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Staging the *Peregrini**

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If one looks at medieval images of the crucifixion, what seems most striking is not the central image of Christ on the cross so much as the episode's capacity for change, its openness to being re-envisaged in different contexts and for different functions. The more ideologically central an image, the more it seems likely to permit, or even *require*, such re-envisioning. That is what makes and keeps it a core image: its adaptability. This is fairly obvious when one considers pictorial images, but we have not allowed the idea to run as far as it should in dramatic criticism. Why should we consider the playmaker as any more of an *auteur*, let alone an *auctor*, than the painter who knew for whom the image was to be produced, and for what purpose, and created the work to suit those exigencies? I would argue that the dynamic of play production is not so much driven independently by the writer or the playmaker as by the needs, desires, fears and tastes of the expected audience, in their relation to the core ideology they have received, its imagery and traditions. At its most fundamental, what the audience will be *able* to comprehend limits the making of a play, but over and above that, the playwright will make many finer judgements about the audience and the local context of production. One reason we have been relatively slow to follow this through is that pinning down a chronology for individual plays or collections has been exceptionally hard, and is constantly being revised, so it is hard to link a play's style or content to a specific time. The collections of civic drama which we now have in the so-called "cycles", even where the manuscript's date comes from the period of production, contain plays from different periods of composition, having undergone varying degrees of revision, sometimes, as in the case of Chester, to make them support what was already defined as

* I am very grateful to Professor Greg Walker for his advice on this paper, and to colleagues in the universities of Tours and East Anglia who commented on earlier versions.

house-style. But if anything, that should encourage us to look *more* at what the plays themselves suggest their audiences' needs and desires might have been. The evidence we find could then be linked to the interpretation of other cultural objects, and a chronology gradually proposed by internal literary reading as much as by external evidence.

I could choose many plays to exemplify this, but there are a number of reasons that make the *Peregrini* suitable. These include the nature of its source, in which the roots of its adaptability lie, its varied action, and its metatheatrical quality. To adumbrate this study one might mention that the very definition of the disciples and Christ as *peregrini* ("pilgrims") is itself a liturgical re-envisioning of the biblical source, and English plays often opted for a title which included "Emmaus", the place where the central event took place.

The story of the *Peregrini* concerns the risen Christ's appearance to two sorrowing disciples on the road to Emmaus, his conversation with them, including instruction in the prophecies about Christ while not revealing his real identity to them, and then his subsequent disappearance after he had blessed bread and given it to them at supper, at which point the disciples belatedly realise who has been with them. It is attested only at the end of Luke's gospel (24:13-35), where it follows the discovery of the empty tomb by the three Maries and precedes Christ's appearance to eat fish and honey with his disciples in the upper room. In the most obvious instance of re-packaging the narrative, plays in various genres sometimes unbiblically combined the Emmaus or *Peregrini* episode into a larger set of Christ's resurrection appearances, including those to Mary Magdalen in the garden and to Thomas Didymus from the gospel of John, but I will mainly focus here on the single episode.

The biblical story has a mythic power, making profound claims about the human condition through a simple narrative. It affirms that the supernatural and natural worlds can intersect in the most intimate and ordinary of circumstances, the divine encountered on the road, God coming *in medias res*, as it were, to walk and talk with men, willing to be persuaded to sit down and eat with them at an inn. But it also says that human vision is imperfect—Christ is unrecognised for most of the story, but is then identified by the disciples when he disappears. It is one of these myths about whether thresholds can be crossed—like Orpheus's failure to recover Eurydice because he looked back when only he had passed over into life, or Mary Magdalene's seeing Christ only as the gardener until her own identity was given by Christ in speaking her name. As in the best myths, the narrator seems to be absent, events largely speaking for themselves; the story's paratactic style sequences events without always stating their causal relationship: "Et factum est, dum recumberet cum eis, accepti panem, et benedixit, ac fregit, et porrigebat illis. Et aperti sunt oculi eorum. [And it came to pass, whilst he was at table with them, he took bread and blessed and brake and gave to them. And their eyes were opened.]" (Luke 24:30-31;

Vulgate with Douay-Rheims trans.). It does not say here that their eyes were opened *because* Christ blessed, or broke or distributed the bread, though the disciples later say they recognised Christ *through* his breaking the bread at supper (24:35). In addition, emotions are limited and emerge almost tangentially rather than as a prominent feature of the story: for example, one hears that the disciples are sorrowful only because Christ asks them why they are. They do not express their grief, and the biblical narrator does not tell us subsequently about their feelings of joy or regret or penitence when they discover whom they encountered and at first failed to identify. The biblical narrative is suggestive and emotive rather than determinative and emotional. Precisely because it leaves so much unsaid, it comes over as mythically emblematic of the complex relationship of the natural and supernatural, and so open to further discussion. At the end the *peregrini* may claim to have recognised Christ from his breaking bread, but the story itself included other details which were linked to recognition without being explained or put into any hierarchy of causation: the blessing, the distributing, Christ's miraculous disappearance, the affective force of his teaching—"Was not our heart burning within us?" (24:32 [Douai-Rheims]), the disciples say. In this respect, the biblical source has a degree of disparateness, even of incoherence, that invites further attention, and would be problematic if one were determined to look for precise explanations. And Christians did, whether they were theologians or playmakers.

If one wants to appreciate further the room for manoeuvre that the story allowed, one only needs to look at the attempts made to pin it down. When myth turns to scripture, and scripture becomes the Word, and especially when the Word becomes the only ground of faith, as was the case in the Reformation, narrative has to bear the weight of theological desire. Gaps in the narrative need to be filled; what might be incidental details become potentially symbolic; actions are treated as exemplary, and bare fact is turned towards teaching. Although there was already a long-standing Catholic tradition of interpreting the story, hermeneutic transformations of the myth are particularly evident in the Reformist writings of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, where there is hardly an aspect of the story that was not picked over and turned to didactic advantage.¹

Topics included *why* the pilgrims were going to Emmaus, and what the name "Emmaus" means linguistically and allegorically (Patten, p. 81; Boys, p. 359; Andrewes, p. 404); why they were going *away* from Jerusalem, and why they were not believed by the disciples when they returned to report (this not, in fact, a detail in the Luke story,

¹ The theological commentaries and sermons referenced in what follows were accessed on the *EEBO: Early English Books Online* website: <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com/home>> (accessed 29 January 2018).

but rather inferred from Thomas's doubt in John's gospel); whether Christ's pressing to continue his journey is to be understood figuratively or literally (Fisher, p. 260); how his expounding Moses, Psalms and the prophets to the *peregrini* supports the importance of scripture over the *unwritten* traditions of the Catholics (Bell, p. 110); how it was that the disciples didn't recognise Christ and what *exactly* led to their eventually recognising him (Ambrose, pp. 31-32 [chap. 2, sect. 7]; Allen, pp. 371 and 384; Rollock, pp. 354-55). As we will see, medieval civic drama also found the cause of their recognition an area of doubt ripe for exploitation. Other topics included the warmth of the effect that his words had on the disciples, and what we should feel (Ambrose, p. 345; Perkins, p. 395); how this day of multiple resurrection appearances (Easter Monday) confirms the dignity of the Christian over the Jewish Sabbath (Widley, p. 38); and, in an imaginative plundering of the text, how the scriptures used by Christ to instruct the disciples on the road to Emmaus all speak against usury (Fenton, p. 35). Particularly important, and for obvious reasons, was whether Christ gave the sacrament to the two disciples, or simply blessed bread as one would do before any meal (Allen, p. 384); and, if he *was* giving the sacrament, whether he used only the element of bread, since wine was not mentioned (Sarpi, pp. 519-20). This had been an issue for various church fathers—some fathers had thought it *was* the sacrament—and was still current at the Council of Trent. Calvin thought it was not the sacrament but just blessing bread; some reformed commentators thought it simply a synecdoche for having a meal, with no literal exclusions one way or the other (Lindsay, p. 42). On the Catholic side of the debate, one finds a tract arguing that Christ's unrecognised appearance to the disciples shows how he can be invisibly present in the sacrament (Gwynneth, fol. 52^r). The *Peregrini* story was even recommended to Catholics as a justification for equivocating under interrogation, following the example Christ set when he pretended to be going forward on his journey (Worthington, p. 215). The blindness of the apostles to Christ's identity could be seen as giving comfort to someone actually blind (Hakewill, pp. 168-69), whereas at the level of international politics the story was caught up in the episcopal controversy between the Scots and English churches about the lawfulness of ceremonies, such as private sacraments and kneeling at communion: if Christ's blessing the bread meant that he was giving communion to the disciples, did this validate private communion, which the Presbyterians opposed but King James supported? And did it support sitting, rather than kneeling, at communion (Lindsay, p. 42)—the first of these things being correct in the view of Presbyterians, as against the king's insistence on kneeling? Interpreted with diverse degrees of theological, practical, personal, sectarian and political emphasis, the story could be made valuable to everyone. A scriptural text which could be regarded as modelling how people encounter and recognise God was bound to have its indeterminacies transformed into specific ideological assertions and exploited, shifting with genre, to meet the needs of specific audiences.

Nothing shows this more powerfully than dramatic versioning of the biblical story, and that's where this article goes next.

Rosemary Woolf called the *Peregrini* episode “a subject difficult to invest with dramatic life” (p. 280). This judgement has always troubled me, partly because Woolf had very good judgement, partly because I personally find the episode moving, even, if I am honest, *deeply attractive* about how things might be in the world, and so I can't understand how it could not translate into good theatre. It is also true that the story already contains several of Aristotle's core dramatic elements: *hamartia* (= failure, in this case a failure to recognise Christ); *peripeteia* (= a sudden reversal of circumstances, in this case when the disciples' interlocutor miraculously disappears); and *anagnorisis* (= recognition, in this case when the disciples realise who was with them). Admittedly, the most important element, *catharsis*, is missing, because the story is, in medieval terms, a comedy, which moves from inauspicious beginnings to a happy conclusion. However, I also find Woolf's judgement challenging because the *peregrini* episode was in fact very popular as a dramatic subject in different medieval theatrical and national traditions over a period of at least 400 years.

From the twelfth century it was part of a liturgical drama for Vespers on Easter Monday, the *Ordo ad Peregrinum*, where it was combined with the appearance to the disciples and Doubting Thomas. Found in versions from Rouen, Fleury, Beauvais, and Madrid, it was evidently important on the continent.² As regards English liturgical observance, researchers at the University of Durham working on the *Records of Early English Drama* (*REED*) for the North-East have recently identified, performed and reconstructed the music for a verse play written there by Prior Lawrence around 1150, on the model of the *Ordo*, and it can be seen on YouTube.³ Other English examples may well now be obscured by the accidents of recording, hidden behind general references to “resurrection” plays or plays which name more prominent figures such as Doubting Thomas, as Lincoln Cathedral's records do. Furthermore, while Lincoln's Corpus Christi plays are recorded in the last thirty years of the fifteenth century, there is no detailed information about their content, so one is not in any position to see whether the prominence of the *Peregrini* in the Easter liturgy of fourteenth-century Lincoln (*REED: Lincolnshire*, II: 408) resulted in its being present in the now-lost Corpus Christi plays of the fifteenth century, but the general impression one gets from what detail there is does not suggest identifiable transference of material between the venues. Stokes writes

² Gardiner includes extended analyses (and translations) of these versions.

³ See <http://community.dur.ac.uk/reed.ne/?page_id=80> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7a_jG3nLuGs> (both accessed 30 January 2018). See also Bevington, ed., which contains the Beauvais *Ordo ad Peregrinum*.

that “Evidence concerning the pageants that were embedded in the procession is sketchy at best” (*REED: Lincolnshire*, II: 417). However, one record fortunately shows that the episode was indeed part of the liturgical tradition at Wells Cathedral. Payments for an Easter week play continued through most of the fifteenth century, and that for 1417-18 evidences the *Peregrini*: “Item Solutum pro tinctione 1 toge Sancti Saluatoris pro ludo in Ebdomada Paschatis & pro barbīs pro ij palmerijs xvid [Also paid for the dyeing of one robe of the Holy Saviour for the play in Easter week and for two beards for two pilgrims, 16d]” (*REED: Somerset*, I: 243; trans. Abigail Ann Young at II: 834). What is not clear is whether this episode had always been and would remain part of what was presumably a liturgy-linked play. More seriously, the records do not show how the episode worked as theatre—for example, *when* in the play Christ wore this special dyed robe, whether it contributed theatrically to the pilgrims realising who he was, or how the spectators’ knowledge of Christ wearing it affected their response to the disciples when they were slow to recognise Christ. These are the points where the real experience of spectators is lost to us.

However, we have more evidence if we pass to another generic transformation of the story—that of English vernacular drama produced under civic or partially lay auspices, in which the *Peregrini* episode seems to have had wide currency. It appears in all four extant collections of biblical plays, *York*, *Chester*, and the *N-Town* and *Towneley* anthologies. It was not apparently in Coventry’s famous cycle, but I will return to this. It is relatively easy to see what theatrical possibilities might have attracted any playwright, regardless of the episode’s significance in the story of salvation. These possibilities were permitted by both what the Bible did include, and what it left unspoken.

Firstly, it allowed variety in a number of areas: in the range of possible emotions in the characters, only hinted at in the Bible; and in the styles of acting, which could run from the intimate to the manneristic, and hence prove adaptable to new tastes. Its action could incorporate set-piece lament, set-piece instruction, conversation, ceremonial or even sacramental action, and theatrical special effects—all of which could make the episode dramatically adaptable, permitting different emphases of treatment and theatrical exploitation. For example, the disappearance could be managed in a number of ways from the casual to the spectacular, not least because the important element was not the actual event and how it happened, but rather the reactions of the disciples, whose responses would guide those of the spectators. Secondly, the central event of Christ’s blessing and breaking bread, in suggesting the Mass, would have created links with the experience of a broad spectrum of spectators, offering engagement for more spectators than even the meeting of Christ with Mary (though that must have had a gendered appeal) or Thomas putting his hands into Christ’s wounds. Thirdly, without being specific, the biblical story, with its passage from confusion to understanding, and from

loss to recovery, offered the possibility of a definable emotional dynamic in spectator response. The English dramatists made a point of exploiting this to create different emotional trajectories through the play, as well as allowing contrary feelings to over-lie each other, creating at times the characteristically turbulent affect of lay piety, in which pity, anger, sado-masochistic fascination with brutality, self-reproach, joy, comprehension, sympathy, and so on, mingle.

And lastly, the story offered central characters of relatively lowly status, who were adaptable to local circumstances because they came without a clear traditional profile (or even in some cases names) and thus allowed the spectator to feel more directly implicated in the action. If we turn to the plays themselves, what presses for our attention is the variety of routes which were taken, some of which seem clearly identifiable with local culture or the special conditions of production and preservation.

The *Chester* cycle, for example, has come down to us largely as the product of mid-sixteenth century revision partly at least in response to Reformist pressure, but it also shows evidence that such revision attempted to preserve the character, emphases and style of the cycle as it had developed. As David Mills showed, this valuing of the local product was responsible for the antiquarian manuscripts of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century, in which the cycle was preserved a generation or more after its performances had ceased (Mills, *Recycling*, p. 185; see also Mills, "Chester Cycle"). Chester's *Peregrini* story is combined with Christ's appearance to the disciples and to Thomas, thus following the pattern of liturgical drama but *also* Chester's preference for multi-episode plays. The manuscript entitles it *Concerning Christ's appearance to the two disciples going to the Castle of Emmaus and to other disciples* (*Chester*, p. 356; my translation). In many of its plays, *Chester* contrasts the reaction of believers and unbelievers to Christ's miraculous signs, but, while it cannot quite do that with the two disciples of this story, Lucas and Cleophas, it nuances them towards such an effect by making one appear more confident and the other more doubting at different stages. The sense one gets is that this play is hedging its bets, and particularly so in the vexed area of *how* exactly the disciples came to realise that their companion was Christ (as previously noted, that was one of the questions addressed by theologians).

Most strikingly, *Chester* changes the order of events in the Bible so as to elide the difference between the sacramental sign of the breaking of bread and the miraculous sign of Christ's disappearance, the latter corresponding to *Chester's* traditional emphasis on the miraculous signs and tokens by which Christ revealed his identity. The bible says that the disciples' eyes were opened after the blessing, breaking and distribution of the bread, and *then* Christ disappeared (Luke 24:31). *Chester* changes this so that the disappearance comes before the recognition. And Lucas actually responds to the disappearance (ll. 126-27) *before* Cleophas comments on the blessing of the bread (ll. 130-31). The recogni-

tion of Christ is thus neatly sandwiched between the two comments at ll. 128-29. Later, Cleophas reports the episode's events to the disciples in their biblical order, with revelation coming from the breaking of bread, and the vanishing following it (ll. 156-59), but that is not how the event was dramatized for the spectator, who was encouraged to promote the disappearance to the same level of proof as the sacramental action. Also in keeping with *Chester's* sixteenth-century, and possibly Reformist, emphasis on words themselves (and especially the biblical text) as signs, *Chester's* Christ expounds the prophets, and the manuscript includes the Latin biblical text which he is explaining, a pattern one finds throughout the cycle. The consequence of all this is, firstly, a reminder to the spectators through Cleophas and Lucas that they should be conscious of varying degrees of faithfulness and, secondly, a balanced account of the relative power of teaching, sacramental sign and miraculous sign to reveal God—this version being strongly along the lines of the cycle's established style and, in the theologically fraught context of mid-sixteenth century pressures on drama, producing a performance which would not frighten either camp.

In contrast, *York's* single episode play, its manuscript begun around 1476-77 (*York*, ed. Beadle, I: xii), emphasises less the means by which God is disclosed to man than a narrative that can generate affective piety. Three things principally distinguish it from *Chester*. Firstly, it emphasises the recounting of the passion story by the pilgrims—before Christ's appearance, in greater detail to Christ himself, and then again with new material after he has disappeared, Secondly, this narrative emphasis (directed through the pilgrims to the audience) and the final breaking of the fourth wall when the disciples announce that they must leave because of the press of oncoming plays serve to construct a close identity between the pilgrims and the spectator. Thirdly, the play integrates its prosody and drama so that interruptions, shifts, and changes in the prosody actually create the theatrical effects of Christ's entrance, his reluctance, his acceding to the pilgrims' demands, his disappearance, and its aftermath. The consequence of these features is to make the episode an extended and detailed reflection on the Passion by men who are positioned as close to the spectators (they re-narrate what the spectators have seen dramatised)—men whose failings in faith are recognised but not emphasised by Christ, and whose passage from sorrowful memory to joyful mission is the overall dynamic of the play. Christ's teaching is substantially reduced, the penitential largely absent. Christ's miraculous disappearance is not separated from his blessing of the bread as leading to their recognition: instead, both seem covered by the lines: "be the werkis that he wrought full wele might we witte / Itt was Jesus hymselffe—I wiste who he was" (*York*, Play 40 [*The Supper at Emmaus*], ll. 165-66). While a later line, in accordance with the bible, emphasises the breaking of the bread as the proof that it was he—"We saugh hym in sight, nowe take we entent, / Be the brede that he brake vs so baynly between" (ll. 179-80)—the emphasis

is more on his wonderful ways and works together providing a theatrical antidote to the cruel narrative of the Passion. Similarly, there is no nuancing of the two pilgrims, as there is in *Chester*. Indeed, only one of them is named (the usual one being, as here, Cleophas), and actually he is II *Peregrinus*. So, while the play follows tradition in naming Cleophas, it does not want to project any contrasts on stage, but rather seeks to draw the audience close to both men.

The *Towneley* version is distinctive in several respects. The emphasis as a whole falls upon the pilgrims' feelings, beliefs, reactions and limitations, and this is quite drawn out (what *Chester* does in 144 lines, *York* in 194, and even *N-Town* in 240, *Towneley* gives 386 to). Narrating what has happened previously (a frequent *Towneley* device) is used to emphasise the disciples' penitential questioning, rhetorically directed at the Jews but then also at themselves—in ways we can recognise as common in treatises promoting lay piety through emotional involvement in imagined scenes. The potential in the biblical story for confusion about precisely what revealed Christ to the disciples is, if anything, increased by the author's attempt to resolve it. Theatrically, the pilgrims' recognition of Christ seems to come about after his miraculous disappearance (*Towneley*, Play 27 [*Pilgrims*], ll. 287-303), but then the play concentrates on the pilgrims' self-criticism for not recognising him from his teachings and his beauty (l. 314); then they backtrack, saying that they *did* recognise him from the bread breaking (ll. 334-35 and 346-51). But they also propose that he disappeared *because* he realised that they had recognised him (ll. 352-55), which is obviously a rationalising of the inexplicit ordering of events in the bible. There seems to be a disparity between, on the one hand, how the play would have worked *in practice*, with the symbolic triune breaking of the bread, the blessing of it, and the miracle of disappearance working powerfully together, and, on the other, the internal characters' confusion of chagrin, penitence and self-deluding attempts at self-justification. The play exploits the difference between a piece of pure, clear action, in which all the stages of the eating and disappearance are combined in a single stage direction at line 296, and a welter of confused, inconsistent and penitential responses by the participants. Add to this the author's decision to explain why Christ disappeared, and one has a perfect example of how the perceived needs of the audience drive the play-making, but also of how complicated it might be to unpick those needs. This play allows for powerful action and complex emotion in actual performance, but it also seems to speak to a different reception, one perhaps more reflective of the *Towneley* manuscript's mid-sixteenth century date and its role as a late reassurance about the worth of Catholic doctrine: one has the sense that the play, even if it is not intended for readers, is being composed by someone whose characteristic activity is reading, or writing for readers! The affective piety overlaps with affective lyric poems and treatises; Christ's exposition of the prophets is also extended, and the general character of the writing, whatever its

original auspices, is in keeping with the practices of private reflection. This is a text in which explanations of what was left unspoken in the Bible were as important as any real theatrical experience.

The *N-Town Peregrini*, whose manuscript date puts it into the later fifteenth century, close to *York*, may have originally been performed on its own (as the Proclamation suggests), but it became joined to other resurrection appearances climaxing with Doubting Thomas, and this is significant because it thus became part of a larger structure focused on proof and unbelief. The nature of proof is at the heart of the play, the *peregrini* being allowed to dispute Christ's teaching so as to draw from him a set of quite traditional analogies for life after death—Jonah in the whale, Aaron's flowering rod, and finally Lazarus—which progressively offer more convincing evidence for the truth of the resurrection. Christ's breaking the bread and his disappearance must have provided a climactic *coup de théâtre*, though it is hidden behind a single line of stage direction, but this theophany is also a slightly enigmatic affair, for there is a substantial delay of about sixty lines (which would have included the disciples returning to Jerusalem) between Christ's breaking the bread and the disciples, as the bible directs, stating to Peter that it was this that revealed the truth to them. In their account, Christ's manual breaking of bread is additionally miraculous (and traditional, as evidenced by its presence in *Cleanness*⁴) in its precision: "As ony sharpe knyff xuld kytt brede" (*N-Town*, Play 37 [*Cleophas and Luke; The Appearance to Thomas*], l. 286).

N-Town does, in fact, dramatise both the miraculous vanishing and Christ's *blessing* the bread, which he himself draws attention to (ll. 213-14), but the pilgrims do not refer to either of these in their own account of how they came to believe. Instead they seem to achieve belief through the power of the feelings inspired by Christ's teaching, his kindness, and his proofs. So the play has it both ways, allowing the power of miracle and sacrament to work on the audience, but emphasising the probative force of teaching—thus setting up the moment when Christ will say in the Thomas episode (ll. 349-52) that those who have faith despite *not* having seen are more blessed. It is a clever way for drama to resolve the diverse routes to divine recognition in the biblical story, since it provides the excitement of theatrical revelation to an audience living after Christ, but in a context where teaching is presented as the better means of arriving at faith. It is also a combination which we can see as distinctively regional, a late-fifteenth century East Anglian achievement, defending faith in a scholarly and exact manner against perceived heresies, but also satisfying the theatrical and emotional desires of personal lay piety. Its orthodox

4 A hundred or so years earlier than *N-Town*, the anonymous author of the poem *Cleanness* wrote (clearly about the Last Supper) that Christ was so gracious in his touch that he needed neither knife nor edge to break bread perfectly (ll. 1101-8). I am grateful to Greg Walker for this point.

but also proto-Reformist position is rather like other contemporary East Anglian plays, such as *Wisdom*.

A hundred years later, when the Coventry authorities were engaged in mid-sixteenth century Reformist revisions of the Coventry Playbook, amongst other things by removing Marian material, why, one wonders, did they record payment for the *addition* of material on “the Castle of ernaus” (*Coventry*, ed. King and Davidson, p. 41; *REED: Coventry*, p. 191) —in other words, pay to include the story of the *Peregrini*? The answer to that question, I believe, is to be found in the diversity we have encountered in the other English plays. Most obviously, they turned to it because of the contemporary importance of the core topic: whether, and by what means, ordinary people might identify the supernatural; how the divine could be recognised and drawn within the human realm; and how people could gain understanding of themselves from success or failure in taking the routes to identification open to them. These were routes which the biblical story, almost despite itself, had allowed to be varied, so permitting different accounts of how the supernatural could be recognised by questioning, limited human beings. This variety, whereby either miracle, scriptural teaching, affect, sacramental or purely ceremonial action might provide a means of accessing the divine, is probably what made the episode so ubiquitous in Catholic theatrical tradition, but it also ensured that the episode was one to which Protestant playwrights might also turn. One could pick one’s route to recognising the divine, so the *Peregrini* was an amenable subject for drama in changing local circumstances.

I think that Rosemary Woolf thought the subject “difficult to invest with dramatic life” because she did not like the kind of life with which it was invested. She did not like the realist, indecorous comedy around the inn at Emmaus employed by continental dramatists (Woolf, p. 280); she didn’t like *Chester’s* “perfunctory” attempt to add theological weight (p. 280); she evidently didn’t find the *York* or *Towneley* versions worthy of much comment. On the whole, she didn’t engage with spectator emotion. What she *did* like was the *N-Town* version, but her praise of it is really a reflection of herself: its scholarly creativity in turning tradition to new uses, its balance “between instruction and scepticism”, its structural adroitness and its theological seriousness, the author’s “subtle and devotional imagination” (Woolf, p. 281). I say this not to criticise Woolf, but to emphasise the point that the *Peregrini* episode’s relative unfixeness enables us to like what we like. It offered the dramatist scope to shift the story in a direction appropriate to the context in which spectators would view it; its different parts allowed the spectator room for personal engagement of a varied, possibly even diffuse, kind. It permitted a kind of “smudged” affectivity, blending different kinds of response, not always coherently and rarely single in character. Staging the *Peregrini* meant staging the self in reaction to the supernatural, but the different ways in which that was done reveal much about local cul-

tures, which saw in the episode an opportunity to exploit drama's distinctive capacities and pleasures.

But we can argue for a further feature which may have made the play attractive—one fundamental to drama as a medium. Play is an instantiation of change telescoped into the one or two hours traffic of the stage: events occur, characters are affected by them, and a plot develops. It is in that fundamental sense that it is a mimesis, a representation of life. It allows the spectator to feel emotional change as events unfold. Perhaps spectators achieve an emotional resolution which would not be achieved if the events were experienced in real life, but in any case they can feel, and explore within limits, emotions which they might not consciously wish to feel outside the play or ideas they might not consciously wish to confront. It is a space whose social value lies in exposing human beings to that which they might normally feel anxiety about—the condition of change in which we all live—but in a controlled manageable environment. In plays where the end is known, either because the play has been seen before or because it conveys a narrative which is traditional and ideology which is to any degree accepted, that process of confrontation with, and management of, change may be less frightening or challenging *because* of what is known, but the power of feeling can still be safely experienced afresh under the pressure of the event. However, some plays, and the *Peregrini* is one, go further, actually replicating the experience of the spectator within the play's action.

In our case, this is done, firstly, by showing the interruption of a journey and later allowing it to continue with new purpose and meaning—something that the spectators may recognise as symbolic of their own lives, but which is essentially what the play itself is doing to their normal life. But more than that, the play takes its characters, the *peregrini*, through a process of revelation which mimics the one being forced on the spectators by the medium itself. The rather ordinary disciples within the story go through a parallel experience to that of the spectators: looking, listening, recognising, understanding, being changed; and so spectators have their own experience doubled in what they watch. This may be a different kind of dramatic life from what Woolf envisaged, but it is one which the plays seem to have particularly valued, for staged moments of revelation were frequent elements in the revelatory medium of late-medieval drama.⁵ The integration of biblical revelation in the *Peregrini* with the revelation which constitutes the dramatic medium itself, both unfolding through time, gave intensity, conviction and authority to the ideological adaptations which served local needs and tastes.

5 See McGavin and Walker, pp. 105-43.

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