Doctrinal Orthodoxy and the Dramatic in Liturgical and Secular English Drama

Sarah Brazil

This essay considers the representation of Christ's Resurrection in two very different dramatic forms: liturgical and secular. The liturgical concerns the Easter morning *Visitatio Sepulchri*, while the secular involves the plays from York, Chester, Towneley and N-Town, whose extant textual forms stretch across the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The times at which both performances were initially crafted situate them in two very different moments of Christian worship, and throughout this essay I demonstrate that the Eucharistic controversies which raged from the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries had a significant impact on how the moment of Resurrection was or was not staged in English drama. The doctrinal changes are particularly notable in the case of the Easter celebration of the Resurrection, as not only does the actual moment of revivification come to be staged, but the body of Christ, which was absent in order to signal Resurrection in earlier forms of worship such as the liturgical *Visitatio*, becomes a central feature to the late-medieval mode of celebration. This corporeal insertion is furthermore contextualised in terms of its wider resonance within secular English drama, with its connection to the Eucharist elicited.

This essay seeks to explore the significant differences in the representation of Christ's Resurrection found in the liturgical *Visitatio Sepulchri*, instigated in the tenth century, and the secular English Resurrection plays, the texts of which are dated between the fifteenth and sixteenth

centuries.[1] The purpose of this comparison is to assert the impact that the changes in Eucharistic doctrine, most emphatically realised in the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, had upon two very different forms of drama that at their instigation are separated by four centuries in which crucial theological changes occurred. The central divergence in the plays' respective presentation of the event, I will argue, is the movement from a moment in which the celebration of the Resurrection relied on the discovery of an empty tomb on Easter morning to a time when bodily presence was central to the proof of Christ's defeat of death. This development, which occurred in iconography from the twelfth century and drama after 1215, marks a major rupture from the Gospel narratives and Resurrection iconography from approximately the fourth century onwards. Text and image, in both of these instances, foreground the corporeal absence of Christ as being the principal mode of expressing the Resurrection. In order to demonstrate the changing centrality of the body of Christ in the post-Fourth Lateran Council world, and its consequential impact upon English secular drama, both of these media, as well as the changes in the Eucharistic doctrine, will be outlined.

Beginning with the canonical Gospels' account of the Resurrection, it is important to note that none of the Evangelists record the moment of Resurrection and use other narrative devices to declare its occurrence after the event itself. The reluctance to narrate this event is particularly evident in the Gospel of John because another Resurrection narrative – that of Lazarus – is included in the text (John 11:44). Jesus's own revival is, as in the other Gospels, left to inference, signs and divine mediation. In the three Synoptic Gospel accounts, varying numbers of angels announce the Resurrection to a similarly diverse number of women who attend the corpse of Christ, while in the Gospel of John the discarded grave cloths are signs that must be interpreted by Mary Magdalene and the two apostles present. Crucial to all four accounts, however, is that the women who approach the tomb find it evacuated of bodily remains. While the understanding of what has occurred ranges from joy to a

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[1] Dating is an intrepid issue for the secular plays, and performance dates differ significantly from those of the texts themselves. The York and Chester Cycles are thought to have begun in the late-fourteenth century. The manuscript containing the fullest version of York is from the late-fifteenth century, while the majority of the manuscripts which contain the Chester plays are from the sixteenth century. The N-Town manuscript is a compilation, and none of the extant play-texts have external performance records, leaving it impossible to pin down such details. One date is included in the Purification play, and this is 1468, and scholars do place the manuscript in the late-fifteenth or early-sixteenth centuries. Towneley is another such work, and its extant form, like the majority of the Chester manuscripts, is from the sixteenth century.

question of theft in the case of the solo Mary Magdalene, an empty tomb is at the centre of all accounts.

Iconography, too, was a reluctant participant in the early representations of the Resurrection. Indeed, before the second century, no Resurrection iconography is attested. The centrality of the Resurrection, which by the time of the First Council of Nicaea and the proclamation of the Nicene Creed in 325 had been cemented in doctrine, can be traced back to Paul, who, writing in the mid-first century, bases the entirety of Christian faith on this event: "And if Christ be not risen again, your faith is vain, for you are yet in your sins" (1 Corinthians 15:17). But between the middle of the first and second centuries, neither Easter celebrations nor Christological beliefs featured this Pauline position on the Resurrection, but instead propounded the importance of the Incarnation and Crucifixion (see Vinzent 77).

This sudden inclusion of the Resurrection within Christian belief and celebration is attributed to the controversial theologian Marcion of Sinope (85-160), who was eventually declared a heretic and excommunicated from the Church for his radical beliefs. As Markus Vinzent demonstrates, Marcion is a crucial figure in the development of Christian belief and the emergence of the body of literature now termed the New Testament. Vinzent convincingly argues that it is solely because of "Marcion's rediscovery of Paul . . . [that] Christ's Resurrection [regained] a place in the memory of Christianity" (111). Marcion is believed by scholars to be responsible for instigating the sorting of Christian texts into a canonical format, and the initial use of the term "New Testament" is attributed to him (see Vinzent 77-191).

Prior to the Edict of Milan in 313, in which the Roman Emperor Constantine protected Christians from persecution, iconography of the Resurrection, when it did begin to emerge, predominantly took the form of symbols. A prime example of this Resurrection symbolism is found on a fourth-century sarcophagus preserved in the catacomb of Domitilla, Rome. The sarcophagus contains the *Chi* (X) *Ro* (P), the so-called "sacred monogram," composed of the first two letters of Christ's name in Greek, placed on top of a cross and surrounded by a Roman wreath. Below this, two guards sleep. While the monogram stands for Christ, the wreath signals his triumph over death, with the cross emphasising this further. The guards are typically ineffective and powerless and the tomb is not shown in this scene – the sarcophagus making its addition unnecessary. This image contains a common fusing of Christian and Roman symbolism, and declares the Resurrection to be a victory over death.

After the fourth century the "Women at the Tomb" scene came to dominate iconography, taking over from another indirect iconographic form known as the *traditio legis*. In this earlier convention, Robin Margaret Jensen argues, the images which "show Christ transcendent and enthroned or seated on an orb certainly are representations of the resurrected Christ, and frequently include heavenly backgrounds (new Jerusalem, cloud-streaked skies) to emphasise the point" (162). The Women at the Tomb, meanwhile, takes its model from the initial discovery of the empty tomb in the Gospel narratives, and regularly features an angel, a cloth and commonly both as mediating forces of the miraculous event. A fifth-century ivory diptych from Rome is an example of the transition between these two conventions. The top panel shows the empty tomb and sleeping guards, while two women bow at the feet of a haloed man holding a scroll sitting in front of the doors of the tomb in the panel below. The identity of the male figure is unclear, as Jensen explains:

> This particular composition has been thought either to represent the angel announcing the resurrection to the two Marys (Mary Magdalene and "the other" Mary, Matthew 28:1-8), or a visual conflation of that event with Jesus' subsequent appearance to the two women (Matthew 28:9-10). The confusion is due to the fact that the young man has a halo and holds a scroll, more appropriate for Christ than an angel.   (162)

The scroll and seated position of Christ seem to be residual elements of the *traditio legis*, yet the presence of the women moves the scene closer to the Gospel accounts, and closer to the general trend developing during this period.

Bodily absence comes to be a pervasive feature of this iconographic form. This can be further seen in the sixth-century mosaic at Ravenna, dated to before 526, which has all the typical features of the Women at the Tomb iconographic convention (Devonshire Jones 499). An empty tomb, female attendants and an angel, seated and with a halo, populate the scene, with the angel delivering the message of Christ's Resurrection to the two women. The iconographic dominance of the empty tomb, which began to emerge in the third century and prevailed until the twelfth, presents the viewer with the opportunity to experience presence in the face of absence. The lack of bodily presence, as encountered by pilgrims at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, was (and continues to be) for many Christians a sustaining point of their faith. Colin Morris observes the power of this shrine: "All other graves were venerated because of the presence of holy remains; but that of Jesus was important precisely because his body was believed not to be there" (8). This power

translates to iconography, but whereas veneration at the tomb requires the confrontation of sheer absence, artistic renderings frequently communicate Resurrection through other devices such as angels and cloth, as in the Gospel narratives. Common to both forms of devotion, however, is that Christ's body is necessarily absent.

Corporeal absence is also integral to the tenth-century liturgical *Visitatio Sepulchri* (henceforth *Visitatio*), or "Quem quaeritis," a sung monastic re-enactment of the early morning discovery of the empty tomb that was enacted on Sunday morning of the Easter weekend, and followed several other integral liturgical ceremonies of the Easter events. The earliest extant version of the text is recorded in the *Regularis Concordia* (London, British Library, Cotton Tiberius A. iii), a monastic agreement drawn up by Bishop Aethelwold of Winchester, which outlined common monastic practices in England based on the rule of St. Benedict. David A. Bjork argues that a Frankish monk composed the *Visitatio* during the ninth century and that soon after it "enjoyed nearly universal circulation within the Frankish realm," although there is no firm evidence to specify the place or time of composition (51). As with the iconographic form of the "Women at the Tomb," which had by this point prevailed for almost five centuries, the *Visitatio*, and indeed the entire liturgical celebration of Easter, depended on Christ's body being elsewhere in order to be meaningful (see Kolbiaka; Flanigan).

The significance of this corporeal absence begins on Good Friday with the ceremony of the *Depositio crucis*, which features a cross wrapped in linen then carried to the altar and concealed behind a veil. The purpose of this procession is to evoke the carrying of Christ's body to the tomb, with the cross here standing for the corpse of Christ and the altar for his sepulchre. At the instigation of the ceremony in the tenth century in England, the cross was deemed the most fitting object and symbol of Christ's body, and was thus ritually wrapped and placed in the area of the altar designated as the tomb. The *Regularis Concordia* proceeds to detail the *Elevatio*, the early Sunday morning unwrapping and removal of the cross from its resting place, which takes place without the presence of witnesses. The text shows that this is to occur before the bells of Matins are rung, but the instructions for the *Elevatio* are scant in comparison to the two main liturgical sequences that buttress it at either end. Only monastic presence is required at this point, and the cross is transferred from the place where it has been watched to one that will be out of sight for the onlookers of the *Visitatio*. The next time the altar/tomb will be seen the cross will have disappeared, leaving only the cloth behind. Before that, however, the angel and women – the main actors in

the drama of the *Visitatio*, with their parts performed by monks or priests – must sing their antiphonal exchanges. The angel sits in waiting for the women, who enter the Church searching for the tomb. Upon meeting, the angel will question the women's purpose in searching for Christ in such a place, and his Resurrection, as foretold, will be triumphantly announced:

> Angel: *Quem quaeritis in sepulchro, o Christicolae. . .*
> Women: *Ihesum nazarenum crucifixium, o celicola . . .*
> Angel: *Non est hic surrexit sicut praedixerat. Ite nuntiate quia surrexit a mortuis.*
> Women: *Alleluia. resurrexit Dominus.* (*Regularis Concordia*, Cotton Tiberius A. iii, fols. 21r-v)

An integral feature of the *Visitatio* is that the Resurrection is explained through and understood by the empty tomb. *Non est hic* – he is not here – is an utterance which defines the Easter celebration. The evacuation of Jesus's body from the tomb is one of the most crucial aspects of the angel's declaration, as Resurrection is initially secured by this very fact. In the sung exchange, Resurrection is entirely connected to corporeal absence, and it explains and qualifies the validity of the angel's announcement.

The last key feature of the performance is the angel's revelation of the altar/tomb, which, up until this moment, is still concealed by a veil that covers the shroud, and in turn once covered the cross. The sight of the cloths further develops and expands on the meaning of this empty tomb, and just how necessary it is for Jesus not to be present at this moment:

> When he [the angel] is saying this he should stand up and lift the curtain and show them the place which is empty of the cross. Only the linen cloth, in which the cross had been wrapped, has been put there. When they have seen this, they should put down in the same sepulchre the thuribles which they had been carrying, and take up the shroud, and stretch it out in the direction of the clergy, and, *as if they were showing that the Lord had risen and was no longer wrapped in it*, they should sing the antiphon: "The Lord has risen from the sepulchre, [he who hung on the cross for us, alleluia]". They should place the cloth over the altar. (*Regularis Concordia*, fols. 21r-v, trans. Sheingorn 22; my emphasis)

As the text indicates, displaying the cloths, which are decisively detached from the body of Christ, is the final means through which the Resurrection is communicated to the congregation. The concluding antiphon sung in praise and celebration of the Resurrection is thus contingent on

these cloths. They visually confirm the separation from the corpse they once wrapped, and in doing so confirm its continual existence outside this place of death.

The *Visitatio,* recorded in this English manuscript in 970, lies between two significant eucharistic controversies. The first of these was between two monks from the monastery at Corbie, Radbertus and Ratramnus, in the ninth century, and the second was instigated by Berenger of Tours in the eleventh century. The impact of each controversy on the celebration of the Resurrection, however, was vastly different. The first controversy developed from the divergent opinions held by Radbertus and Ratramnus about what the Eucharistic host signified, and the relation this held to Real Presence. Radbertus, following the teachings of Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, argued that Real Presence meant that the historical body of Christ was to be found in the consecrated Eucharist. He sent a treatise on the Eucharist to King Charles the Bald (d. 877) between 843-844 to this effect, in which he argued that "the sacrament that the king received . . . was holy food and drink, the source of eternal salvation, because it contained the very body born of Mary in Bethlehem and crucified in Jerusalem" (Chazelle 205). Ratramnus, a decade later, also sends his own treatise to Charles, writing that "while the Eucharist is indeed Christ's body and blood, its contents are spiritual, not physical, and thus different from the incarnate blood and flesh" (Chazell 206). His own understanding of Real Presence followed the teachings of Augustine, and as William R. Crockett outlines, Ratramnus is disputing how this notion is interpreted:

> Ratramnus is not denying the real presence here, but reaffirming the Augustinian tradition that the body of Christ is present in the Eucharist not to the senses but to the mind and to faith. The elements are perceived by the senses, but the reality that they image is only received by faith. (109)

The conflicting positions held by the Church Fathers Ambrose and Augustine on eucharistic matters had co-existed for centuries and continued to do so after the Radbertus/Ratramnus debate. Indeed, it is notable that the *Visitatio* was produced some time after this first controversy, yet does not seem to bear any significant marks of it. It was not until the second controversy, which began with the objections of Berenger of Tours against Radbertus' own writings on the matter that the issue of the Eucharist really came to a head, heralding "some of the greatest changes in the theology of the Eucharist in the history of Western Christianity" (Macy 365). Berenger's objections to the Real Presence

as formulated by Radbertus were based on Augustinian teachings as well as Ratramnus's divergent position. Gary Macy outlines:

> Berenger's position was straightforward. The body and blood present in the sacrament cannot be the same historical body of Jesus. The historical body of Jesus must take up space and be seen, felt and tasted as a human body. This body can only exist in heaven. The presence on the altar is the spiritual body of Christ. Furthermore, the bread and wine must continue to exist as bread and wine since they are symbols that point to the spiritual presence of Christ. (371)

Berenger's dissention, however, was considered tantamount to "denying the reality of the presence of Christ in the Eucharist, and thus undermining the efficacy of the ritual" (Macy 371). Papal authorities did not tolerate this and Pope Leo IX (1048-1054) condemned Berenger's teachings at the Council of Rome in 1050, while Gregory VII (1073-1085) forced him to sign two separate oaths accepting the now orthodox position on the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist (see Crockett 109-113). While Ratramnus was able to propose a more spiritual, non-literal interpretation of the Real Presence two centuries before, by the time Berenger uttered his own objections, the theological climate had altered significantly.

The changing significance of the term *corpus Christi* is one method of tracing such theological developments. Before the mid-twelfth century, this term had two particular referents: the historical body of Christ and the Church. The Eucharist, meanwhile, was referred to as *corpus Christi mysticum*. After this point in time, however, this latter term designated the Church, while the Eucharist came to be designated as either *corpus Christi* or *corpus verum*. Andrew Louth observes the significances evident in this verbal shift:

> First of all, the direction of signification is reversed. Whereas traditionally the celebration of the Eucharist had disclosed (or pointed to) the realization of the church (the celebrating community) as the Body of Christ, so that the church is the hidden meaning of the Eucharist, with this change the Eucharist, the consecrated host, becomes the hidden meaning of the church, and becomes an object of devotion, or adoration, in itself. (123-24)

The complexities of the arguments that became increasingly staunch in the wake of Berenger's objections to the Real Presence of Christ's incarnated body in the Eucharist are too dense to explore in detail within the scope of this work. But what Louth makes clear is that during this

later eucharistic controversy, the body of Christ was taking up a position of centrality that was previously held by the institution of the Church, and was becoming integral to doctrine and worship throughout Western Christendom in a very literal sense.

The shifting significance of the Eucharist can also be traced through the changing role of the priest in relation to the celebration of the sacrament in the Mass. The decision made during the Gregorian Reform in the late-twelfth century, which decreed that only an ordained priest could preside over the sacrament, invested the priest with a level of power he had not hitherto enjoyed in relation to the Eucharist. Previously, members of the congregation and even women had shared the capacity to consecrate the host. But these changes, as Macy clarifies, quickly and irreparably altered the power dynamic related to the act of consecration: "The official position quickly became so firmly entrenched that it was understood to have been the perpetual understanding of the Church. This enhancement of power of the priesthood could not help but also enhance the power of the Eucharist" (366-70). This movement towards a more official procedure, performed by one deemed to have a privileged power to do so, was a defining feature of late-medieval Christian worship, and its influence grew beyond solely celebrating and memorialising the Crucifixion.

In the midst of these significant changes to the practice of the Mass, the Resurrection, which had been defined principally by the corporeal absence of Christ, came to be deeply entwined with the Eucharist. Eamon Duffy explains that the new eucharistic theology present in the prayers said during the Mass in the late-medieval period contained a dual celebration of the Crucifixion and Resurrection when the host was elevated:

> Linked firmly to the death of Christ on the altar of the cross, [the prayers] nevertheless emphasized the glorious and risen character of the body on which the devotee gazed. The prayers invoked Christ not only by his death but by his resurrection, by the descent of his spirit, by his coming again in glory. (119-20)

An image included in Duffy's discussion shows just how intimately the Crucifixion, remembered in the Eucharist, and the Resurrection, were in the Mass. The image is from a Sarum Primer in 1497 and shows the Mass of Pope Gregory. The lifting of the chalice coincides exactly with the emergence of Christ from the tomb, flanked by two angels who aid his evacuation from the space where his dead body was laid to rest. The placement of one image upon the other similarly reinforces the prox-

imity suggested between the two momentous events in the life of Christ, and both are understood through his corporeality.

In tandem with these immense theological developments, Resurrection iconography also experiences significant changes. A major shift particularly evident from the twelfth century is that a new artistic convention begins to replace the "Women at the Tomb" scene. From this period onwards, the moment of Resurrection starts to be shown in iconography and initially presents a fully clothed Christ emerging from the tomb, displaying the body from the waist up, as in the case of the Resurrection miniature from the Lewis Psalter (Philadelphia, Free Library, Lewis E 185, fol. 16v), produced in Paris between 1225-1240 (Figure 1). The image that was to dominate late-medieval iconography, however, is of a different order again. This featured a dynamic body mid-action, usually stepping out of the tomb onto the backs of the ever-ineffective soldiers and striding towards the onlooker. Even more radically different, and marking this art as particularly affective for the viewer, is that the body of this Christ bleeds profusely, as in the case of the Holkham Bible (c. 1327-1335, fol. 34v) and the Litlyngton Missal (1383-1384, Westminster Abbey MS 37, fol. 95v) (Figures 2 and 3). The difference in time between the production of the two images also evinces a development in this iconographic style, as while the Holkham Christ's wounds are visible and manifold, the Litlyngton's shows blood streaming forth from wounds on the right side of the chest and the hands of its Christ. Such increased attention on the vulnerable, bleeding aspect of the resurrected Christ in the late-fourteenth century emphasises the importance of this type of divinity at this particular moment. David Morgan argues that "the emergence of a devotional piety that stressed the human, corporeal aspect of Christ more than the triumphalist, post-Resurrection character of the earlier Middle Ages" (61) accounts for the shift from the earlier iconographic forms to an emphasis on the pain endured by the incarnated Christ. Sarah McNamer also observes equivalent changes in the depiction of Christ's body at the same historical moment in Crucifixion iconography, which had previously presented the Christian god as triumphalist:

> Images of the crucifixion in devotional literature and art before the eleventh century typically depict Christ as triumphant saviour: even on the cross, he is regal in bearing, clothed and crowned, victorious over death, awe-inspiring. But by the thirteenth century, a different image has begun to dominate, and it will do so until the Reformation: naked, disfigured, covered with blood, Christ had become a vulnerable human victim, one for whom the meditator could and should feel compassion. (2)

Although these moves to a more affective mode of artistic expression must be considered, so too must the theological changes that dictated that Christ's incarnated body was literally present during the celebration of the Mass. The Crucifixion always had a body to contend with, whereas one is forcibly inserted into Resurrection iconography. By the twelfth century, however, these movements were working side by side, although the precise details of this development are difficult to ascertain.

The English secular drama that emerged in the late-fourteenth century, and continued in some instances well into the sixteenth century, broke radically from the previous forms of performing Christ's Resurrection. The liturgical drama, Richard Beadle observes, provided no precedent for depicting the body leaving the tomb (2, 364), yet three of the four extant English plays (York, Chester and Towneley) feature such an event. A shaping force, at least in relation to the York and early Chester Cycles, was the establishment of the feast of Corpus Christi in 1311 (occurring on the first Thursday after Trinity Sunday), which was dedicated to honouring the Eucharist, and followed in the wake of the aforementioned theological developments. Unlike the liturgical drama, where bodily absence and an empty tomb were part of the incontrovertible proof for the continual presence of Christ, the majority of the secular plays relied on a bodily presence closely related to eucharistic presence to verify the occurrence of Resurrection.

In the York *Resurrection of Christ*, the dynamic shifts to such a sizable degree that the whole and phenomenologically present body of Christ emerges from the tomb, possibly walking silently through the audience.[2] Signalled not by the utterance of dialogue, but by a single stage direction, "Tunc Jesus resurgente," this play departs radically from older modes of signification.[3] The impact that the changes in eucharistic doctrine had upon secular performances is particularly notable in the case of the York *Resurrection*, primarily because the extant play-text has overt links to the feast of Corpus Christi, as well as the fact that the play drew on liturgical drama and displayed a keen knowledge of its contents (see Coldewey 28). In saying this I do not mean that secular and liturgical

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[2] This is how Meg Twycross chose to stage the York *Resurrection of Christ* in March 1977, and while no evidence for the staging exists outside of the single stage direction, it remains a strong possibility. See Twycross (273-96).

[3] While Beadle does question the function of this stage direction, he also surmises: "The singing of *Christus resurgens* (by two angels) accompanies the Resurrection in the Towneley, Chester, and Cornish versions of the episode, and it would be surprising to learn that it was not part of the original conception at York as well" (371).

drama were part of a continuum or that the development of either was predicated upon the other, but that the language of certain parts of the York *Resurrection* is extremely close to that of the *Visitatio*.[4] Richard Beadle, the editor of the York plays, supports this view and states that the dialogue in the section where the women encounter the angel is "closely modelled on that of the 'Quem quaeritis' section of the much older Latin liturgical *Visitatio Sepulchri* plays" (Vol 2, 365). The plays' connection to liturgical frameworks is further supported by King, who clarifies that it was not biblical history that dictated the structure of the Cycle, but liturgical temporality as defined by the Church (31). While the York *Resurrection* play displays a close familiarity with the liturgical text, the secular play departs from the liturgical in many aspects of its performance. The moment at which the *Visitatio* culminated in the celebration of the Resurrection was when the "women" lifted the cloth before the congregation, emphasising that it no longer contained the corpse it once wrapped. But between 970 when the *Visitatio* was recorded in England, and 1377, the earliest possible date for the staging of the York Corpus Christi play, much had changed in the way Christians celebrated their god.

The witnessing of Christ's resurrected body is also crucial to the meaning of the York *Resurrection*, as it provides incontrovertible evidence in a play where there is a sustained attempt to contain that body before and after the event. The conspiratorial exchanges between Annas, Caiphas and Pilate focus on how they can retain power over Christ's body. When they fail to keep the body in the tomb, they switch techniques and attempt to corrupt the truth of the Resurrection by making the soldiers swear that a large group seized the body: "Thus schall the sothe be bought and solde / And treasoune schall for trewthe be tolde" (Beadle, *The York Plays* ll. 451-52). The attempt to contain the body of Christ on two fronts is termed by Sarah Beckwith a "double retention," but despite all conspiratorial efforts this is utterly undone by introducing Christ's body into the dramatic action, making the audience witnesses to the truth and reasserting the veracity of the Resurrection (81). The body thus conveys proof of Christ's defeat of death in a new way, far removed from its liturgical predecessor.

The Chester and Towneley plays feature the presence of Christ's body in a different manner again, and include a Christ who not only steps out of the tomb but one who also directly addresses the audience.

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[4] Scholarship on medieval drama has long since abandoned the teleological model of drama that was proffered by E. K. Chambers in 1903 (see Flanigan; King).

The Towneley Christ delivers the more ample monologue, but both are clear in their emphasis on the link between the resurrected body and the Eucharist. Not only did the elevation of the Eucharist make direct links to the Resurrection in the Mass then, but these resurrected Christs unequivocally link their bodies back to eucharistic bread, suggesting a sustained reciprocity in the meaning of both bodies. The first stanza in the Chester Christ's speech sees him declare himself "prynce of peace," announcing that peace will be bestowed in exchange for the cessation of sinning. Repentance is the means by which access to his body is granted:

> and yf they will of synnes sease,
> I grant them peace trulye
> and therto a full rych messe
> in bread, my owne body.   (Lumiansky and Mills, *The Chester Mystery Cycle*
> ll.166-69)

This is not the only reference to the Mass and the presence of this Christ's body in the bread either, and the following stanza iterates the connection between resurrected body and eucharistic bread, premising the salvific function the bread performs upon the believer:

> I am verey bread of liffe.
> From heaven I light and am send.
> Whoe eatheth that bread, man or wiffe,
> Shall lyve withowt end.
> And that bread that I you give,
> Your wicked life to amend,
> Becomes my fleshe through your beleeffe
> And doth release your synfull band.   (ll. 170-77)

The centrality of the bread to redemption and the possibility of resurrection for all Christians are here evinced, and the clearly common source between Towneley and Chester sees the Towneley Christ present a similar eucharistic focus (Stevens and Cawley, *The Towneley Plays* l. 344). The overtly corporeal language in both, with the extended section in Towneley emphasising the numerous wounds that this Christ has suffered ("And therefore thou shall understand, / In body, hede, feete, and hand, /Four hundredth woundys and v thowsand / Here may thou se" (ll. 291-92), focuses attention, and particularly the sight of the audience upon this resurrected body, the presence of which is crucial to the

meaning of this event.[5] This walking, talking and injured Christ proves to them without doubt that the Resurrection has occurred.

The N-Town plays, by contrast, are the only secular plays which do not focus their Resurrection play around the moment Christ emerges from the tomb. While Christ's body is staged in its transition between dead and revivified in the two *Harrowing of Hell* plays (33 and 35), and in the latter briefly addresses the audience once resurrected, this is not done in a manner equivalent to the other plays, or the prevailing iconography, where witnessing the Resurrection is integral to the affirmation of the event. Instead of an actor presenting the body of Christ exiting the tomb in order to prove the veracity of this central tenet of Christian faith, N-Town points to it indirectly through this sequence of plays, and then announces this moment in play 36, *The Announcement to the Three Marys; Peter and John at the Sepulchre*. In doing so, the N-Town plays are comparable to both the Gospel texts and the liturgical drama in underscoring the importance of discovering the empty tomb, but correlations cannot be made much further beyond this point.

In play 36, the need for an actor's body is notably lacking in the N-Town portrayal of the Resurrection, but this does not fully exclude the corporeal from the language of this play. The cloth is back in a central place, and while the three Marys need it to be interpreted by the angel who sends them on their way convinced that the Resurrection has occurred, John, like his counterpart in the Gospel of John, sees the empty tomb and the grave cloths of Christ and further glosses their meaning as proof of Resurrection:

> The same sudary and the same shete
> Here with my syth I se both tweyn.
> Now may I wele knowe and wete
> That he is rysyn to lyve ageyn.   (Spector, *The N-Town Play* ll. 135-38)

Christ's literal body is absent from this play, and Resurrection is here, like in the *Visitatio*, to be understood by the disconnection between the grave clothes and Christ's corpse. His body is, however, present throughout the play in another capacity. Both the women and angel insist on the wounds of the deceased and resurrected body to such an extent that it cannot but cause the audience to meditate upon the blood

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[5] Stevens and Cawley note in relation to the Towneley play: "The monologue of the risen Christ, which is not in the corresponding York play, was apparently inserted into the Towneley play. It belongs to a type of medieval religious lyric known as 'Appeals to Man from the Cross'" (602).

that has been shed for their sake. Marie Salomé's language is particularly visceral, and recalls the grievous wounds caused by the nails and the spear which penetrate Christ's body as the women approach the tomb:

> The naylis gun his lemys feyn,
> And the spere gan punche and peyn.
> On tho woundys, we wold have eyn:
> That grace now God graunt us.   (ll.29-32)

Of particular note is the wish to see these wounds again – to have "eyn" them, with this language of sight directing the audience to visualise an image of a resurrected body they would have been all too familiar with from iconography. Even without an actor's body marked with signs of torture, the N-Town play features a post-death body of Christ in a way that the liturgical drama did not imagine.

In the case of the N-Town plays, which do not choose to include the moment of Resurrection in its sequence of plays encapsulating the key moments surrounding the event, corporeality is still integral to the understanding of Christ's defeat of death. Departing significantly from the Easter liturgical performances and the dominant iconographic form up until the twelfth century, the body is, in all of these secular plays, essential to their articulation of Resurrection. Before the doctrinal changes in relation to the Real Presence of Christ in the consecrated Eucharist, which raged on between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries, bodily absence was a necessary aspect of Gospel narratives, iconography and liturgical drama linked to Christ's Resurrection, with the empty grave part of the indisputable proof of his continual presence. When it comes to the English secular drama, which extended from the late-medieval period into the Early Modern, however, the audience encounters an actor staging a body that could not have been conceived of in liturgical drama. As is the case with early English drama, episodes regularly vary significantly from one play to another in their presentation, and thus we find in the N-Town *Resurrection* a performance at times more akin to the Gospel narratives than its fellow productions in York or Chester, although it is very much of its time in terms of its use of affective language and imagery. The conclusion then is that changes in the doctrine of the Eucharist affected the manner in which drama related to the body of Christ, and in the case of York and the early Chester Cycle, which unlike N-Town had significant links to the celebration of the Eucharist, the audience saw Christ emerge from the tomb, and was assured of his glorious defeat of death via a body which moved and bled, and occasionally talked, before their eyes.
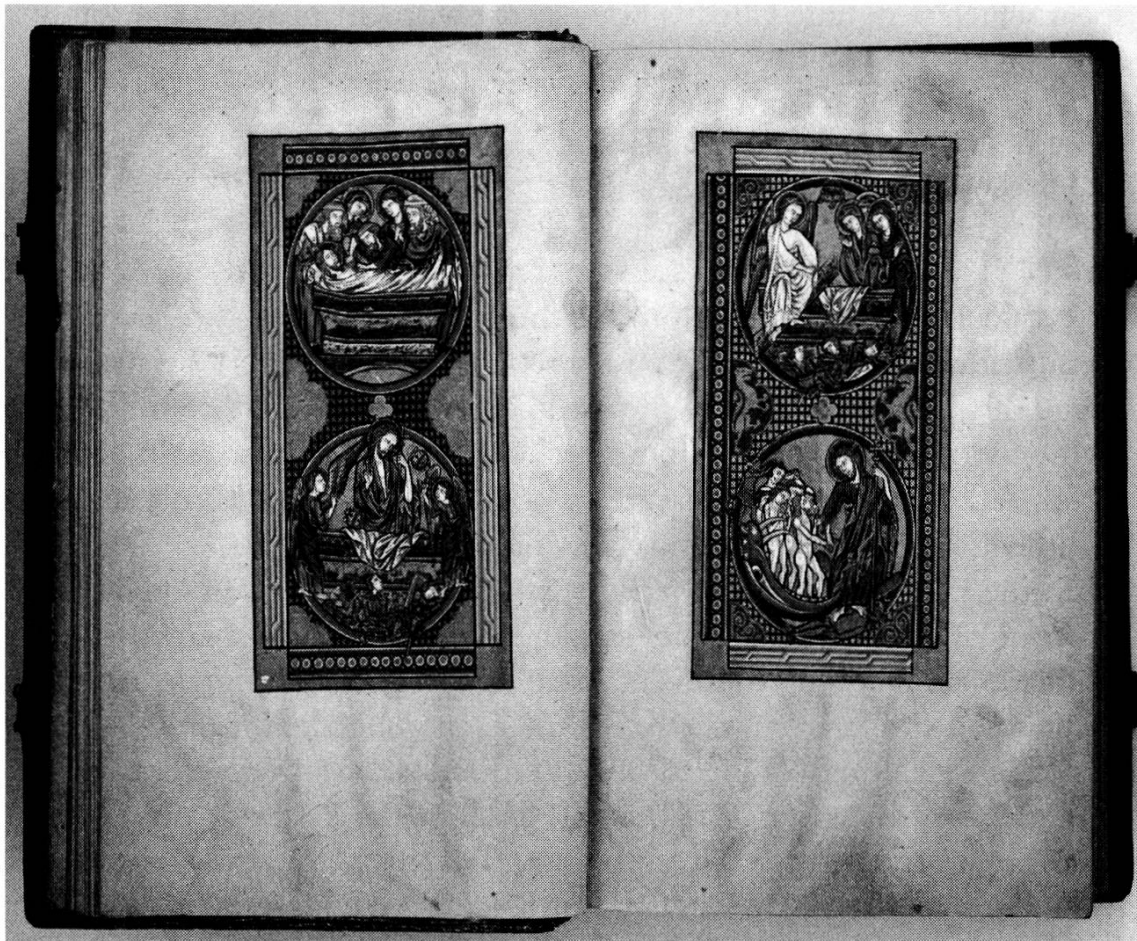
Figure 1: Lewis Psalter: Image courtesy of The Rare Book Department, Free
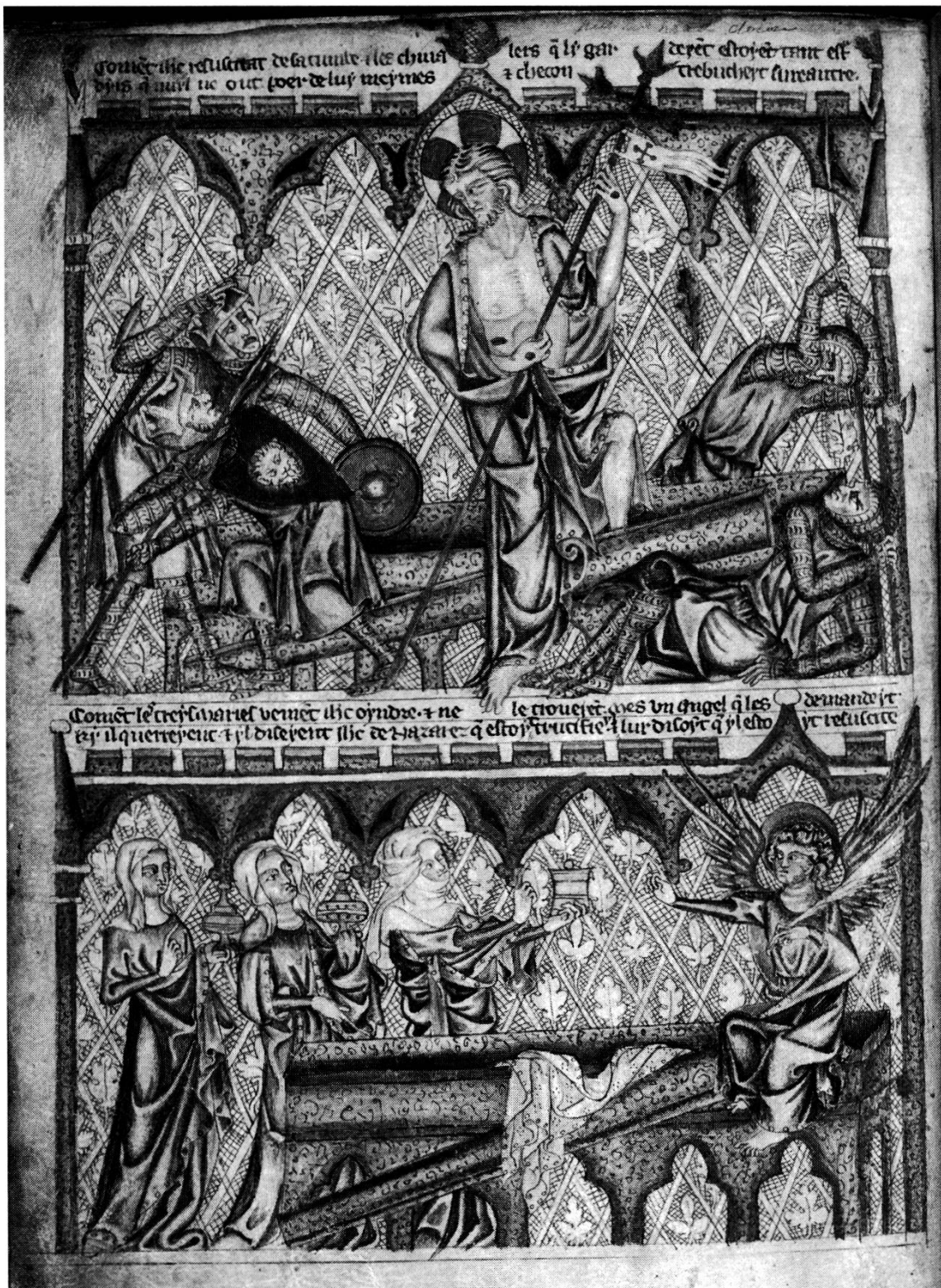Library of Philadelphia, Lewis E 185, fol. 16v-17r.

Figure 2: Holkham Bible, © The British Library Board,
BL MS Add. 47682, c. 1327-1335, fol. 34v

Figure 3: Litlyngton Missal, Westminster Abbey MS 37, 1383-1384, fol. 95v
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