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Mourning, Heresy, and Resurrection in the York Corpus Christi Cycle

FROM SOME TIME around 1376 to some time during the 1570s, a remarkable annual theatre event took place in the northern English city of York. On the Feast of Corpus Christi, manufacturing and trading guilds collaborated to present to an audience of both citizens and tourists as many as fifty plays dramatizing biblical events from the Fall of the Angels to the Last Judgement. Beginning at 4:30 in the morning and ending shortly after midnight, they pushed and pulled their "pageants" or wagon stages through the streets of the city, performing their individual dramas at designated stations at the doors of citizens' houses, at major intersections and before the gates of parish churches.

An official record or register of the plays produced by the individual guilds was compiled sometime between 1463 and 1477. This register records (for the most part) a version of the cycle as it was performed in the latter half of the fifteenth century; marginalia in a mid-sixteenth century hand indicate that many plays underwent substantial revisions between their initial transcriptions and their later (literal, in production) incarnations. One of the plays noted as revised is The Supper at Emmaus (Play 40), the first of a series of plays (extending to Christ's Ascension) that dramatize the disciples' deep despair after Christ's crucifixion and burial.

That the disciples grieve Christ's death in this particular fifteenth-century post-Passion sequence is not especially interesting or unique—in other late medieval biblical plays, they lament the fact and manner of his death, usually at length. What is unique is the York Corpus Christi cycle's careful representation of the disciples' mourning as excessive and, therefore, as both a cause and a sign of weak, even heretical faith. I will argue that these plays dramatize an interpretation of the disciples in their doubt

and despair first put forward by St. Augustine, who, in a number of sermons, reads them as proto-dualists because they initially doubted the resurrection. This use of Augustine allowed the cycle to represent the disciples' grief to double purpose. First of all, the plays illustrated to their audience the dangers of excessively mourning the dead; the disciples move from improper to proper expressions of sorrow, demonstrating the manner in and degree to which mourning should be performed as they shed their heretical beliefs about Christ's particular, and humanity's general, resurrection. The close association of resurrection and transubstantiation in late medieval culture then allowed the plays to exploit the disciples' grief to a second purpose: because Augustine identified the disciples as proto-dualists and used their example to condemn fourth-century Manicheans, York playwrights could identify the disciples as Lollards or Wyclifites and use their example to condemn fifteenth-century heretical beliefs on the doctrine of transubstantiation. The York disciples' disbelief in Christ's resurrection and their unrestrained mourning could be read as both cause and product of an anachronistic Lollard doubt about the true presence in the consecrated host.

Both the disciples' act of mourning and the playwrights' examination of classical and contemporary Christian belief begin in Play 40 of the York Corpus Christi cycle with The Supper at Emmaus. Here the disciples' intense sorrow becomes first and most evident as Cleophas and Luke lament the fact and manner of Christ's death in over sixty lines of heavily alliterative and repetitive verse. That the lines are filled with alliteration suggests the characters' deep-felt emotion:

That lorde bat [that] me lente [gave] pis lifje [life] for to lede [lead], In my wayes pou [you] me urisse [guide] pus urill qfuionc [distraught]. *Qwen* [when] othir men halfe [have] moste mirthe to per mede [reward], Panne [then] als a mornand [mourning] manne make I my mone [complaint]. (Play 40.1-4)

That portions of the last line of each (increasingly alliterative) stanza repeat in the first line of each stanza following suggests, as Alexandra Johnston notes, that Cleophas and Luke "are locked in their despair as they re-tell the story of the crucifixion" (244). Although moving forward in their physical journey to Emmaus, Christ's followers are trapped in a spiritual cycle (or spiral) of grief:

II Perigrinus

In *frasting* [trial] we *fonde* [found] hym full faithfull and free.

In his mynde mente he neuere *mysse* [harm] to no man.

Itt was a sorowe, *forsoth* [in truth], in sight for to see

Whanne pat a *spetyffyll* [cruel] spere vnto his harte ranne.

In bail! [torment] *bus* [thus] his body was *beltid* [embraced],

Into his harte *thraly* [violently] bei *thraste* [thrust]; *Whan* [when] his piteffull paynes were *paste* [over, finished],

bat swet [dear] thyng full swiftely he stweltid [died].

I Perigrinus

He sweltid full *swithe* [quickly] in *swonyng* [swooning], **bat swette**.

Alias for þat *luffely* [beloved] þat laide is so lowe,

With *granyng* [groaning] full *grissely* [grisly] on grounde may we *grette* [weep],

For so *comely* [worthy] a *corse* [person] canne I none knowe. (40.49-60)

When Christ appears to the pilgrims and speaks to them, interrupting the stanza form, he attempts to break the cyclic expressions of grief the men have established and are reluctant to abandon. He asks, "What are bes *meruailes* [marvels] bat 3e [you] of men e / And bus *mekill* [greatly] mournyng in mynde bat 36 make, / Walkyng *bus wille* [distraught] by bes wayes?" (40.67-69). Cleophas and Luke immediately resume their mournful alliterative and cyclic verse even as they respond to Christ's intentionally disruptive question:

I Perigrinus Why, herde [heard] pou [you] no carpyng [speaking]

nor crying

Att Jerusalem per [where] bou haste bene [been],

Whenne Jesu be Nazarene

Was *doulfully* [cruelly] *dight to be dying* [put to death]?

II Perigrinus To be dying bei dight hym bat dejte [gentle] was and

dere [...]. (40.77-81)

This heavy lament continues for another forty-eight lines before Christ interrupts the men again, condemning their behaviour and reading their grief as evidence of weak faith: "A, fooles pat are *fauty* [mistaken] and failes of youre *feithe* [faith], / Þis *bale* [pain] *bud* [it was necessary that] hym *bide* [endure] and *belde* [save] þame in blisse—/ But 3e be *lele* [faithful] of youre *laye* [law] youre liffe holde I *laith* [in aversion]" (40.130-32). Christ's condemnation and second interruption of the pilgrims' grief brings the two men to their senses at last, disrupting the verse form. Although lines remain alliterative in the play, stanzas are now shared between speakers and repetition is used to different effect.³

When the pilgrims realize with whom they have been talking, they resolve to tell their "felawes" (fellows) about their experience (40.187-90). However, Play 41 opens with the disciples in Jerusalem, still unaware of the events that have transpired in Emmaus and lamenting Christ's death and their own persecution at the hands of the Jews:

Petrus Alias, to *woo* [woe, misery] pat we wer *wrought*

[made],

Hadde never no men so mekill bought

[much worry],

Sen [since] that oure lorde to dede [death]

was brought

With Jewes *fell* [cruel];

Oute of bis steede [place] ne durste we noght [we dare

not go],

But here ay [always] dwelle.

Johannes

Here haue [have] we dwelte with peynes strang

[strong pains];

Of oure liffe vs lothis [we hate], we leve to lange [live

too long],

For sen [since] the Jewes wrought [did] vs bat wrong

Oure lorde to sloo [slay],

Durste we neuere [we don't dare] come pame emang

[among them],

Ne hense to goo [nor to leave]. (Play 41.1-12)

When Christ miraculously appears to these disciples, they, following the gospel account, wonder if the apparition they see is a ghost or "sperite" (41.35, 37). Christ appears again, condemns them for their lack of faith and for their grief, and reassures them that he is no ghost:

What thynke 36, madmen, in youre thought?

What mournyng in youre *hertis* [hearts] is brought?

I ame Criste, *ne drede 30u noght* [do not fear, doubt];

Her may 36 se

be same body bat has you *bought* [saved, redeemed]

Vppon a *tre* [tree]. (41.43-48)

Christ offers to eat roast honeycomb, "To make youre *trouthe* [faith] sted-fast and grete, / And for 3e schall *wanhope* [despair] forgete / And *trowe* [believe] in me [...]" (41.74-76). He suggests that only true belief will allow the disciples to abandon their despair—faith and grief are, therefore, finally incompatible.

At this point, Thomas enters the scene, approaching the sequestered disciples from a distance. He too is hopelessly sad and expresses his pain using familiar terms and verse form:

Alias for *sight* [grief] and sorowes sadde,

Mornyng makis me *mased* [bewildered] and *madde*;

On grounde nowe may I gang [go] vngladde

Bobe even and morne [night and day].

pat hende [worthy man] pat I my helpe of hadde [from whom I received help, strength]
His liffe has lorne [lost].

Lome I have pat louely light,

Pat was my maistir moste of myght. (41.97-104)

As Thomas considers the pain suffered by Christ during his Passion, he is overcome with emotion, crying, "Alias, for sorowe myselffe I *schende* [kill] / When I thynke *hartely* [truly, sincerely] on þat *hende* [worthy man] [...]" (41.115-16). He declares on behalf of all the other disciples, "So wofull *wyghtis* [people] was *neuere* [never] none, / Oure joie and comforte is all gone. /Of mourning may we make oure *mone* [complaint] [...]" (41.121-23). Thomas is therefore understandably shocked to discover that his fellows no longer grieve Christ's death but instead proclaim his resurrection. Indignant, Thomas declares that he will not believe until presented with proof of the supposed miracle:

Tille [until] þat I see his body bare
And sithen [after that] my fyngir putte in thare [there]
Within his hyde,
And fele the wounde be spere did schere [cut]
Rist [right] in his syde,

Are [before] schalle I *trowe* [believe] no tales betwene. (41.158-63)

Christ then appears, invites Thomas to probe his wounds, and commands him to "be no more *mistrowand* [lacking in faith / misbelieving], / But *trowe* [believe] trewly" (41.179-80), which Thomas of course immediately does.

Unfortunately, the disciples' eventual unanimous acceptance of the resurrection does not put an end to their grief. At the beginning of Play 42, they even lament Christ's imminent ascension:

Johannes The missing of my *maistir trewe* [true, faithful, good master]

That *lenghis* [remains] not with vs *lastandly* [always],

Makis me to morne *ilke a day newe* [each day again] For *tharnyng* [lack] of his company. (Play 42.9-12)

Fortunately, Peter explains, this sorrow, caused by the disciples' separation from their Lord, is mitigated to some degree by the promise of an eventual and eternal reunion:

Bot *3itt* [yet] in all my *mysselykyng* [sorrow]
A worde þat Criste saide comfortis me:
Oure *heuynes* [heaviness] and oure mournyng,
He saide, to joie turned *schuld* [should] be. (42.17-20)

The believer's separation from Christ and from all loved ones who die is temporary, for, as Christ himself explains later in the play, all will unite again in future, both spiritually in heaven and physically on earth. On the Day of Judgement, Christ promises, "man by *cours of kynde* [in due course] schall ryse / Allbogh he *be roten onrill nost* [has rotted to nothing]" (42.105-06) and "schall [...] be broght / Wher [Christ] schall sitte as trewe *justise* [judge] [...]" (42.108-09).

The disciples' new, more tempered grief seems acceptable to Christ, as he no longer reprimands them. Before he ascends in Play 42, he chooses instead to remind his followers of their past sins, encouraging them not to re-offend by explaining the consequences, both past and potential, of their former doubt and excessive sorrow:

In grete *wanne-trowyng* [weak faith] haue 36 bene, And *wondir* [extremely] harde of hartis ar 36. Worthy to be reproued, I *wene* [believe, think] Ar 3e forsothe, and 3e will see In als *mekill* [much] als 3e haue *sene* [seen] My wirkyng proued and my *posté* [power].

Whan I was *dede* [dead] and laide in graue
Of myne *vpryse* [resurrection] se were in *doute* [doubt],
And some *for* [about] myne vprysing *straue* [argued]
When I was laide als vndir *clowte* [shroud]

So depe in erthe. But *sithen* [since] I haue
Ben *walkand* [walking] fourty daies aboute, *Eten* [have eaten] with 3ou, youre *trouthe* [faith] to saue, *Comand* [have come] emange 3ou inne and oute.

And perfore beis no more in *were* [be no more in a state of confusion, misery]

Of myne vpperysing, day nor nyght. (42.83-98)

Christ warns the disciples that their initial disbelief in his resurrection, evinced by their grief and mourning and by their petty arguing, has not only been a sign of, but has also produced, schism within the disciples' ranks: "Youre misbeleue," he tells them, "leues ilkone seece [each one separate]" (42.99). Fortunately, from this point on in the cycle—with only a couple of exceptions in the plays of Pentecost (Play 43) and the Assumption of Mary (Play 45)—the disciples leave their own mourning and lamentations and instead speak of receiving and giving comfort. After the appearance of two angels at Christ's Ascension, James proclaims, "Loued be bou lorde ay [ever] moste of myght, / Pat bs, in all oure grete disease [discomfort], / Vs comfortist with thyne aungellis bright" (42.233-35). More encouraging still, James tells the Virgin Mary that he and the other disciples will in future focus on lessening her sorrow at the loss of her son: "Oure comforte, youre care to kele [relieve], / Whill [while] we may leue [live] we schall not faile" (42.269-70), he promises her. The disciples, good Christians who now put their faith in the resurrection, no longer require consolation at separation from their loved one but instead comfort another believer who mourns.

Christ's repeated condemnation of the disciple's initial immoderate grief in York can simply be read in light of that ubiquitous medieval adage, "measure is treasure." In all things, ordinary Christians were advised to assume the stoic middle-ground—for example, in the fifteenth-century play Mankind, Mercy counsels the title character not to shun all food, drink, or fashion but always to indulge in moderation. He advises Mankind,

Mesure ys tresure. Y forbyde *yow* [you] not be vse. Mesure *yowrsylf* [yourself] euer; be ware of excesse. be superfluouse *gyse* [manner of living] I wyll þat 3e refuse, When nature ys suffysyde [satisfied], *anon* [immediately] þat 3e sese. (11. 237-40)

This stoic approach to the pleasures of life also applied to those experiences that were painful or sorrowful. Thus Saint Ambrose, in his sermon "On the Belief in the Resurrection," recommends to his fellow Christians "that moderation in adversity which is required in prosperity" (175). "If it be not seemly to rejoice immoderately," he asks, "is it seemly so to mourn?" Of course not, he concludes: "want of moderation in grief or fear of death is no small evil" and so should be avoided.⁴

Ambrose's advice and reading of bereavement is typical of the Latin fathers, who, while discouraging over-indulgence, allow that grief is a natural response to the death of a loved one and is not necessarily sinful in itself. Jerome, in a letter to Heliodorus on the death of his nephew Nepotian, writes that he and his friend, grieving properly, do not sorrow for the young man but for themselves, because they "cannot bear the feeling of his absence" (125). Augustine writes in Sermon 173 that Christians inevitably sorrow when they observe a lifeless body because they are aware that the invisible spirit has departed (in *Patrologia Latina* Vol. 38, 939). Separation from one's family member or loved one is recognized as a natural, sanctioned cause of grief, which perhaps explains why in York the disciples' sorrow at Christ's ascension is never condemned.

Yet, according to Ambrose in his sermon "On the Death of Satyrus," those who die "seem to be not lost but sent before, whom death is not going to swallow up, but eternity receive" (172). The separation of the living and the dead is only temporary, as believers will be reunited in heaven, and so a true Christian's grief should be measured and moderate. If it is not, if his or her grief is instead excessive and inconsolable, it likely arises not from good, natural impulses but from sin and lack of faith. Ambrose writes that "there is a very great difference between longing for what you have lost and lamenting that you have lost it" (162): the former is a natural sorrow by which one does not incur "any grievous sin"; the latter is a "distrustful sadness" that "proceeds from unbelief or weakness" (162). The "difference between the servants of Christ and the worshippers of idols" is that "the

latter weep for their friends, whom they suppose to have perished forever" (172). Thus excessive grief signals that the mourner is either a pagan or, amongst those who profess to be Christians, an heretic.

This is not to say that intense mourning was never appropriate and therefore never sanctioned: humankind did not always have the hope and assurance of eternal life. Before the advent of Christ and his crucifixion, if not after, violent sorrow was an appropriate response to death, as Jerome explains in a letter of consolation to Paula. Here he cites a number of Old Testament examples to prove that grief had its place under the old Law. He notes that "lamentation was made for Moses; yet when the funeral of Joshua is described no mention at all is made of weeping" (52). "The reason, of course," he explains, "is that under Moses—that is under the old Law—all men were bound by the sentence passed on Adam's sin, and when they descended into hell were rightly accompanied with tears" (52). He also offers the example of Jacob who, dressed in sackcloth, mourned the death of Joseph and refused to be comforted. Jerome writes: "Jacob, it is true, mourned for Joseph, whom he fancied slain, and thought to meet only in the grave [...], but he only did so because Christ had not yet broken open the door of paradise" (51). Of course, once that door was finally and forever opened, any sorrow stemming from the belief that death is permanent became a "superstition" and a grievous sin. Jerome singles out Jews for condemnation, as they "go on their weeping to this day" (52). And yet, he allows, "they are right to weep, for as they do not believe in the Lord's resurrection they are being made ready for the advent of antichrist."

This last point is of interest, as Jerome seems to identify belief in the resurrection of Christ as the central consolation of Christianity. Christ's bodily resurrection, a sign of his victory over the grave, was a promise of spiritual salvation but was even more a guarantee of the physical salvation to come at the general resurrection. Augustine is more emphatic on this point: in the same sermon in which he identifies the lifeless corpse as a source of legitimate sorrow for those left behind, he identifies that same corpse as a source of tremendous comfort and consolation. The dead body has a dual effect on mourners because it reminds them at once of their separation from their loved one and of their joyful reunion to come, when "the lord himself, with a cry of command, with the call of the archangels and with the sounding of the last trumpet, will descend from the sky; first the

dead in Christ will rise, and then we who are still living will, with them, be caught up into the clouds and will meet with Christ in the air" (i Thess. 4.16-17, cited in Sermon 171, in *Patrologia Latina* 38.939). "Let sorrow perish when consolation is this great," Augustine exclaims, "let light cleanse sadness from the soul, let faith expel sorrow."⁵

Augustine's assertion that the resurrection of bodies at the end of time is the ultimate source of comfort for the bereaved accords with his repeated insistence that resurrection is Christianity's central tenet. In Sermon 241 he writes:

The belief in the resurrection of the dead is the distinctive belief of Christians. Christ, our Head, in His own person revealed this to us, that is, the resurrection of the dead, and He furnished us an example of this belief, so that His members might have hope for themselves in regard to that which had already happened to their Head. (*Sermons on the Liturgical Seasons* 255)

"Pagans, wicked people and Jews believed in the Passion of Christ," he explains in Sermon 233, but "Christians alone believe in His Resurrection. The Passion of Christ discloses the miseries of this life; the Resurrection of Christ points to the happiness of the life to come" (217).

Belief in the resurrection, of Christ and of Christians more generally, was also considered central by Augustine because it distinguished orthodox believers from heretics, specifically from the Manichaeans and the Priscillianists, who denied that Christ had a physical body and therefore rejected the doctrine of resurrection. Augustine's discussion of these dualist heretics in his sermons on the Easter season is striking, as he compares them to the disciples in their disbelief after Christ's resurrection. In Sermon 236, he writes:

If at any time the Resurrection is preached in these days and the account seems to some listener to be nonsense, do not all agree that such a person is greatly afflicted? Do not all denounce, shun, and avoid this person, close their ears and refuse to listen to him? Behold what the disciples were after the death of Christ: they were that which we abhor. Like rams, they had the plague from which lambs shrink. (232)

In Sermon 237, Augustine discusses in particular the disciples' initial belief that Christ had returned as a ghost:

They saw [...] and because they did not believe that their own eyes were seeing aright, they thought they were deceived. For they 'thought that they saw a spirit,' as you have heard. The wavering Apostles anticipated what the worst heretics later believed about Christ. For there are people today who do not believe that Christ had a body, because they rule out the parturition of a virgin and they refuse to believe that Christ was born of a woman.[...] All that appeared to the eyes of men, as the Manichaeans believe, was spirit, not flesh. (235-36)

In his very next sermon, Augustine reiterates this reading of the disciples' misreading of Christ's appearance, stating, "They [...] were disturbed; they 'thought that they saw a spirit.' That is what is thought by those who do not believe that He had a true body; these are the Manichaeans, the Priscillianists, and other scourges not worthy to be mentioned" (Sermon 238, Sermons on the Liturgical Seasons 240-41). Augustine then asks, "What do you think, O Catholic? What do you think, O faithful spouse?" and encourages those who believe truly to "Forgive those who think what the disciples in their confusion previously thought" (241). Again, he explains that the apostles "thought, as the Manichaeans and as the Priscillianists think today, that the Lord was only a spirit without a true body." The only difference between the apostles and these "worst heretics" is that the former "did not remain in their error" but allowed themselves to be instructed and corrected by Christ.

Augustine here represents the disciples as proto-heretics, as dualists. This representation fits with his and other church fathers' more general readings of excessive grief and mourning as evidence of false or lack of faith in Christians, and therefore of heresy. The disciples existed at a crucial moment in time: they witnessed the very events—the crucifixion and resurrection—that eliminated, for true believers, eternal physical death and spiritual damnation, the only legitimate reasons for or causes of immoderate mourning. They should have moved effortlessly from Jewish sorrow to Christian joy, from the old law to the new, from sacrifice to sacrament,

but they did not. They remained for a time in a liminal, dangerous state that could have led to, and that Augustine suggests did in fact anticipate, later schisms within the church.

Augustine's reading and representation of the sorrowing disciples as heretics is clearly dramatized in the York Corpus Christ! cycle. As discussed in the first section of this paper, repeated reference is made to the disciples' false or "fauty" beliefs in the York resurrection sequence; their grief, their arguments over the truth of Christ's resurrection, and their resultant lack of unity anger Christ and are unequivocally condemned by him. In the Play of Pentecost, the latter shortcoming (the disciples' lack of unity) becomes particularly troubling as they ponder their future roles as teachers and missionaries. Here, in accordance with the biblical account (Acts 1.12-26), Peter suggests that the eleven disciples must nominate someone to fill Judas' place so that they will make an even number; this will facilitate the preaching of the gospel for, Peter states at the very end of the play's first stanza, "Twelue may be asoundir tone [parted] / And sett in parties seere [separate groups]" (43.11-12). By dividing into smaller groups, the disciples will be able to spread their message further and will win more converts; however—and at this point York deviates from the scriptural account—the disciples must take care that their division in number not result in a division in doctrine. At the very end of the second stanza and thus in obvious juxtaposition with his recommendation that the disciples divide their labour, Peter warns, "senne [since] we on bis wise [in this manner] / Schall his [Christ's] *counsaile* [message] *discrie* [proclaim], / *Itt nedis* [it is necessary that] we vs avise [take care] / Pat we saye nost serely [variously]" (43.21-24). The disciples must be careful not to promote schism within the church and therefore, as in Augustine, must be careful not to sow the seeds of heresy.

That the York Plays dramatize Augustinian readings of biblical events is not an original or particularly contentious point: Alexandra Johnston, in her article "*The Word Made Flesh*: Augustinian Elements in the *York Cycle*," offers convincing external and internal evidence that Augustine's writings were accessible and familiar to both the York playwrights and their subsequent revisers, whoever they were. She discusses a surviving late fourteenth-century catalogue from the Austin friary at York which reveals that the library contained most of Augustine's works, some of the more popular even in multiple copies (226-27). The many references to and interpreta-

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tions of Augustine in the plays, she suggests, can be explained by the easy accessibility of his texts and therefore the playwrights' intimate knowledge of them. Johnston goes on to argue that the cycle's representation of Christ, the word incarnate, as well as its basic prosodic structure and form very clearly reflect (her term is "exploit") Augustinian theology and theories of language.

However, that the York Corpus Christi cycle echoes Augustine at this particular point in the text is a bit surprising. Augustine's representation in his sermons of the disciples as temporary heretics served a specific purpose at the time when he was writing: it allowed him to address the very real, very pressing problem of dualist heretics in the church of his day. However, this representation seems to serve no purpose in the York Plays: there were no dualist heretics in England in the fifteenth century when the plays (in this form) were being performed.

Why, then, would the York Corpus Christi cycle retain and represent Augustine's reading of the mournful and skeptical disciples as dualist heretics? The answer to this question may lie in popular readings of those heretics who did trouble England at the time: the Lollards or Wyclifites. These heretics were not, strictly speaking, dualist, but could, if creatively read, be compared to their historical and continental counterparts. For example, it seems that Lollards were popularly believed to be immoderately—if disingenuously—mournful and melancholic. In a sermon delivered sometime between 1389 and 1404, an anonymous preacher alludes to (though he unfortunately does not explain) a connection between sorrow and Lollardy:

we se now so miche folk & specialiche bes lollardes, þay go barfot, bei gon openhed, 3e, þei wassche soþylike hir eloþes with-owten with teres of hir e3en, þat miche oþ þe peple is fowle blynded & deseyuyd bi hem. For þei wene þat tei haue plente inow with-in hem oþ þe water of holi leuyng, & truliche it is noþyng so. (Grisdale 65,11.494-99)

[We see today so many folk, and especially these Lollards, go barefoot, go bare-headed, even wash (soak) their clothes with the tears of

their eyes, so that many of the people are horribly blinded and deceived by them. For they think that they have plenty of the water of holy living inside them, and truly it is not so.]

More than ten but less than thirty years later, the infamous Margery Kempe became a victim of this popular belief. When in Leicester, she was accused of being "a fals strumpet, a fals loller, & a fals deceyuer of be pepyl" (*The Book of Margery Kempe* 112, 11. 1-2), at least in part because she felt compelled to "brekyn owte wyth a lowde voys & cryen *meruelowslyche* [marvelously, amazingly] & wepyn & sobbyn ful *hedowslyche* [hideously]" after beholding a crucifix in the local church (in, 11. 12-14).

Thomas Netter, in his weighty condemnation of the evils of Wyclifism, the *Doctrinale Fidei Catholicae*, also suggests that Lollards are particularly sad or melancholic and offers a possible reason why this is so. Whereas Augustine and the other Latin fathers trace heretical sorrow to a disbelief in the resurrection of Christ and of humankind at the end of time, Netter suggests that the Lollards' heretical sorrow stems from a rejection of Catholic practices and rituals. For example, he writes that the Lollards follow the Jews in their rejection of church dedications and other celebrations and so have adopted the joylessness of Jewish worship:

It ought to be noted that when the Jews throughout the world had been captured by the Gentiles, they discontinued the practice of dedicating Churches, which custom of the Church Fathers Christians preserved [...]. Along with renouncing the dedication of their temple[s], the Jews renounced being joyful. When these [practices] were adopted by the Wyclifites, they had no joy in Church festivals, but were somber as were the Jews. (3:978)⁶

More famously, or infamously, the Lollards denied the devotional, educational, and emotional value of images, which they condemned and periodically smashed and burned. They considered pilgrimages to shrines, often occasions of merriment, to be sinful; the time wasted on such activities could and should be spent ministering to poor men and women who were more perfect images of Christ than any statue of wood or stone could ever be.

Related to this rejection of images (and almost as famous) was the Lollards' rejection of transubstantiation. According to orthodox Catholic doctrine the host really and completely transforms into the body of Christ at the words of consecration; it retains its bread-like appearance after the substance of bread has been annihilated because in it there are acridens sine *subjecto*, accidents or qualities without substance. John Wyclif, founder of the Lollard heresy, was a metaphysical Realist and so rejected, first, the notion that substance or essence could be destroyed and, second, the notion that accidents or appearance could exist independently of essence. He insisted instead that the consecrated host is *panis in natura et corpus Christi in figura:*

In its substance, the consecrated bread is still what it appears to be: bread. But in figure, it is (and does not merely signify) the body of Christ. On the natural level as bread, one might say the Host is a sign of the *corpus Christi*; but on the higher, figural level, by virtue of the consecration it is *vere et realiter* the body of Christ, (qtd. in Szittya 158)

The actual physical substance of flesh, according to Wyclif, is at no time present in the consecrated host. Instead, the body of Christ appears in the wafer in much the same way as an image appears in a mirror, and is similarly distanced from its object or source (Phillips 253). Thus, Wyclif argues, those who worship the Eucharist as though it is Christ are as guilty of idolatry as those who worship images: they are guilty of actively venerating an object created by human hands that is not in itself divine.

Netter responds to this argument by calling Wyclif and his followers throw-backs and judaizers whose beliefs trouble the line between the old law and its fulfillment. Netter categorically denies Wyclif's assertion that, in substance at least, the host is merely a sign of Christ's body:

Behold, wretched Wyclif: the blood on the altar is not *type* but *truth*, is not figure but *clarity*, is not the *shadow* of Christ's blood, but it in nature. The type of his blood was the blood of the paschal lamb; the type of his blood was the sprinkling of the priests. What do you think about this? (2: i8o)⁷

Netter then accuses Wyclif of idolatry, reasoning, "just as one is reckoned an idolater who worships with divine reverence that thing which is not God, so is he who denies divine reverence to that which is truly God" (2:165). By not recognizing Christ's body in the sacrament and not giving the Eucharist the reverence it is due, Wyclif and his followers are acting like idolatrous Jews and Pagans.

This debate's importance to the York Plays and their representation of the disciples is nowhere made explicit, but the Lollards' doubts about transubstantiation seem strikingly similar to the disciples' doubts about the resurrection. In other texts this similarity is perhaps clearer. For example, in the treatise "Seven miracles of Corpus Christi" from the Vernon manuscript (c. 1390), an otherwise righteous man denies that the substance of the host is Christ's flesh. The man is not identified as a late medieval Lollard for good reason—the compiler of the Vernon manuscript borrows the treatise from Robert Mannyng of Brunne's early fourteenth-century text *Handlying synne*, which is itself an English version of William of Wadington's thirteenth-century *Manuel de pechez* (Rubin 219)—but his heretical views are very similar:

And, for [because] be fend [fiend] wolde him haue schent [destroyed] He leeuede not [did not believe] in be sacrament,
And seide, hit was not Ihesu
Pat Conceyued was borwh [through] gret vertu [virtue],
Ne Ihesu was not bat Oble [host, wafer]
Pat was reised [raised] atte sacre [the words of consecration]
And bat be folk honourede to; To leeue hit was not to do [it was not to

be believed]. (Horstmann p. 201,11.111-18)

The heretic confesses his disbelief to two holy abbots, who try to convince him with examples and arguments that the bread really does convert to flesh; however, he remains sceptical and, like Thomas, declares he will not believe until he sees Christ's body displayed before him: "And al [still] he seide hit was lye, / But 3if [unless] he seae [saw] hit wi3 his e3e" (11.127-28). The very next Sunday, after the words of consecration, the heretic sees the Eucharist transform into a small child; this child is then, before his very

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eyes, sacrificed and cut to pieces by an angel. The priest offers the heretic a portion of the child's bleeding flesh, which, unlike Thomas, he declines to touch. However, like Thomas, the heretic immediately converts and, the treatise tells us, lives as "a good *mon* [man] for euer-more" (202,1.182).

The close association of transubstantiation and resurrection we see here was supported in part by their increasing association in church ritual from the fourteenth to sixteenth century. Medieval Catholics were required to communicate at least once a year (Rubin 148) and generally did so on Easter Sunday. During Holy Week in many churches in England, both Christ's burial and resurrection were re-enacted; a consecrated host was placed in a "sepulchre" on Good Friday and was guarded until Easter Sunday, when it was removed and placed on the church's altar (Rubin 294). By the fifteenth century, the connection between the consecrated host and the resurrected body was further reinforced as, in some English churches, the host was placed inside "an image of Christ with a hollowed chest" before it was "buried" inside the Easter sepulchre (Rubin 294) and raised victorious on Easter Sunday.

Holy Week was not the only time in the liturgical calendar that Catholicism's two central doctrines were paired, however. The Eucharist had its own feast day, the feast of Corpus Christi; celebrated on the first Thursday after Trinity Sunday, it was originally marked in York with an ecclesiastical procession in which both clergy and laity followed the host as it was carried through the city streets. Some time later the cycle, itself processionally staged, developed and eventually became so large and so popular that by the third quarter of the fifteenth century it displaced the ecclesiastical procession to the following day. This left "the cycle of plays as the principal celebration of the feast proper" (Beadle 28)—which again implies a close connection between transubstantiation and Christ's physical resurrection. The cycle must have been considered an appropriate celebration and explication of the miracle of the Eucharist, yet the Eucharist is not its ostensible subject. The cycle represents instead the entire span of Christian history, reaching its climax at Christ's resurrection. As the corpus Christi was consumed by communicants on Easter Sunday, it appears that Easter Sunday was consumed by audience members on the feast of Corpus Christi. Resurrection and transubstantiation are again linked.

In the York Plays, Cleophas and Luke, infirm of faith as they are, leave both their sorrow and their doubts about the resurrection when Christ breaks bread with them at the castle of Emmaus. Some lines are missing from the manuscript, but we know that near the end of Play 40 Christ blesses the bread in some manner and disappears. On the basis of this miracle and other "werkis" that the mysterious pilgrim "wrought," Cleophas and Luke deduce that the man with whom they were travelling and talking was Christ—it was he they "saugh [saw] [...] in sight" (40.179). Cleophas then examines the bread Christ blessed and quite enthusiastically proclaims that no greater miracle has ever been witnessed, a declaration Luke immediately seconds:

I Peregrinus

We saugh hym in sight, nowe *take* we *entent* [pay attention, learn]

Be [by] be brede [bread] bat he brake vs so baynly [willingly] betwene,

Such wondirfull *wais* [course of events] as we haue *wente* [known]

Of *Jesus pe gente* [the gracious Jesus] was *neuere none seene* [never before seen].

II Peregrinus

Sene [seen, witnessed] was *per neuere* [never before] so wondirfull werkes.

Be [by] see ne be sande, in þis worlde so wide.

Menskfully [in a fitting manner] in mynde bes materes
now merkis [let us take note of, remember], And
preche we it prestly [quickly] on euery ilke side
[everywhere]. (40.179-86)

Unfortunately, the two men never reveal what is miraculous about the bread, and therefore we must turn to other dramatic representations for a possible explanation. In the N-Town play, Cleophas and Luke notice that Christ has broken the bread "as evyn on tway [in two] / As ony [any] sharpe knyff xuld kytt [should cut]" (38.285-86); they conclude "therby" that the vanished pilgrim was really Christ. This "brekynge of bred ful evyn asoundyr

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[asunder]" in N-Town (38.291), as lovely a stage effect as it is, does not seem to be the miracle performed in the York play, however; more likely, the miracle represented here is similar to that represented in the Towneley play of the Pilgrims. In Towneley, Cleophas reveals that he and Luke recognized Christ by the manner in which he broke bread:

I had no knawlege it was he, Bot for [except that] he brake this brede in thre, And *delt* [gave] it here to the and me With his awme [own] hande. (27.334-37)

Christ breaks the bread into three parts for a purely practical reason—after all, three men are sitting down together for a meal; and yet, he breaks the bread in this manner for a purely symbolic reason as well—at the fraction in the mass, the priest breaks the host into three equal parts. In Towneley, Christ seems to be conducting (a very condensed) mass on stage; the bread he breaks may even be a Eucharist. Given that the host's transformation into flesh at the words of consecration was considered the greatest of miracles, the unparalleled "werkes" Cleophas and Luke in York claim to have witnessed may at least include the host's transformation into the body of Christ, signalled by the bread's (new) wafer-like appearance.

Because Cleophas and Luke "saugh" Christ "in sight," recognized his body, and believed in the resurrection, they are finally able to understand the true nature and profound significance of the bread they hold in their hands. In a single moment, they convert both from Judaism and heretical dualism to Christianity and from heretical Wyclifism to orthodox Catholicism. In the process, they find themselves liberated from their crippling grief, which mutates into a milder natural sorrow at separation from Christ when he ascends to the right hand of God.

Of course, separation from Christ and from all dearly-departed loved ones (and therefore even the slight sorrow this separation generates) is temporary: we see this promise dramatized in York in the play of Last Judgement (Play 47). At the end of time, grief becomes the exclusive property and eternal state of those who, unlike Cleophas, Luke, and the other disciples, never did convert, but who stubbornly refused to recognize Christ's body in any form. After the final trumpet sounds, the first evil soul

(1 Anima Mala), realizing what is about to happen, exclaims on behalf of all of his fellows, "Alias, alias, bat we were borne, / So may we synfull kaytiffis say" (47.113-14). The wretch then very helpfully identifies for the audience the sin for which he and many others will be eternally condemned: "Alias, we wrecchis [...] are forlorne, / Pat never att [yet] serued God to paye [to please], / But ofte we have his flesh forsworne [denied]" (47.117-19). In York, it seems that Christ damns souls first and foremost for denying and abjuring his body, in whatever form that body chooses to take. Hell and sorrow are reserved primarily for heretics, for dualists and Lollards who, "for pompe of wikkid pride," "Wepe [...] may with many a teere" (47.158, 159)-

This threat of eternal damnation lent an urgency to the lessons offered with such marvellous dramatic economy in the post-Passion sequence of the York Corpus Christi cycle. Audience members, through the example of the disciples, not only learned orthodox Catholic doctrine on the nature of Christ's resurrected and transubstantiated body; they also (eventually) saw modelled before them the proper way to mourn the dead after death's defeat by Christ. This final lesson, although probably less profound to the York playwrights, was likely more valuable to its original audience, as this lesson was seldom offered and encountered elsewhere. Medieval treatises on the true nature of the host abound, but few texts of advice or consolation appear to have been written and circulated for those faced with the hard and yet relatively mundane task of faithfully mourning their dead.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This article was accepted to the current collection just before Sarah Beckwith's important study of the York Passion sequence became available, and so I have not been able to incorporate or address any aspects of her argument here. Readers interested in this topic are encouraged to see her Signifying God: Social Relation and Symbolic Act in the York Corpus Christi Plays (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2001).

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NOTES

- One play—Adam and Eve in Eden—was not received and copied into the register until 1559. Other plays—The Marriage at Cana and Jesus in the House of Simon the Leper—were never entered. See Richard Beadle, ed., *The York Plays* (London: Edward Arnold, 1983) 418, 440, 441.
- See Beadle 456.
- 3. Whereas repetition at the end and beginning of stanzas previously suggested that each pilgrim was feeding off of or encouraged by the other's grief, repetition now is used to suggest the men's desire that Christ remain with them: "Bide [remain] with vs sir pilgrime, we praye sou. // We praye sou, sir pilgrime, se prasse nost to passe [do not insist on leaving]" (40.144-45); as well as Christ's graciousness in accepting their invitation: "Sir, I muste nedis do as se bid me. // se bidde me so baynly [willingly] I bide for be beste [it's best—or good—that I stay]" (40.152-53).
 - 4. Ambrose here is echoing Seneca, who, in a letter written to Lucilius on the death of Flaccus, does not forbid mourning but insists that it be done in a controlled manner. "We [...] may be forgiven for bursting into tears," he writes, "if only our tears have not flowed to excess, and if we have checked them by our own efforts" (429). "Let not the eyes be dry when we have lost a

- friend, nor let them overflow," he advises. "We may weep, but we must not wail" (429-31).
- 5. The translation is my own. The original reads: "Quia ipse Dominus in jussu et in voce archangeli, et in novissima tuba descendet de coelo, et mortui in Christo resurgent primi: deinde nos viventes, qui reliqui sumus, simul cum illis rapiemur in nubibus obviam Christo in aera'.[...] Pereat contristatio, ubi tanta est consolatio: detergatur luctus ex animo, fides expellat dolorem."
- 6. The original reads: "Notandum videtur, quod genti per mundam captivae obsolevit usus dedicandi Ecclesias; quern morem Patrum Christiani conservant [...]. Unde Judaei simul cum templo dedicatione ejus, ne jucundentur, renuntiant. Cum his item captivi Wiclevistae, ne iucundentur in Ecclesiae festivitate, judaice contristantur."
- 7. The original reads: "Ecce, miser Wicleff: ergo sanguis in altari non est typus, sed veritas; non est figura, sed claritas; non est umbra Christi sanguinis, sed natura. Typus ejus fuit sanguis Agni paschalis: typus ejus erat sanguis sanctuarii: typus aspersio sacerdotum. Cujus putas?"
- The original reads: "sicut est idololatra repuntandus, qui colit divino cultu, quod Deus non est: ita cui cultum divinum denegat ei, qui vere Deus est."

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