*, or Passover supper,

to create particular staging challenges through their attempt not just to allude to two things at once but actually to present them. Both plays depend heavily on the presence of a multi-referential table: in *N. Town*, the table of Simon of Bethany, the table of the Last Supper, and the altar used for the Eucharist; in the *Pèlerinage* play, the table of Moses and the Mass altar. In both plays, the function of the table is defined by the blocking of characters in relation to it. Those staging these plays must also decide on the nature of the props with which the table is laid.

Edible props of the Last Supper

In *N. Town*, what are Jesus and the Disciples actually eating and drinking at each point? What props are required? It seems clear that a lamb is involved: tempting though it might be to stage only the allegorical meaning rather than the literal, the insistence on ‘the paschal lamb’ of the Passover meal and the transition between it and the spiritual food of the Eucharist would make it difficult to use only bread. But how is that transition managed? When Jesus and the Disciples enter the house of Simon, they *ete þe paschal lomb* which he was specifically requested to prepare, and which, as we have seen, they eat standing. Reference to the details of the meal imply that a lamb must be presented on the table. When the scaffold is unclosed for the reveal of the iconic ‘Last Supper’, Jesus makes an explicit parallel between himself as the ‘newe lomb’ and the ‘paschal lomb’ that they have eaten (365–72), and then picks up the *oblé* (372 sd), a wafer. After expounding its allegorical significance, he

but the food is unspecified as either lamb or bread and the scene is preoccupied with the Conspiracy and betrayal by Judas; see *The Towneley Plays* edited Martin Stevens and A.C. Cawley, 2 vols *EETS SS 13 and 14* (1994) Play 20, 1 227–51. The York Play’s *Last Supper* pageant is defective: it has lost a leaf (perhaps deliberately?) between lines 89 and 90, possibly losing fifty-nine lines. The remaining portion contains the Passover meal with the lamb, but the Institution of the Eucharist is missing, and the focus of what remains becomes Jesus’ washing of his disciples’ feet (originally a separate pageant); see *The York Plays: A Critical Edition of the York Corpus Christi Play as recorded in British Library Additional MS 35290* edited Richard Beadle, 2 vols *EETS SS 23 and 24* (2009 and 2013 for 2011) Play 27, 1 224–9, and notes at 2 219–25. The Chester *Last Supper* features both Passover lamb and the words of Institution over bread and wine, but the disciples do not appear to go up to Jesus to receive them: indeed, everyone still seems to be seated at dinner, as Jesus is reclining with John sleeping in his lap (*Tunc accumbet Jesus ac Johannis in gremio dormit*; 80 sd); see *The Chester Mystery Cycle* edited R.M. Lumiansky and David Mills, 2 vols *EETS SS 3 and 9* (1974 and 1986) Play 15, 1 268–83.

tells the Disciples that he has now taught them how they shall eat their ‘paschal lombe, þat is my precyous body’ (438), and then offers them the *oblé*, now defined as angels’ meat and ‘gostly sustenawns’. It therefore seems possible that the lamb course, having been consumed ‘þe hed with þe fete’ (355) in the Passover meal before the opening of the stage, and now referred to only in the past tense, is no longer visible: the closing of the stage before the reveal provides the practical opportunity to substitute the wafer for the lamb. However, it is also possible that some trace of the lamb remains, since Christ refers to the lamb with the deictic ‘þis’ (349): this would accord with many representations in medieval art that feature wafer and lamb – or the gravy left in the lamb dish – at the same table, as we discuss below.

‘This’ lamb, as Christ indicates, is the lamb that *has been* eaten; the lamb ‘that is his body’ is what they *shall* eat, in the future. The complexity of the typological relationships between lamb and bread, Passover and Last Supper, are here caught up also with temporal questions about a changing symbol: Jesus explains that the Passover lamb *as a ‘fygure’* shall ‘sesse’, and ‘another shal folwe therby’ (361) which shall be ‘my flesch and blood in forme of bred.’ (364) Of course, the crucifixion, by which Christ became the sacrificial lamb, has not at this point in the play happened; the institution of the Eucharist has also not yet occurred, but will follow in this same scene, and Christ indicates that it is by the words that he speaks at that moment that the bread becomes his flesh (381–3). At the beginning of this scene, therefore, the bread has not yet become Christ’s flesh, nor has the new ‘figure’ of Christ as sacrificial lamb been brought into existence: the moment seems suspended, but of course must be staged, and it is not obvious what props should be present, nor are there explicit stage directions to help. By replacing lamb with wafer, a production may anticipate the institution of the Mass; by keeping both lamb and bread in sight of the audience, a production may remind the audience that it is the ‘figure’ that changes, but not the spiritual truth. The blood presents no problem, for Jesus’ lines specify a ‘chalys’ (486) which may or may not have been on the table throughout. And, of course, unless there are glass drinking vessels involved, the audience cannot see what is inside the chalice; nor would they in any case be able to differentiate between blood and wine simply by looking.

In the *Pèlerinage* play, bread becomes flesh. As we have seen, the play as it stands begins with the Pilgrim troubled about the miracle by which,

Reason explains, Grace Dieu and the Moses-priest have turned bread into living flesh and wine into blood:

... *char vive, de pain at fait,*
Et de vin, sanc, por son beuvrage,
Contre Nature et ses usage 14–16

‘He has made living flesh out of bread, and blood out of wine, for his drink, against Nature and her laws.’

If this scene was staged as part of the play, and if we are to take it literally, this would seem to suggest some striking sleight of hand. Wine into blood would not be difficult; but how in performance does bread become living flesh? It might seem economical to represent it with the Paschal Lamb. However, one drawback in using the roast lamb as a prop here is that ‘living flesh’ would not have been cooked: it must have demonstrated in some way that it was alive. This seems to be the solution in the illustration in MS Soissons BM 2028 (194), which presents the prose reworking of Deguileville’s text, where the scene is depicted with a nun (probably Reason) and the Pilgrim watching Grace Dieu and Moses discussing a plate of patently living lamb (fol. 17v). But in the play, as the Pilgrim later watches the distribution of the Eucharist, Grace Dieu expounds the event to him at some length, in a way that could be helpful. The *relief* which is given:

C’est char et sanc en verité,
Mains pain et vin est figureit,
Et voir est que fut jadis
En pain et vin , mais tu veis
En char et sanc mueir de vray
Par Moysen qu je aydaie. 428–33

‘It is in truth flesh and blood, but in the form (figure) of bread and wine; it is true that it once was bread and wine, but you have seen it actually changed into flesh and blood by Moses, with my help.’

Although four of his senses may declare that it is merely bread and wine, she says, they are deceptive: he must depend on his hearing, by which he has been told that it is flesh, the food of angels (440–59). It would seem from Pilgrim’s reference to the *si petit* (‘very small’) size of the *relief* that the *char vive* or ‘living flesh’ into which Grace Dieu and the Moses-bishop transformed the bread at the dining table is shown as a



FIG. 3. Moses and Grace Dieu at table with three others. Oxford: Bodleian Library MS Douce 300 fol. 13v. Guillaume de Deguileville *Pèlerinage de la vie humaine*. Online at <<https://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/objects/b891d227-826c-4db9-adc1-0165aa391511/surfaces/19f2f238-65e9-4e8e-b812-8bbe87cd2dbe/#>> © Digital Bodleian; reproduced under Creative Commons Licence CC-BY-NC 4.0.

communion wafer. This seems to be the solution adopted at this point by the artist of Bodleian MS Douce 300 (see FIG. 3). The illustration of the miracle shows Moses and Grace Dieu seated at table accompanied by three other characters. Moses is distinguished by his horns (though he is tonsured and holds a crozier), and Grace Dieu by her crown, starry halo, and didactic stance. The meal on the table is Eucharistic: four wafers and three chalices.

That the 'flesh' is 'living' is of course because it is Christ's. Since it appears that it is represented as an *oblé*, the most practical, and visually striking, way to demonstrate that this is the living flesh of Christ would be to have a wafer, possibly oversized for visibility, suddenly bleed. (We discuss below how this might have happened with the Pilgrim's scrip.) This was the traditional way in which contemporary miracles demonstrated the Real Presence. The Bleeding Host of Dijon (FIG. 4), whose cult must have reinforced if not originated the *Croxton Play of the Sacrament*, is said to have bled through the multiple stab wounds inflicted on it by a Jewish unbeliever. The many images in Books of Hours and on devotional woodcuts show a wafer impressed with the figure of Christ on the rainbow, beaded with blood. The lightness and whiteness of the wafer would reinforce the idea that the flesh of Christ, though living, was spiritual.

It is initially helpful that the *Pèlerinage* attracted such a detailed programme of illustration, since the images show us how the playwright might have envisaged the scene onstage.⁵⁴ However, there are difficulties in using static images this way. This is especially true when choosing how to portray moments of transformation, be they narrative or allegorical. Art cannot show bread becoming flesh; a painting has to show one stage or the other. The Deguileville illustrations can show bread or some version of living flesh, but not one becoming the other. Fra Angelico, similarly, shows only the wafer Christ offers to his disciples: there is no other food on the table. This is not unusual; indeed, all of the late fifteenth-century portrayals of the Last Supper discussed by Coletti present only bread on the table. This is possibly because, as Coletti argues, late medieval artists responded to 'the increasing importance of Eucharistic devotion' by visualising in Last Supper scenes 'the sacramental consecration and

54 The standard reference for the programme of illustrations is still Michael Camille 'Illustrated manuscripts of Deguileville's *Pèlerinages*, 1330–1426' (PhD dissertation, Cambridge University, 1985). Rosemond Tuve first introduced the anglophone scholarly world to them in 'Guillaume's *Pilgrimage*', chapter 3 of *Allegorical Imagery: Some Medieval Books and their Posterity* (Princeton UP, 1966). However, she does not concentrate particularly on the Eucharistic images, which are understandably much more varied between manuscripts than are the more emblematic ones. See also Richard K. Emmerson 'Translating Images: Image and Poetic Reception in French, English, and Latin Versions of Guillaume de Deguileville's *Trois Pèlerinages*' in *Poetry, Place, and Gender: Studies in Medieval Culture in Honor of Helen Damico* edited Catherine E. Karkov (Kalamazoo MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2009) 275–301.

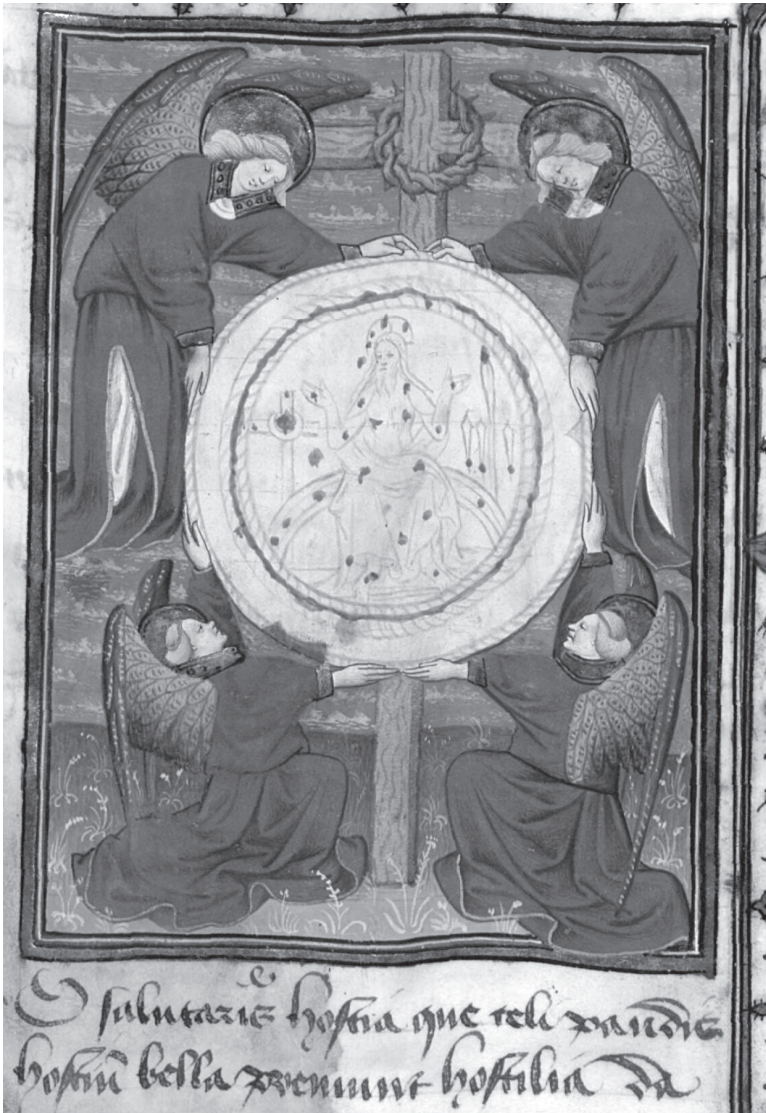


FIG. 4. The Bleeding Host of Dijon. BNF MS lat 1156A fol. 22r; Heures de René d'Anjou (before 1480). Online at <<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b6000466t/f55.item.r=MS%20latin%201156>>. Reproduced in compliance with the copyright rules of the Bibliothèque nationale de France.



FIG. 5. The Hospitality of Abraham and the Sacrifice of Isaac. Ravenna: San Vitale (consecrated AD 547), mosaic 546–56. Photo credit: Elisabeth Dutton.

communion’, by contrast with earlier medieval representations that focused on ‘narrative content’ such as Christ’s identification of the traitor Judas and John’s falling asleep on Christ’s breast.⁵⁵

Medieval systems of typology also allowed some earlier artists, by focusing on narrative content, to draw attention to the connections between bread and lamb by presenting parallel Old Testament narratives, as in the sixth-century mosaic of the Hospitality of Abraham in St Vitale, Ravenna.

In the centre of the mosaic, the three angels hosted by Abraham each have before them on the table a bread which, though not an *oblé*, is nonetheless given a symbolic appearance through its circular shape and cross-shaped marking. To the (viewer’s) left Abraham also offers his guests a platter on which is a whole lamb, and to right the patriarch raises a sword to sacrifice his son Isaac. The juxtaposed scenes create clear iconographic connections among lamb, bread, and sacrifice.

Furthermore, although Coletti’s examples show only bread, the lamb often also appears in later medieval representations of the Last Supper, perhaps pointing the informed viewer to the rich typological associations of the Old Testament sacrificial lamb as well as the lamb of the Passover feast. BL Add MS 24098, a Book of Hours known as ‘the Golf Book’, with miniatures by the Flemish Simon Bening (1483–1561), features a table with the lamb and other plates of meat, as well as bread rolls (fol. 2v, bas

55 Coletti ‘Sacrament and Sacrifice’ 247.

de page). However, Bening shows no wafer, and the image thus presents the Passover meal but not the Institution that follows. Another resource for artists is to combine different moments in the same image: BL Add MS 18852, produced in Bruges between 1486 and 1506 for Joanna the Mad, presents a Last Supper in which Jesus reaches across a plate with what seems to be most of the Paschal Lamb to hand an *oblé* to Judas (fol. 45r).⁵⁶ More subtly, Dieric Bouts in his Leuven Altarpiece of the Holy Sacrament (1464–7) shows the pewter platter on which the Paschal Lamb had been served empty except for gravy; there are brown rolls on the table, and he is consecrating an *oblé* over a chalice-like cup. The full-scale Passover meal is represented on a wing of the altarpiece in all its ritual detail, including the bitter herbs.⁵⁷

In N. Town, the Paschal Lamb of the Passover feast gives way to the very specific term *oblé*, the wafer, midway through the meal. The substitution of the *oblé* for the Paschal Lamb appears to (at least partly) take place through literal *onstage* consumption by the performers: the lamb disappears gradually as the action of the play progresses and the performers ingest it. Even if the remains of the lamb were removed before the Last Supper reveal, this onstage eating makes a stronger theological point than the simple replacement of one prop by another: N. Town's Jesus, by eating the Paschal Lamb, subsumes the Old Testament image into his own body and literally becomes the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy. This is something more complicated than simple supercession, and is distinctively possible in narrative forms such as drama, where the process of eating can be realised.

Just as the term *oblé* signals the unequivocal arrival onstage of the Eucharistic wafer in N. Town, so in the *Pèlerinage* play this arrival is marked by the term *relief*, a brilliantly oblique or polysemous word in late medieval French, which connotes salvation or help (like Modern English *relief*) but also the leftovers from a meal (as in Middle English *relefe*), and by analogy 'a small quantity of something'. Through the related term *relevement*, used in medieval French to mean something

56 For London: British Library Add MS 188852, see <https://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Add_MS_18852>; for London: British Library Add MS 24098, see <https://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Add_MS_24098>.

57 For images, see the Web Gallery of Art at <https://www.wga.hu/html_m/b/bouts/dirk_e/lastsupp/index.html>.



FIG. 6. Charity (Sylvia Wiederkehr), instructed by Wisdom (Elisa Pagliaro) prepares the *relief* for Pilgrims, in the forthcoming film of the *Pèlerinage* play by the Medieval Convent Drama Project. Photo credit Jeremy Wright.

artistically fabricated or drawn,⁵⁸ the term *relief* was also associated with construction and fabrication,⁵⁹ so the play also draws attention to the process of bread-making, which it subsequently describes at some length. This elastic term *relief* allows the verbal co-presence of all the different approaches to or embodiments of the Eucharist which the play stages or imagines, from salvation to elements of a lavish meal to a small object that is, as we learn in the course of the play, mystically baked by the allegorical character called Charity while actually, presumably, confectioned by a real person in this world. The term *relief* is thus much richer than the N. Town Passion's *oblé*, as it both draws attention to the on-stage

58 *Dictionnaire du Moyen Français* online at <<http://zeus.atilf.fr/dmf/>> sv *relevement* sense C.

59 *Dictionnaire du Moyen Français* online sv *relief* sense A2.

object that is or outwardly represents the Host and almost masks it with other potential readings or meanings.

The *Pèlerinage* play, a morality rather than a mystery and thus not primarily focused on the life of Christ, does not finish with the Institution of the Mass, but pushes beyond it into the life of the Early Church, and then into the anagogical New Jerusalem to which Pilgrim's journey will lead him. Pilgrim asks if he may take some of the *relief Moÿsi* ('relief of Moses', 702) to fill him up (*mon wit corps rasazier*, 'to satiate my empty body', 704) before his journey, but Grace Dieu first provides him with a pilgrim bag or scrip in which to put it: the bag is decorated with twelve bells, representing the twelve apostles, and overspread with blood: *sanc voy sur m'esckerpe expandu* ('I see blood spread across my bag', 806) which, she explains to the shocked Pilgrim, is that of the first martyr, Stephen. Thus the Eucharistic blood of Christ/wine, which is generally overshadowed in a play that tends to focus on the bread/flesh,⁶⁰ is imagistically mingled with the blood of Christian martyrs in the early church. Grace Dieu then equips Pilgrim with a staff,⁶¹ representing hope in Christ and in the Virgin Mary, and, at his demand, armour and weapons representing virtues that will support him on the pilgrimage to the heavenly city: the helmet of Temperance, the gauntlets of Continence, and so on.⁶² In a moment of farcical comedy, however, Pilgrim finds

60 The bread seems to have had more iconic status than the wine: seeing the Host, not the chalice, was the high point of the lay experience of Mass, and artists portraying the Eucharist tended to depict the Elevation of the Host: see Duffy *Stripping of the Altars* 96. This is possibly because the majority of believers received only bread, and not wine, at Mass; Communion in one kind for the laity developed in the twelfth century, and in England the congregation did not receive wine as well as bread until after the Reformation.

61 In Deguileville, in a passage that precedes that covered by the play, Pilgrim resolves that he must find a staff and scrip, or pilgrim bag, for his journey, and it is thus clear, as it is not in the play, that these gifts from Grace Dieu are a delayed response to Pilgrim's own wishes: *Tantost apres me pourpense | Qu'escherpe et bourdon me failloit | Et qu'avoir les me convenoit, | C'est chose mont bien avenant | A chaschun pelerin errant* ('Afterwards I thought to myself that I needed a sack and a staff, and that it would be convenient to have them, [for] they are fitting things for every wandering pilgrim', 216–20); *Pèlerinage* edited Stürzinger.

62 The whole passage, of course, recalls the 'armour of God' which St Paul urges Christians to put on in Ephesians 6: 10–15, although the precise virtues associated with each piece of armour are different: in Ephesians, the helmet is 'salvation'. The gauntlets are also called *Gaigne pain*, literally 'bread-earner'; figuratively

himself unable to move under the literal weight of the allegorical armour, and Grace Dieu has to find him a servant strong enough to be his armour bearer: Memory, who, in another potentially comical twist, is female, a *chamberier* ('chambermaid', 1193) or *mesquine* ('servant-girl', 1196).⁶³ It is only then that Grace Dieu deems Pilgrim ready to approach *le pain Moïse* ('the bread of Moses', 1225) for himself, and tells him *Va, si en prens* ('Go and take some', 1226) – this is the final piece of preparation before Pilgrim sets off on his journey to *la belle cyté* ('the beautiful city', 1219).

Up to this point, Pilgrim, who is the questioner and observer and thus may be assumed to stand for the audience – an 'Everyman' figure – has not himself consumed anything; meat, bread, or wafer. The whole play may be seen as a sort of preparation for his first Communion: it has explained the nature of the Eucharist and the appropriate moral and spiritual state of the believer who would receive it. In this final scene, then, should the audience see Pilgrim, in response to Grace Dieu's command *Va, si en prens*, finally take and consume the host? The scripted words imply that this might occur, but there are as always no stage directions or rubrics and the action is nowhere described, so there is no sense of how it might have looked or what the performers wanted to achieve. There is, however, a gap in the manuscript, where a speaker marker indicates 'Pilgrim' but no dialogue is given. This perhaps marks an action, which may be the ingesting of the wafer. But it also, strangely, may not, because the focus of this final scene of the play is that of the Pilgrim's provision for a journey, and on that journey Grace Dieu has told him he should always carry the bread and his victuals in his pilgrim bag:

the phrase signified a labourer, but also – in a very different context – a form of leather gauntlet. The *Dictionnaire du Moyen Français* online *sv gagne-pain 2 subst. masc.* speculates that the latter expression arose out of an accidental phonetic resemblance (rather than a logical or etymological connection) with the word *canepin*, a type of leather used to make gloves. Grace Dieu nonetheless elaborates on the connection which the expression *gaigne pain* enables between glove and bread: she says (1040–1) that *par el est gaignié le pain | Dont repassus sont tous cuers humains* ('by them [i.e. the gloves] is gained the bread | that satiates or fills all human hearts'). The phrase is interesting in relation to the definition of 'daily bread', discussed in the next paragraphs.

63 The gender of Memory is not necessarily marked as, indeed, all the characters apart from Pilgrim and, inevitably, Aristotle and the Moses-Priest, are female. However, in performance the contrast between Pilgrim's complaints about the weight of the armour and the fact that a female figure is chosen to carry it may have been comical.

ton pain, ossy ta vitailh | Dois tu dedens tous jour avoir ('your bread and also your victuals you must have inside it every day', 750–1). It thus seems at least as likely that what the audience sees is Pilgrim taking bread from the table of Moses and packing it in his bag as provisions. The Eucharistic wafer now appears as daily bread – needed *tous jour* ('every day'): it is sustenance for the traveller; perhaps also (through the association with Moses and traditional typology) analogous to the manna that sustained the Israelites in the desert. The coexistence of bread-as-wafer with bread-as-daily-bread in this scene is sharpened by the name of the Pilgrim's bag, Faith, which is established by Grace Dieu: *L'escerpe Foy est appelee* ('the bag is called Faith', 747). Faith metaphorically 'contains' or surrounds the transubstantiated Eucharist (belief in whose transubstantiation at the moment of consecration requires faith), while, at a more literal allegorical level, the Pilgrim's bag contains simultaneously the bread that offers him sustenance.

The field of association resembles that found in Jesus' comments on those who follow him after the Feeding of the Five Thousand: they follow him because they have eaten their fill, but they should seek the bread of eternal life; the manna that Moses gave the Israelites in the desert (Exodus 16) was bread from heaven that came from God (hence its prominence in biblical typology);⁶⁴ and finally, 'I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry.'⁶⁵ It is important to remember that the phrase 'daily bread', familiar to us from English scriptural translation of the Paternoster, did not necessarily carry the same connotations for the Huy nuns: the New Testament Greek *epiousion* is in the Vulgate's translation of Matthew 6: 11 rendered not *cotidianum* ('daily') but *supersubstantialem* ('super-substantial'), indicating the bread of heaven or the Eucharistic bread.⁶⁶ BL Add. MS 14042, a

64 This is a standard late medieval type of the Eucharist. See e.g. Avril Henry *Biblia Pauperum, a Facsimile and Edition* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1987) 81 and 83; *Mirour of Mans Saluacioune* edited Henry, 102 and 103, lines 1811–54. Exodus 16: 31 says that the manna 'was like coriander seed white; and the taste therof like flour with honey'; Douai version.

65 See John 6: 25–35.

66 In the translation of Luke 11: 3 the same word is rendered as *cotidianum*. For the use of Matthew's version of the prayer in medieval liturgy and devotion, see Anna Edith Gottschall 'The Pater Noster and the Laity in England c.700–1560' (PhD thesis: University of Birmingham, 2014) 1–3; online at <<https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/33528933.pdf>>. The Syriac tradition translates the term

Middle-Dutch prayer book from 1517–23 that was prepared for female Franciscans, presents a typological diptych of the Last Supper and the manna from heaven which, as is traditional, looks like falling wafers.⁶⁷ The nuns, who would have recited the liturgical Latin paternoster, which was based on Matthew's version, might not have primarily associated the bread needed *tous jours* with their version of the petition of the Lord's Prayer, which was rather for *super-substantial* bread: *Panem nostrum supersubstantialem da nobis hodie*. Nonetheless, it is striking that, in the *Pèlerinage* play, the final image is not the spiritualised wafer, the *oblé*, but the daily provision for the traveller. Naturalistically, a loaf rather than a wafer might seem the more appropriate prop at this point; but this would require a change of prop from the *oblé* specified earlier.

In the *Pèlerinage* play, the meal with which the play opens turns into a visual representation of Transubstantiation, however one envisages this as happening. Here, too, then, it is the comestible contents of a meal that shift and change on-stage in order to dramatise the shift from Old Testament to New Testament. When the Pilgrim goes to receive his relief the wafer seems to transform again into mealtime bread, albeit perhaps the bread of heaven, of the New Jerusalem. Rather than using possible onstage ingestion followed by explicit explanation, however – as N. Town does when Jesus explains the historical resonance of the Paschal Lamb just eaten by the Disciples, before replacing it with a wafer and inviting a new form of ingestion – the *Pèlerinage* play is intriguingly silent as to just how, when, and through whom these shifts occurred. Moments of Eucharistic consumption are at once everywhere hinted at and nowhere explicitly demanded, central to the play but also peripheral to the play's theologically and philosophically dense verbal discussion of the nature of what is to be consumed.

as 'perpetual' and 'necessary', and the Coptic translation suggests the bread to come, the bread of 'tomorrow'. We are grateful to Rev. Dr Will Lamb for these observations.

67 BL Add MS 14042 fol. 274v <https://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?index=11&ref=Add_MS_14042>. On this manuscript, see Hanneke Van Asperen 'Praying, Threading, and Adorning: Sewn-in Prints in a Rosary Prayer Book (London, British Library, Add. MS 14042)' in *Weaving, Veiling, and Dressing: Textiles and their Metaphors in the Late Middle Ages* edited Kathryn M. Rudy and Barbara Baert (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007) 81–121, at 83–7.



FIG. 7. Maître d'Antoine Rolin *The Bleeding Scip* (1465). Genève, Bibliothèque de Genève, Ms. fr. 182, #1, fol. 45r. Prose adaptation of *Pèlerinage de la vie humaine* by Guillaume de Deguileville. <<https://www.e-codices.unifr.ch/en/bge/fr0182/45r>>

For a live performance, the special effects required by the *Pèlerinage* play are challenging.⁶⁸ In N. Town, the fact that an audience cannot really see what is in a winecup or a chalice ensures that the wine/blood of the Mass, at least, need not be a problematic prop. But in the *Pèlerinage* play blood must be visible elsewhere, on the bag that Grace Dieu gives to Pilgrim. Furthermore, it is possible that this blood should mysteriously appear on the bag while Grace Dieu and Pilgrim are talking about it; certainly, the bag and the bells upon it are discussed for sixty lines (743–804) before Pilgrim suddenly becomes distressed at the sight of blood on the bag: *mult novellement | Suy desconforté griefement. | Sanc voy sur m'esckerpe espandu* ('suddenly I am grievously upset. I see blood spattered on my bag', 804–6). In Deguileville, the Pilgrim is troubled precisely because he had not seen the stains when he looked at the bag before, suggesting that it is not simply blood-stained but actually bleeding.⁶⁹ Such an effect is challenging but not impossible on the medieval stage, and French theatre was apparently particularly expert at producing bleeding effects.⁷⁰ If the Huy nuns ever fully staged

68 The Medieval Convent Drama Project, based at the University of Fribourg, Switzerland, explored nuns' plays, including those of the nuns of Huy, through performance experiment. The *Pèlerinage* play was scheduled as the final production of the project, but, like the Mass itself, fell prey to COVID restrictions. By autumn 2021 assembling full casts and live audiences was still impossible, but as some restrictions lifted we were able to gather small groups of actors – two or three at a time for each scene – and film the play, often in outdoor locations. Of course, it is much easier to achieve certain special effects on film than in a live performance: for example, it was possible to make Grace Dieu suddenly disappear from Pilgrim's sight, as the lines require that she does: *Car deis maintenant je m'en pars | De la veyue a ton regarde* ('for, from this moment, I leave your sight', 1254–5). However, the film does not attempt to simulate Transubstantiation, but rather uses a loaf of bread throughout as the *relief*. The film is currently in post-production and once completed will be freely available via the project website <<http://medievalconventdrama.org>>.

69 *Vi gouttes de seng semees | Dessur li [the bag] et esbouciees | La quel chose bien me desplut | Et mon courage tout esmut | Et de ce qu'autre fois vëu | Ne l'avoi n'aperçeu* ('I saw drops of blood spattered and stained on it [the bag], which I did not like at all, and which moved me greatly, and all the more because before, I had not perceived or seen this', 3575–80); *Pèlerinage* edited Stürzinger, 111.

70 See, for example, the devices for making Christ sweat blood recorded in Provence and at Ravello: 'Provençal Director's Notebook', cited in William Tydeman *The Medieval European Stage 500–1500* (Cambridge UP, 2001) 317; *The Staging of Religious Drama in Europe in the Later Middle Ages: Texts and Documents in*

the *Pèlerinage* play, their efforts may have represented a theatrical ambition perhaps surprising in convent drama: they must have dedicated considerable attention to special effects associated with the blood/wine and body/bread props of the Mass.

Conclusion

Both N. Town and the *Pèlerinage* play stage a Eucharistic meal, but one shows that meal as a Last Supper, incorporating the Institution of the Mass, and the other is an extra-biblical, eschatological dramatisation. N. Town moves its audience from the Old Testament Passover to the New Testament Last Supper and then to the liturgy – the liturgy is the end-point, as marked by the medieval language of the *Maundé*, the term which both Jesus and his disciples use to refer to the feast. The *Pèlerinage* play is more complex: the liturgy is the starting point and the play circles round it, approaching it from literal, spiritual, and ontological angles. The Huy play does not use ingestion to move from the Old Testament to the liturgy, as N. Town does; instead it uses repeated references to ingestion to punctuate a multi-voiced exploration of what the liturgy is. N. Town is explicit about the choreography and movements required to stage the liturgy, and explicit about choreographing it as a Mass; it thus raises intriguing questions about the nature of participation required from the spectator. The Huy play, on the other hand, is totally silent as to the choreography of its scenes of liturgical ingestion, leaving spaces in which its audience may have participated as the congregation at a Mass, and is also encouraged to see itself in a Pilgrim packing his daily bread. If the play were indeed performed for an audience of sisters who also received the Mass, then this is a particularly potent example of audience participation, focused on bread that is at once the eucharistic Host and a changing theatrical object. The theatrical effectiveness of N. Town, recognised by Woolf,⁷¹ stems from its theologically informed enriching

English Translation edited Peter Meredith and John Tailby (Early Drama, Art, and Music Monograph Series, 4; Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1983) 108. These are discussed in Elisabeth Dutton 'Macbeth and the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*: Blood and Belief in Early English Stagecraft' in *Blood Matters: Studies in European Literature and Thought, 1400–1700* edited Bonnie Lander Johnson and Eleanor Decamp (Philadelphia PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018) 183–97, at 187–9.

71 Woolf *The English Mystery Plays* 234–7.

of Last Supper imagery with evocations of the Passover, of the manna given to the Israelites in the desert, and of Mary's anointing of Christ at the house of Simon the Leper, as well as of the Mass that the Last Supper institutes. The *Pèlerinage* play may have been just as theatrically effective, though the lack of rubrics and stage directions demands scholarly guesswork; it also enriches the spectator's understanding of the Last Supper that is also the Pilgrim's First Communion through an insistent and multivalent interrogation of the nature – shifting, super-substantial, quotidian – of its central prop.

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