The Corporeality of Clothing in Medieval Literature
Cognition, Kinesis, and the Sacred
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EARLY DRAMA, ART, AND MUSIC
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Chapter 2

Graveclothes and Resurrection
From Gospel to Stage

RESURRECTION IS A PROCESS that transforms a body from one ontological state into another. The word, from the Latin resurgo (to rise again), presupposes a repetitious physical action, but one that brings with it new spiritual repercussions on one occasion. The term implies a reintegration of body and soul after the separation enacted by death and, like other aspects of Christology, is an essential part of belief but difficult to explain. ¹ Resurrection is a doctrine that theologians have insisted on without necessarily accounting for its practical dimension. This chapter takes this dynamic as a point of interest, and puts into focus how the thinkers who engage with this doctrine work around the fact that the Resurrection went unrecorded in the canonical accounts of Christ’s life. It is the first of two chapters that take resurrection as a focus, and I begin with Christ’s Resurrection, the event that made general resurrection possible. This chapter does not deal with the wider medieval tradition, but rather with one facet that I believe exemplifies the ways in which individuals and groups grappled with the doctrine. This is where clothing comes in. Clothing holds a central role in medieval resurrection narratives because of its intimate connection to Christ’s body. His body is wrapped in specially designed cloths in preparation for burial, but certain Gospel accounts specify that the cloths become separated from Christ’s body during the process of resurrection. Graveclothes are artifacts, the product of human endeavor, and are designed for bodies in a post-death state. Their function is obvious, and yet the majority of the resurrection narratives that include graveclothes do not use them for this purpose. If an affordance can be defined as “the potential uses an object ... offers to a living creature,” then graveclothes can be said to afford burial.² But, in narratives that take the reverse process as their focus, these artifacts take on a role that is often related to cognitive processes, and afford something else.

This chapter will consider three strands of the medieval imaginative engagement with the Resurrection and situate the role of clothing in each instance. For the first and second parts, it is important to bear
in mind that the Resurrection proper was not recorded in the canonical Gospels and was something of a narrative gap that needed to be worked around. The first part of the discussion begins with the Gospel of John and examines how the Evangelist makes graveclothes part of the reader’s comprehension of the event. I argue that John deploys the narrative techniques of underspecification and inference in verses 20:1–9, which force the reader to counterbalance the scant information the Evangelist offers with absolute prophetic statements. Graveclothes function as cognitive affordances in these verses. They are strategically positioned to help the reader to understand what has happened to Christ, and to believe it is true. This Gospel had a decisive influence on the liturgical performances that spread throughout Europe from around the ninth century onwards, and form the second focal point of this chapter. Even at their earliest recorded instantiation, which was approximately seven centuries later than the Gospel, these performances demonstrate a new use of cloth, shaped by the devotional culture of the day. The *Visitatio Sepulchri* inherits the empty tomb and its scant remanants from John, and its multiple versions use cloth to draw attention to the absence of Christ’s body in order to insist on the truth of his Resurrection. The way that an audience is cued to use cloth to access the resurrected body changes with time and medium. The artifacts used in these performances cannot be equated with the the Johannine garments, and care must be taken to distinguish the respective artifacts and their purposes.

Another shift is evident in the third corpus of texts included. The late medieval vernacular plays of the Resurrection move beyond the model of approaching the event through an absent body and include Christ’s exit from the tomb as instrumental parts of their dramatic shape. In the aftermath of texts such as Jacobus de Voragine’s *Legenda Aurea* (1260), which dared to confront the how, when, and why of what happened in the tomb, new strategies emerged to fill in those missing details. Vernacular plays would not only stage the moment when Christ exited his tomb—akin to comparable developments in iconography—but would in certain instances stage the moment of revivification. New witnesses to the event appeared, giving credence to how such information might be accessed. In this changed sacramental environment, where the body of Christ was Eucharistic and thus something that could be encountered in the phenomenal world, it is surprising that graveclothes do not disappear from such texts. Their authoritative role in narratives of the Resurrection ensures their continual presence, but the way they function diverges sharply from the Johannine and liturgical practice. Again attuned to the needs of late
medieval devotion, the way clothing operates undergoes a change, but remains important to the medieval vision of the Resurrection. The purpose of graveclothes is rarely the conventional preparation of a corpse for burial, because the Resurrection explodes the category of death. In each of this chapter’s sections, cloth retains an important relationship to the body, and the superfluousness of Christ’s graveclothes participates in their recasting into new roles. What unites the versions of cloth discussed is the resilience of this detail, particularly in performative modes and iconography. Although the cloth’s inclusion in a play can at times be understood as deference to tradition, its manifestation gives insight into the way the Resurrection was understood and celebrated. Even at its most tangential, clothing affords critical insights into medieval devotional practices.

Reading John 20:1–9

Unlike other reading experiences, the intended outcome of reading a Gospel is clearer than most. An ideal reader is required to believe what is written and to hold it as the highest form of truth. The cognitive demands such a text makes are supported by specific narrative strategies, which in the case of John 20:1–9 forces the reader to be continually active in understanding the verses and their implications. In these verses, three figures approach Christ’s tomb on the third day after his death and burial. The text narrates three individualized experiences, the outcome of which is the announcement of Christ’s Resurrection. John’s narrative technique depends to a large degree on underspecification and inference, which requires a prospective reader to participate in the making of meaning. In order to account for the importance of the graveclothes, paying attention to where underspecification is deployed and inference necessary in this pericope will clarify where readers are called on to furnish meaning and make the connections that are essential to belief. I quote the verses in full:

And on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalen cometh early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre; and she saw the stone taken away from the sepulchre. | She ran, therefore, and cometh to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and saith to them: They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid him. | Peter therefore went out, and that other disciple, and they came to the sepulchre. | And they both ran together, and that other disciple did outrun Peter,
and came first to the sepulchre. And when he stooped down, he saw the linen cloths lying; but yet he went not in. Then cometh Simon Peter, following him, and went into the sepulchre, and saw the linen cloths lying. And the napkin that had been about his head, not lying with the linen cloths, but apart, wrapped up into one place. Then that other disciple also went in, who came first to the sepulchre: and he saw, and believed. For as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead.

From even a brief reading of these lines, it should be clear to a reader that the interpretative possibilities of the tomb encounter are variable, yet its meaning is absolute. A gradual narrowing of perspective occurs, leading the reader from outside to inside the tomb, from two garments to one, and from three figures to the Beloved Disciple. This narrowing culminates in the statement, “he saw, and believed.” The tension between potential and absolute meaning is nowhere more apparent than in this verse. The reader is told neither what the disciple sees nor what he believes, which takes the device of underspecification to an extreme. Terence Cave writes of underspecification that it “invites the spectator’s cognitive faculties to supply what it takes to make the storyworld come alive,” and John 20:8 is an amplified example of what is required of readers in most reading experiences. The reader must infer what the Beloved Disciple sees and believes. In the latter case, she is aided by verse nine, which furnishes her with an answer to the questions that have been raised over the first eight verses. But what is also revealed in this verse is what the disciple does not possess, which is access to the knowledge with which the reader has just been provided. Belief in resurrection—which at once seems impossible (unclear clues and ignorance of scripture)—is pointed to with circumscription: “he saw, and believed.” It is up to the reader to figure out how these contradictions hang together, and how the gaps this narrative creates might be resolved.

Before returning to these issues, it is important to pay attention to the information the text does supply in order to clarify where the reader needs to be most active. Perceptual acts proliferate throughout this passage and demand attention, especially as all three characters have highly idiosyncratic experiences. What Mary Magdalene sees and understands is not the same as the two disciples, but even among two figures who seem to have almost identical perceptual experiences the text forces a distinction. Peter sees, but there is no attribution of belief. Although seeing the same things in the same place (though not at the same time, nor from the same perspective), the Beloved Disciple believes.
If one pays attention to the New Testament Greek, the verbs in question open up the possibility of distinguishing these perceptual experiences. Whereas the Latin Vulgate and its Douay–Rheims English translation both rely on one verb in all instances—vidēre in Latin, “to see” in English—a significant difference is evident in the Koine Greek. Blepō and theōreō are used in relation to Mary’s sight of the stone (blepei), the Beloved Disciple’s initial sighting of the linen clothes (blepei), and Peter’s sighting of both garments (theōrei). But a third verb—eidō, a past tense form of the verb horai— is used in the phrase “he saw, and he believed” and in verse nine, where it refers to the knowledge the disciples do not possess. Stephen Renn writes that blepō has the general meanings of “to see” and “to look” in the New Testament, and theōreō means to “see, look, or behold.” The verb eidō, which John and the other canonical Evangelists draw on to signal spiritual sight or knowledge, is in this instance employed to allude to the Beloved Disciple’s higher state of understanding, before denying him access to this. Even so, John underscores the disciple’s special status by pairing his perceptive act with belief. The verb in question, episteusen (from the infinitive pisteusō), has “the very significant nuance of ‘have faith, put one’s trust in’ the person of Christ” in the New Testament. The pairing of these verbs, which signals the correlation of two different mental states than are attributed to the other figures, should alert the reader to a different type of perceptual experience. What has triggered this response, in spite of its limitations, also demands the reader’s attention.

The two pieces of cloth, which wrap the body and head of the corpse, respectively, remain in the tomb. The words used in each case also merit, or indeed force the reader to make, an interpretative effort. The noun for the larger cloth, othonia, is found on only two other occasions in the New Testament, including John’s account of Christ’s burial. In general, the Synoptic Gospels use sindon, although Luke also uses othonia to refer to the clothes that remain in the tomb. The critical reception of this word points to a wider difficulty in pinning down its relationship to Christ’s body. Its rareness and diminutive form have led biblical scholars to question how it functions as a burial cloth, with speculations including that it is composed of numerous small cloths to claims that it is a large, coffin-like sheet. The lack of consensus related to this rare word from experts in biblical language points to an attempt at obfuscation on the part of the Evangelist, who could have used a more conventional term. The word’s function in this instance is underspecified and requires readers to figure out what the cloth is and how it works. Although answers to such questions are not forthcoming, the effect of such an effort is possible to
deduce. In necessitating an interpretative effort regarding the functionality of these cloths, a reader is required to direct her attention toward the body in question and its particular state. Perhaps unreflectively, a reader infers information about cloth in relation to the dead body of Christ, with the word *othonia* drawing her attention toward its status as a corpse. Why this is significant rests on the wider context of the passage, and that other garment in the tomb.

The second piece of cloth requires a similar interpretative effort, although the results are profoundly different. The noun *soudarion* occurs only four times in the New Testament, and the two instances in which it refers to a face-covering for the dead are found in John’s resurrection narratives of Lazarus and Christ.\footnote{The *soudarion* is a low-value item, something that is used to wipe a sweaty brow or a runny nose. But in this pericope John invests it with extraordinary significance. He does this by describing the *soudarion*’s positioning within the tomb and then stating that once the Beloved Disciple enters within seeing distance he “believed.” The unlikely importance of the *soudarion* is established by its description. One of the Evangelist’s strategies for investing this cloth with significance includes the distinction he forces between it and the *othonia*. Beginning with each cloth’s relationship to Christ’s body, it becomes evident that the *soudarion*’s is explicitly cited in verse 20:7, whereas the *othonia*’s is not. This distinction is sustained by the descriptive location of each cloth. Notably, the only piece of information given about the *othonia* is that it is “lying” (*keimena*) in the tomb. With the *soudarion*, care is taken to refuse the same possibility, enforce a physical separation between the cloths, and finish with an unusual verbal detail. *Entetyligmenon*, from the infinitive *entylisso*, appears only three times throughout the New Testament.\footnote{13 Its verbal form—a perfect passive participle—is unique to John, and its meanings range from “entwined,” “wound up in,” to “wrapped in together.”} The differing status of the two cloths hinges on this detail, and it becomes apparent that, whereas one has had deliberate acts performed on it, the other has not. The *soudarion*’s wrapped state forces basic questions: how was the cloth folded, by whom, and for what purpose? Although these questions go unanswered, they force the reader to infer, via her kinesthetic knowledge of cloth folding (or the nearest equivalent motor action), what kind of manual dexterity is required. The demand to infer such information leads the reader toward a very different type of body, and, unlike the case of the *othonia*, the questions relate not to a corpse but to the motoric actions of a living body. Although the purpose of cloth folding might remain unclear, the important information to glean is that a resurrected body is being implicated. Again through underspecification, in this case
related to the subject of a particular action, the reader is required to infer that Christ’s resurrected body is being written into this passage.

Although John never states that the Beloved Disciple sees the *soudarion* or that he believes in the Resurrection as a consequence, this is the conclusion to which many a reader of 20:1–9 has been led.15 The *soudarion* is repeatedly used in a transliterated form in exegetical, literary, and dramatic accounts of the Resurrection, even where John’s Gospel is harmonized with the other canonical versions. Its importance, both underspecified by the Evangelist and inferred by the reader, has become an entrenched part of the exegetical history of the Resurrection, resulting in the *soudarion’s* consistent integration into celebrations of the resurrected body. Although not all readers would engage with the text in its Greek form, its Latin Vulgate transliteration—*sudarium*—(notably not done for the *othonia*, which appears as *linteamen*, a linen cloth) would account for its continuation in the Latin West. The striking word choices of the cloths would not carry the same impact in Latin as they had in Greek, but the other narrative strategies would remain intact, forcing the reader into the same active stance the original text required.

In choosing two pieces of cloth and transforming their basic purpose, John plays with the concept of functionality itself. In his Gospel text, graveclothes are not artifacts that are defined by their relationship to corpses and burials, but agents of spiritual truth. These artifacts are affordances of a different kind, and yet their status as clothes underwrites the mechanisms through which they can function as cognitive tools in this text. It is only because they once acted as graveclothes—items in direct contact with the deceased body—that they can subsequently function in this new way. Resurrection is an event about the body, about its transformation into a new state. Graveclothes, as artifacts designed for precise purposes and a specific corporeal state, are ideally positioned to aid the Evangelist in inverting the status quo. The reader is led to grasp the extent of corporeal change by virtue of two pieces of cloth that no longer do what they were designed to. Via this strategy, cloth affords knowledge of corporeal change first and foremost.

**Cloth and the Empty Tomb: Image and Performance in the Tenth Century**

Although the role allotted to clothing in John began a long-standing convention of utilizing this artifact as a mediator of the Resurrection, how this was achieved was unsurprisingly subject to variation across time and place. This variation was contingent not only on the mediums that dealt with the
Resurrection but also the wider exegetical engagement with the event. An integral feature of John’s narrative strategy had been to elide all discussions of what happened in the tomb before the arrival of Mary Magdalene. That the event had no witnesses proposed a complication for exegetes, leading to a dearth of commentary in the first few centuries of Christianity. Markus Vincent writes that, before the second century, the Resurrection was not considered among the key tenets of Christology, which instead had been more concerned with Christ’s Passion, birth, and early years. By 325, however, the Council of Nicaea had included the Resurrection among its central doctrines, and Paul’s insistence on its importance (“And if Christ be not risen again, your faith is vain: for you are yet in your sins,” 1 Corinthians 15:17) was widely embraced.

Even so, the problem of commenting on an event that had gone unrecorded by scripture would prove to be a major obstacle. Iconography followed in line with the wider exegetical engagement with the Resurrection. Until the fourth century, none of the surviving art contained images of—or even symbolic references to—the event. Felicity Harley-McGowan argues that early Christian images were closely informed by the Graeco-Roman culture of death, and that when it came to depicting death scenes, “the subjects are portrayed as overtly joyful stories, devoid of direct references to death, dying or even mourning.” After the underground religion was legalized and protected under Constantine’s Edict of Milan (313), there was a notable change in the iconographic program, although the necessity that Christ’s death be framed in a positive light remained.

By the fourth century, symbols related to the Resurrection began to appear in the Roman catacombs. A stone sarcophagus dated to the mid-fourth century found in the catacombs of St. Domitilla contains episodes from the Passion. These exclude a Crucifixion scene but incorporate the Resurrection via symbols of triumph, among which the cross is numbered. Jeffrey Spier unpacks the details: “The cross of the Crucifixion is surmounted by the chi-rho monogram within a wreath, held in the beak of an eagle with spread wings. The wreath is the traditional Roman symbol of victory, and the eagle, the bird of the almighty god Jupiter. Above are two small busts of the personifications of the sun and moon, denoting the cosmic significance of Christ’s triumph.”

Other contemporary motifs show a resurrected Christ fused with various elements of Roman symbolism. The Traditio Legis, or “giving of the New Law,” images depicted “Christ transcendent and enthroned or seated on an orb” holding a scroll (a symbol of the New Law), symbols that emphasized his authority and majesty.
Artists would wait until the fifth century before producing Resurrection iconography that chimed directly with the Gospel narratives. The image that emerged in the fifth century, which would remain dominant until the twelfth century, was the Visit to the Tomb scene.21 The first examples still contained elements of Roman conventions—such as figures of authority holding scrolls—whereas closer to the sixth century images such as the mosaics of Sant’Apollinare Nuovo at Ravenna appeared.22 In this mosaic, two women approach a round cupola tomb (a reference to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem), the door of which has been dislocated from its hinge. The women stand to the right of the tomb, and an angel sits on the left. The gestures issuing forth from the women and angel evoke a dialogical exchange that is occurring at a precise moment, suggesting that a certain amount of familiarity on the part of the viewer was expected. The artist locates the epistemological and emotional discrepancies occurring on each side of the tomb in the gestures and postures of the three figures. The women point open palms toward the empty tomb, and their entire bodies also move in that direction. The angel, seated and resplendent, makes a conventional gesture of blessing with one hand and holds a staff in the other. This is an image of high emotional tension in which the women are in the process of understanding that Christ has been resurrected.

Iconography of the Visit to the Tomb was relatively consistent over the next few centuries, but differences began to appear from the ninth century onwards.23 In certain illuminations, the dialogic exchange between a harmonized group of biblical Marys and angel(s) began to feature liturgical characteristics, suggesting not only artistic rendering of the Gospel accounts but a direct link to the liturgical performances that were being composed at this time. Both mediums relied on cloth in their announcement of the Resurrection. In several extant Visitatio Sepulchri texts, the raising of a piece (or pieces) of linen coincides with the moment the Resurrection is announced to the congregation.24 In illuminations and ivory carvings, cloth (or cloths) floats in the tomb, either deictically gestured toward by an angel or signalling a future understanding the event. The use of cloth by these interconnected mediums—which on occasion appeared in the same manuscript—is quite far from John’s narrative techniques and, moreover, depends on a different type of artifact. These performance texts and images were produced by cultures in which Christianity was at the center of religious and political systems, at a time when the Resurrection was an incontestable facet of Christology. How cloth functions in such an environment necessarily removes it from the contexts of the Gospel of John, even if it is used for approximate purposes.
In order to explore this new context further, I would like to draw on two pairs of texts and images, between which there is an established or arguable connection. The first pair is the *Visitatio Sepulchri* recorded in the *Regularis Concordia* (ca. 973) and the Visit to the Tomb illumination from the Benedictional of Aethelwold (963–984; see figure 3). Both image and text share the same patron and were produced in close proximity to each other. The illumination’s location in a benedictional already situates it in a liturgical context, but internal details give further evidence for connections to the *Visitatio Sepulchri*. In the second pairing, a group of images from the Abbey of St. Gall has no obvious connection to their surviving *Visitatio Sepulchri* texts, yet their common iconographic strategies suggest a relationship between image and performance. To demonstrate what such a relationship might look like, however, *Visitatio Sepulchri* texts from nearby abbeys will be drawn on in place of the scant records from St. Gall. Each example gives evidence for how cloth was used in a liturgical environment and provides insight into how the event was both conceived of and celebrated in centers of monastic power in the tenth and eleventh centuries.

The English *Visitatio Sepulchri* is not the earliest surviving example, but it is the earliest to contain extensive rubrication. This is a likely outcome of its position within the *Regularis Concordia*, a prescriptive set of directives for all Benedictine monks and nuns in England. To that end, this text is a useful starting point in critical discussions. The rubrics provide information related to performance that would otherwise lie in the realm of conjecture, such as the gestures and movements that accompanied the antiphonal song, the garments worn, and the objects carried. Specific to the purposes of this chapter, these details offer insights into the role of cloth in the *Visitatio Sepulchri* and the liturgical ceremonies that precede the Easter Sunday performance.

Linen cloth is used to wrap a crucifix in the *Depositio crucis* ceremony, which monks then deposit into a space in the altar *assimilatio sepulchri* (in the likeness of the sepulchre). The following night, before Matins, the cross is removed from the altar during the *Elevatio crucis* and unwrapped, with only the cloth placed back in the altar space. The culmination of the cloth’s significance is reserved for the *Visitatio Sepulchri* itself. After singing the verse *Non est hic, surrexit sicut praedixerat*, the angel draws the visual attention of the Maries to the tomb (*Venite et videte locum*). The rubrics then intervene and single out the raising of the cloth as the high point of the celebration, placing the artifact at the visual and devotional center of the performance:
Saying this, let him rise, and lift the veil and show them the place bare of the cross, with nothing other than the shroud in which the cross had been wrapped. Seeing which, let them ... take up the shroud and spread it out before the clergy; and, as if demonstrating that the Lord has risen and is not now wrapped in it, let them sing this antiphon:

The Lord has risen from the sepulchre.

The cloth—referred to by the nouns *linteamina* and *linteum*—is certainly not equivalent to John’s graveclothes, even if the congregation is invited to make this link. Linen cloth was a staple of every church, and it performed a multiplicity of liturgical functions. It had a long association with Christ’s graveclothes, particularly when it was used to wrap the Eucharistic wafer or cover the altar. In this sense, the *Visitatio Sepulchri* was drawing on connections already established in the liturgical practices of a church, and it is likely that the congregation would have recognized the item as capable of occupying numerous roles.

The cloth integrated into the *Visitatio Sepulchri* nevertheless took on a particular framing within the scope of the performance. What is especially useful about the rubrics of the *Regularis Concordia* is that they make evident, and even play on, the discrepancy between what a prospective onlooker would see and what they are expected to perceive. The verb *ostendere* includes a visual dimension (to expose, view, show) and a cognitive one (to make known, reveal, or disclose), and appears at two key moments in the rubrics. This subtle difference is used cumulatively, with the sight of the cloth enabling its perceptible meaning. There is also a hierarchical design in the transmission of knowledge, which proceeds from the angel to the Maries and then to the wider congregation.

The final action of the performance is the spreading out of the cloth and celebratory singing of the antiphon *Surrexit Dominus de sepulchro*. The temporal dissonance between what the cloth shows in the now—evidenced by the present subjunctive *non sit* (is not) and adverb *iam* (now)—is positioned in relation to what has definitively transpired, indicated by the
perfect tense *surrexerit* (has risen). What the congregation witnesses in the present must be linked to past actions, and cloth is the vehicle through which such connections are established. The extended cloth is intended to demonstrate corporeal absence, although the adverb *veluti* (as if, just as, or like) not only sheds light on the performative status of this text, but also indicates that the congregation must take an active role and interpret what is offered. The cloth provides a focal point around which the congregation can meditate upon a central truth of their faith. Once again, it is an affordance of a different kind.

In the near-contemporary Benedictional of Aethelwold (London, British Library, MS Add. 49598, fol. 51v), the Visit to the Tomb illumination also features a cloth, but the inclusion of another artifact suggests a connection between this image and liturgical performance. The first of three Maries holds a thurible, the vessel that the brothers of the *Visitatio* are required to carry during their procession toward the altar. In placing an item that was the remit of the clergy in the hands of the Maries, the artist has complicated their gendered status. Elizabeth Parker McLachlan writes that deacons carried the thurible in liturgical procession, so that the deliberate inclusion of this detail suggests an intentional overlap of the monkish brethren and biblical Maries. It also affects how an onlooker perceives the event. The thurible impacts the reader’s capacity to read this image solely as a walk toward the tomb and forces her to integrate the act of liturgical procession into the scene. The prominent place of clothing also forges connections between text and image. In Robert Deshman’s discussion of the illumination, he writes that Aethelwold’s image breaks with the established convention of how clothing is used. In the iconography of Metz, argued to be a dominant influence on the Winchester school, a cloth is usually in “a sarcophagus deep inside the tomb.” By contrast, the Benedictional “shows the wrapping prominently suspended in mid-air in the tomb door without a sarcophagus.” Deshman attributes this more conspicuous role to “Aethelwold’s personal interests,” which the critic suggests are also apparent in his *Visitatio Sepulchri*. Notably, the Benedictional of Robert, also in the Winchester style and produced ca. 980, does not feature a cloth. Its presence in Aethelwold’s Benedictional is a deliberate inclusion.

The cloth in the illumination plays a similar role to that of the *Visitatio*, even though the medium has an impact on how it functions. Although the sequence of performed events cannot be exactly rendered in image form, the medieval illuminators nonetheless find ways to infer movement, dialogical exchange, and temporal variation. As in the
Visitatio, the angel is a mediating force between the Maries and the cloth. It sits in a central position, directly in between the tomb door and the processing figures. Deshman suggests that this role is greatly amplified in Aethelwold’s image, noting that the plinth the angel sits on is transformed from a “block into a throne, increasing the angel’s majesty,” and further notes that the detail is “extremely rare.” The angel’s right wing partially obscures the cloth, but in doing so secures direct contact with it. The interaction is one of high tension, yet evidence points to a process of resolution that is underway. Attention to gestures gives a sense of this process, particularly as the angel’s are mirrored by two of the Maries. Its benedictional gesture is matched by the hand of the first Mary who carries the thurible, and its other hand is reflected in the second Mary’s, whose hand is turned toward her throat, suggestive of a troubled interior state. The care taken with gesture suggests a proximity between this group that is in the process of being achieved.

This process will move the Maries closer to the angel in both emotional and epistemic terms. The viewer is not given direct access to the joyful moment when the Resurrection is understood, but all of the ingredients are present so that this can be inferred. Although the cloth is not within the visual range of the Maries, the viewer can see it and thus identify its temporal significance. It lies beyond the physical positioning of the Maries, their emotional and epistemological states. They need to advance beyond both in order to reach the cloth, and will do so via the angel. In the Visitatio, the rubrics state that the group must lay down their thuribles and then take up the cloth. If the viewer was familiar with this performance, which the restricted readership of this liturgical book likely was, then this exchange of artifacts would be part of the culminating moment of celebration. The cloth is thus poised to announce the Resurrection as it did in the Visitatio.

The St. Gall images include two ivory plaques and one pen-and-ink manuscript illumination and offer a competing view on the use of cloth within liturgically inflected Resurrection scenes. All include thurible and cloth details, but the style of the three images differs from the Winchester school illumination, as does the way the image is constructed. The differences are sufficient to alter how the Maries encounter the cloth. In an ivory carving dated to between 900 and 950 (likely a panel of a book cover), cloth takes up a central position in the image, with the angel to the left and three figures to the right (see figure 4). The Maries are again subject to an overlap in the gendered roles, and the first of the group swings a thurible that hangs in the air as if poised to return toward its holder.
Figure 4. Victoria and Albert Museum, The Maries at the Sepulchre, Ivory Panel, St. Gall, ca. 900–950. Museum number 380–1871
Photo: © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.
The thurible also swings toward the empty tomb, where two pieces of cloth float. Each piece is distinguished in terms of size and detail and cannot but force an informed viewer to make a link to John 20. The cloth’s central position also changes the relationship the processional group has to it, suggesting that they are not as reliant on the angel for access. The other images contain similar features. In a late tenth-century antiphonary (St. Gall MS 391), a pen-and-ink drawing by the monk Hartker positions two pieces of cloth at the center of the illumination, and a dark tomb offsets the white cloths floating in the doorway. The same manuscript contains a text of the Visitatio Sepulchri, although one without much development or rubrication. And, in a second tenth-century ivory carving—now housed in Budapest—a thurible effusing incense makes direct contact with the cloths floating in the tomb. In all scenes, those processing toward the tomb have unobstructed access to the cloth, a detail that is matched in several Visitatio Sepulchri texts.

Although no Visitatio Sepulchri from St. Gall aligns with these iconographic details, the separation of the cloth into two distinct pieces is present in other texts that were recorded in relative proximity to the abbey. One such example is an eleventh-century Visitatio Sepulchri (Udine, Bibl. Arcivescovile, MS 234), thought to be from the north Italian Benedictine monastery of Aquileia. The text suggests a display of cloth akin to the Regularis Concordia text, but with a division of the cloth into two pieces. The angels and women are two a piece (rather than three and one), and the former group does not direct the latter to the tomb. Instead, they instruct the Maries to tell Peter and others that Christ has risen. The roles of the Maries and the apostles then overlap, and the choir sings, “Two ran together,” integrating the Johannine race to the tomb into the performance. The same brethren that were named in vice mulierum sanctarum (representing the holy women) then display the shroud (seemingly in the roles of John and Peter), which is named as one item in the rubrics (linTEAMINA) but two in the dialogue: “Cernitis, o socii, ecce linTEAMINA et sudarium, et corpus non est in sepulchro inventum” (Behold, O companions, behold the shroud and head-cloth, and the body is not to be found in the sepulchre). Situating the apostles as the finders of the cloths, this Visitatio does not make the angel instrumental to their access. Unlike the English text, there is an explicit connection made between the sight of the cloth and the absence of Christ’s body. The moment of display also chimes with the iconographic strategy of the St. Gall images. In a departure from John, there is no distinction made between how these cloths
function in relation to Christ’s body. Each piece—which was possibly intended to be a single item in performance—urges onlookers to recall the resurrected body of Christ when they see it displayed.

The St. Gall images and “Aquileia” *Visitatio* are part of a different tradition to the English examples, but each one uses cloth within a liturgical environment to provide the space for meditating on the resurrected body of Christ. Taking their lead from the Gospels’ avoidance of the Resurrection proper, which was maintained in early exegesis and iconography, these Easter morning celebrations put the absence of Christ’s body at the center of their articulations of the Resurrection. Discarded cloth was positioned as an artifact that needed to be interpreted or glossed. In all cases where it was used, cloth did not simply reference a Gospel text but participated in contemporary devotional practices. Like the monks who assumed the roles of the Maries or angel(s), this cloth was produced in an environment where it performed a multiplicity of roles, many of which were simultaneously drawn on in liturgical performance. In this way, similar to the Gospel of John, cloth performed roles outside the scope of its quotidian purpose. Whatever its previous role as affordance may have been, these images and performances transform cloth into a powerful vehicle for meditation.

The *Visitatio Sepulchri* would continue to be an enduring part of Easter liturgical celebrations for centuries to come. Even though its strategies of conceptualizing the risen body of Christ would remain relatively consistent, vernacular drama departed from these models in line with changes to sacramental theology that also impacted iconography. In the aftermath of new directives regarding Eucharistic doctrine, identifications between the resurrected and crucified body were made during the consecration of the Host. These developments facilitated new artistic and dramatic conceptualizations from the thirteenth century onwards. Images began to show Christ’s body exiting the tomb, and vernacular plays of the Resurrection included this moment or a meditative focus on the wounded, bleeding body that was familiar from Crucifixion scenes. Although not the sole factor for change in celebrations of the Resurrection (and which did not affect the *Visitatio Sepulchri*’s conventional practices), Eucharistic language exemplified how the laity were conditioned to understand their God.

An increasingly bloodied body emerging from the tomb placed new demands on those who looked on, and also recast how cloth might mediate the event. Although cloth did not disappear from the vernacular drama that was produced throughout England from the late fourteenth century, its role as an affordance necessarily adapted to meet new demands.
Enter the Body: The Resurrection in Vernacular Drama

In the 1415 Ordo Paginarium, which lists the Corpus Christi pageants and offers a summary of their contents, the York *Resurrection* play is recorded as follows: *Iesus resurgens de sepulchro quatour milites armati et tres Marie lamentates Pilatus Cayphas* (Jesus rising from the sepulchre; four armed soldiers and the three Maries sorrowing; Pilate, Cayphas). Citing a cast list of sorts and the central action of an earlier incarnation of the play, this brief description proposes another way to perform the Resurrection. The York Christ would emerge from the tomb within the dramatic action, preceding the Maries’ Easter morning search. In an illumination located in the early fifteenth-century Bolton Hours (York Minster Additional MS 2), also produced in York, a bloodied Jesus is shown with one foot poised on the tomb’s rim, requiring the viewer to infer his past and future movements. Although differing in the extensive focus on the suffering of this body—which is perforated by innumerable wounds—the scene itself was not new. Stained glass dated to ca. 1300 in York Minster already showed Christ in the process of leaving the tomb in the presence of an angel and soldiers, and a nineteenth-century replica of the late medieval Resurrection roof boss preserves a near-identical scene. By the time the York *Resurrection* was recorded in the late fifteenth-century Register, where a stage direction informs the reader that Christ is to rise from the tomb within the remit of the play, this directive had been a dramatic practice since at least the first quarter of the century. Whereas iconography shows this convention to have been prevalent from the thirteenth century, in terms of drama there is no certainty that this practice was mirrored from such an early date. The Ordo Paginarium supplies the earliest testament to the performance of a *Resurrection* play in the vernacular, although it is notable that the *Visitatio Sepulchri* continued to be performed into the fifteenth century. In the Wilton (1250–1320) and Barking Abbey (1404) *Visitatio Sepulchri* texts—two rare English records of the performance—the Maries (played by nuns) encounter the angel in the empty tomb, and Mary Magdalene raises the *sudarium* to the congregation as proof of the Resurrection. So, although there is a consistency in this liturgical performance’s mode of celebration, at least in the case of these two abbeys, vernacular drama did not follow the *Visitatio* in its presentation of the event. Not all English plays would have a Christ player stepping out of the tomb, but the overwhelming dramatic presence of Christ’s body in early English drama echoes the iconographic and devotional strategies that had developed much earlier.
Whereas the *Visitatio Sepulchri* had been developed for a fixed date in the liturgical calendar, vernacular *Resurrection* plays could be staged at different moments in the Christian year. In the case of York, its play formed part of the sizable Corpus Christi cycle, which was to eventually become the city’s principal means of celebrating the feast day. Although not liturgically in line with its proper calendric place, the framing feast of Corpus Christi speaks to how a fifteenth-century parishioner from York was supposed to comprehend the Resurrection. There had been significant changes to Christian culture since the remote and often exclusive monastic practices of the *Visitatio Sepulchri* in the tenth century. Although the forces of these developments are numerous, their practical implementation is evident in certain outcomes from the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215. Demands requiring the clergy to “increase lay knowledge of Christianity” led to a greater involvement of the congregation in their own salvation. The proliferation of meditative and devotional guides in the vernacular from the thirteenth century and the production of secular biblical drama from the late fourteenth century give concrete proof of this engagement. Lateran IV also cemented into doctrine the contested matter of real presence, issuing a definitive stance on a debate that had been raging in monasteries since the ninth century. In the wake of this doctrinal order, all Christians were required to believe that, upon consecration by the priest, the literal and historical body of Christ was present in the Eucharistic bread and wine. This event had become intimately entwined with the Resurrection, to the extent that, when the priest blessed the Host during the Mass, he was recalling not only Christ’s death but also his rising. And that Resurrection, in line with Eucharistic belief, was understood first and foremost via corporeal presence.

The presentation of Christ’s body had changed significantly from the early iconographic modes of the Crucifixion and Resurrection, where the focus on a triumphant Christ had long been evident. The wounded body of Christ became, from the thirteenth century, the principal body of the Passion, and the sacramental overlap made between Crucifixion and Resurrection established the centrality of the suffering body. When Christ’s Resurrection began to be depicted in iconography, it recalled the bleeding body shown on the cross (see figure 5). The body emerging from the tomb was a testament to that suffering and became increasingly bloody over time.

The changes in how the Resurrection was conceived of had an obvious impact on the ways in which drama, iconography, and devotional texts approached the event, and an increasingly corporeal focus
led to a greater investment in the moment when Christ emerged from the tomb. New witnesses to the Resurrection appeared, creating a solution for the narrative gap that had hitherto existed. Christ’s stepping out of the tomb would be told from the perspective of the soldiers who vocalized the physical onslaught they suffered during his exit. In attempting to address those moments left to the side for centuries, these narratives created answers reflective of the moment in time in which they were constructed. The urge to find answers where the Gospels provided none was not a new impulse, but the scale on which late medieval culture celebrated the Resurrection via Christ’s body was shaped by the cumulative forces of sacramental theology, emotion-centered devotional practices, and a greater lay participation in the celebration of Christian beliefs.

It is with this multiplicity of factors in mind that one must consider the role of Christ’s graveclothes in early drama. How garments function
once the body becomes central to the Resurrection narrative is perhaps surprising, particularly as they do not simply disappear from the plays that include the exit from the tomb. Not all of the extant play-texts include the moment of Resurrection itself, although, as I intend to demonstrate, this does not mean that the body of Christ is absent to a prospective audience. Nor is corporeal presence achieved through the same strategies that the *Visitatio Sepulchri* relied upon.

The plays that include the Resurrection proper can be found in the York and Chester cycles and the Townley manuscript. *Resurrection* plays from the N-Town and Bodley manuscripts do not suggest that this event was intended to be staged, but these plays include many of the central episodes surrounding it. Dramatic records also provide evidence for other English *Resurrection* plays. Both the Coventry and Beverley cycles contain *Resurrection* plays that offer grounds to argue for the inclusion of an exit-from-the-tomb episode. Records for the parish of St. Laurence, Reading, give evidence for a church-based vernacular *Resurrection* play that involved a temporary wooden sepulchre and special lighting effects, and was likely not a unique case. For the purposes of this discussion, however, only plays with surviving texts will be discussed.

**Body and Cloth in the York, Chester, and Townley Plays**

The York *Resurrection* is the earliest play-text to contain evidence for staging the exit from the tomb. Recorded in the Register, the moment of resurrection is alluded to by the direction *Tunc “Jhesu resurgente”* (then Jesus being risen). The action is further supported by the musical direction later added by the scribe John Clerke, “*Tunc angelus cantat ‘Resurgens’*” (Then the angel sings [Christ] is arisen), which Clifford Davidson writes “likely represents long-standing practice.” The play would make little sense without the resurrected body of Christ emerging from the tomb. It is obsessively concerned with both the containment and evasive power of Christ’s body, and the factions that conspire to prevent its raising—either by force or deception—continue to do so long after the tomb has been evacuated. The counterpoint to the lies of Annas, Caiaphas, and Pilate would be the audience’s perception of the event itself. The silent exit of this body (in terms of dialogue, not music) positions the audience as witnesses to the truth of Resurrection, enabling them to view the conspirators
as comically inept and doomed to failure. Without Christ’s physical body, the disruption to the version of events that Pilate orders the soldiers to uphold relies on the audience’s capacity to insert their knowledge of the Resurrection narrative into this play. Although this option is not beyond the realms of possibility, it does not seem in line with the sustained focus on truth that permeates the language of the play. While Pilate claims that truth can be “bought and solde” (450) in his final speech, the play’s sub-version of this narrative tyranny would be powerfully achieved by the inclusion of Christ’s Resurrection.

Critics have noted the York Resurrection’s linguistic echoes of the Visitatio Sepulchri, but have similarly observed the distinct contexts of production and reception that distinguish their respective performative aims. Their use of cloth falls under a similar need for contextualization. Whereas the York play’s use of the Christus resurgens antiphon might recall Easter Sunday worship, the presence of Christ’s body within the dramatic framing of Corpus Christi forces a connection to the Eucharist. That his body needs to be appreciated within a Eucharistic framework proposes an important contrast to the mode of worship the earlier Visitatio operated under. The Resurrection occurs before the Maries approach the tomb, but the inclusion of a body at this moment alters the impact of the subsequent exchange between the Maries and the angel. It also affects how cloth functions in the episode. The angel, as it did in the liturgical performances, questions who the women seek at the tomb: “Ye mournand women in youre þought, | Here in þis place whome haue ȝe sought?” (235–36), to which they reply: “Jesu, þat to dede is brought, | Oure lorde so free” (237–38). As in the Visitatio, the angel then draws their attention to the empty tomb, pointing to the absence of Christ’s body and the continual presence of the sudary within it:

ANGELUS. Women, certayne, here is he noght,
Come nere and see.
He is noght here, þe soth to saie,
þe place is voide þat he in laye,
þe sudary here se ȝe may
Was on hym laide. (239–44)

Although the transposition of the liturgical Latin of the Visitatio into the Middle English of this civic play retains an equivalent meaning, the perception of the cloth is relegated to an ancillary mode of proof. The repetitious language of the angel might be understood as a reinforcement
of this Resurrection message, yet it is a far cry from the laconic offerings of the *Visitatio* angel. The need to reiterate the importance of the empty tomb in a play that is trying to balance bodily presence and absence as mediators of the Resurrection creates an awkward dynamic, which might be explained not by recourse to dramatic efficacy, but by deference to tradition. The exit from the tomb stands in stark and efficient contrast. The long-standing place of the *sudarium* as the sensible proof of Resurrection is respected in this play, but the impact of the raising of cloth in the *Visitatio Sepulchri* and its inclusion subsequent to the moment of resurrection in York cannot be equated. The York audience may have recognized the cloth’s role from this traditional interpretation, but, based on the play alone, cloth’s capacity to convey the truth of Resurrection is greatly diminished.

The Chester and Towneley plays use similar strategies to that of the York *Resurrection*, but they expand significantly on Christ’s role in both instances. Each play contains stage directions that make Christ’s emergence from the tomb explicit—again while the *Christus resurgens* is sung—but they also feature a speaking Christ who delivers a monologue directly after his exit from the tomb (291–92). The introduction of the cloth—specified as the *sudarye*—into the dramatic action is distinct in each play. Towneley is almost identical to York, and, in language reminiscent of the *Visitatio* dialogue, the first of two angels draws the Maries’ attention to the cloth left in the tomb. With a resurrecting and speaking Christ, however, the role of cloth is even more displaced than in York, with convention again justifying its inclusion. In the case of Chester, which is clearly not influenced by the *Visitatio* model, Peter and John race to the tomb after hearing Mary Magdalene’s report that Christ’s body has been stolen. The race episode relies on John 20:5–7, but the playwright includes some surprising variations. Both disciples run to the tomb, with John arriving first and remaining outside. It is subsequent to this detail that the playwright departs from the Gospel script. John gives a speech from outside the tomb in which his sight of the “sudarye” leads him to support Mary Magdalene’s conjecture that Christ’s body has been stolen:

JOHANNES. A, Peter, brother, in good faye, my lord Jesu is awaye, but his sudarye, sooth to saye, lyenge here I fynd by hitselfe, as thou se maye;
farre from all other clothes yt laye.
Nowe Maryes wordes are sooth verey,
As we may have in mynd. (385–92)

The coalescence of a careful description of the cloth with the claim
that it proves a grave robbery—and from outside rather than inside
the tomb—is a departure from both the Gospel account and standard
interpretations of the *sudarium*.69 The Chester play’s dislocation from
the *Visitatio* tradition might account for this distinct use of the cloth,
and it is utilized as a tool to stratify John and Peter along epistemic
grounds. This stratification serves to reverse the Gospel narrative
and place knowledge in the hands of Peter. The disciple’s access to
knowledge of the Resurrection is predicated on his memory of Christ’s
prophecy, and this memory is shown to be activated by his presence
within the tomb:

Petrus. A lord, blessed be tho ever and oo,
For as thou towld me and other moo
I fynd thou hasse overcome our foo
And rysen art in good faye. (397–400)

The verb *finden* links Peter’s spatial positioning with access to a
memory that exceeds the bounds of this faculty. He does not merely
recall words uttered, but also understands their cosmic significance.
Knowledge of the Resurrection implies an understanding that Christ
is now eternal, having defeated all enemies. Notably, the *sudarye* has
no claim to truth in this play, and, as editors Lumiansky and Mills have
suggested, the prop is possibly placed outside the tomb rather than
inside.70 John’s interpretation of the cloth from this exterior position,
coupled with an acceptance of Mary’s words, leads him to an erroneous
conclusion. In this distinct use, the *sudarye* can only supply the possibi-
licity of false interpretation.

The connection between Christ’s body and Eucharistic bread in
both plays is also worth remarking on. Although neither play-text had
overt connections to Corpus Christi, the insistence on the Eucharistic
nature of his body is explicit in Christ’s post-Resurrection speeches. In the
Towneley *Resurrection*, Christ refers to his body as “a measse | in brede”
(343–44) and then makes reference to the transformation of bread into
body through the priest’s consecration:
That ilk veray brede of lyfe
Becommys my fleshe in wordys fyfe:
Whoso it resaues in syn or stryfe
Bese dede foreuer,
And whoso it takys in rightwys lyfe
Dy shall he neuer. (345–50)

Unsurprisingly, this passage of the play may have been controversially received by some readers, and it was crossed out by one such reader. This Eucharistic link is part of an effort to identify the Resurrection with the Crucifixion, and it is notable that the portions of what is known as the “speeches delivered from the cross” were included in this monologue. The Chester Jesus refers to himself as “verey bread of life” (170) and proclaims the Eucharistic bread (171–77) to be integral to the salvation of all Christians. Further reference is made to the correct spiritual state of the recipient of the Host, and Christ’s speech labors over the strictures that apply to oral reception of the host. The individual must have gone through the correct penitential channels or will face dire spiritual consequences:

And whosoever eateth that bread
in synne and wicked liffe,
he receaveth his owne death—
I warne both man wiffe;
the which bread shalbe seene instead
the joye ys aye full ryffe.
When hee ys dead, through fooles read
then ys he brought to payne and stryffe. (178–85)

Both plays have unquestionable stakes in linking the resurrected body of Christ to the Crucifixion. As part of the phenomenal presence of a Christ player in these plays, it is easy to see why the sudarium assumes a subordinate role. In a more explicit format for which York provides evidence, a walking, talking Christ proves his Resurrection and delimits the way an audience should receive this body in their lives.

For the audiences of these plays, the sudary has a dramatic purpose that is never comparable to the role of cloth in the Visitatio. Whereas meditation on the sudarium and its inferred connection to Christ’s body underscores its importance in the liturgical performances, the insertion of a physically present Christ into these three plays disrupts that process. Meditation does not cease to be important to the dramatic enterprise, but it is the raised, bleeding, and occasionally speaking body of Christ that
assumes the position to which devotional efforts must be directed. York and Towneley, with their respective connections to the *Visitatio Sepulchri* tradition, guarantee a sense of stability in relation to how cloth is positioned, but in doing so undermine its conventional role as a cognitive affordance. Chester, with its inversion of this convention, excludes cloth from its usual role in an effort to bolster Peter’s supremacy over John. With cloth being aligned with the figure of John, neither functions as a vehicle of truth.

The N-Town and Bodley Resurrection plays

The plays that do not stage the moment of Resurrection still integrate the body of Christ into proceedings for devotional purposes. The absence of the resurrected body in the N-Town and Bodley *Resurrection* plays opens up the possibilities for cloth to mediate the event. Both plays are dramatically distinct in their approach to the Resurrection. The N-Town manuscript (MS Cotton Vespasian D.8) divides the Resurrection into several episodes that are split across three pageants. Whether these plays were ever intended to be performed in this sequence is, however, a matter of debate. The Bodley play, meanwhile, is a rare surviving example of a vernacular *Resurrection* play written to be staged within a church during the Easter period. Both plays grant cloth a greater role than the other English examples, although in ways that chime with their contemporary devotional influences.

The N-Town play that prioritizes the role of cloth is *The Announcement to the Three Marys; Peter and John at the Sepulchre*. The speeches of the Mariæ contain a sustained focus on the wounded body of Christ, and, in Mary Salomé’s quest to anoint Christ’s corpse with ointment, she states that she seeks the body tortured during the Crucifixion. The language of vision positions this body as a focal point upon which an audience should meditate:

MARY SALOME. The naylis gun his lemys feyn,
And þe spere gan punche and peyn.
On þo woundys, we wold haue eyn:
ðat grace now God graunt vs. (29–32)

Mary Salomé’s discovery of the cloth in the tomb is framed around the evidence it provides. She laments the absence of Christ’s body and her inability to provide comfort to the corpse by dressing the wounds. Although
the cloth leads Mary to an understanding of bodily absence, it is notable that the possibility of Resurrection is not addressed:

MARY SALOME. To myghtfful God, omnypotent
I bere a boyst of oynement.
I wold han softyd his sore dent,
His sydys al abowte.
Lombe of Love, withowt loth,
I fynde þe not, myn hert is wroth!
In þe sepulcre þer lyth a cloth,
And jentyl Jesu is owte. (55–62)

The Maries must move beyond this reading of physical evidence and, under the guidance of the angel, must direct themselves away from death and toward Christ’s living body. Notably, the angel relates this body to its previous suffering and, when insisting the women leave the tomb to spread the news, specifies that it “levyth with woundys reed” (78). The angel is the vehicle of truth on this occasion, and cloth functions to misdirect the Maries.

Cloth reverts to its traditional role later in the play, where it causes joy in place of “wroth.” The Johannine race to the tomb is closely adhered to in terms of the sequence of actions, but the roles Peter and John assume are altered. Although access to the knowledge of the Resurrection comes through John’s correct interpretation of the *sudary* (notably named on this occasion), this is achieved through the combined perceptual efforts of the disciples:

*Hic currunt Johannes et Petrus simul ad sepulcrum, et Johannes prius venis ad monumentum, sed non intrat:*

JOHANNES. The same shete, here I se þat Crystys body was in wounde.
But he is gon! Wheresoever he be,
He lyth not here up on þis grownde.

*Petrus intrat monumentum, et dicit Petrus:*

PETRUS. In þis corner, þe shete is fownde;
And here we fynde þe sudary
In þe whiche his hed was wounde
Whan he was take from Calvary.

*Hic intrat Johannes monumentum dicens:*

JOHANNES. The same sudary and þe same shete
Here with my syth I se both tweyn.
Now may I wele knowe and wete
þat he is rysyn to lyve ageyn!
Onto oure bretheryn, lete us go seyn
þe treyth ryght hevyn as it is:
Oure maystyr lyvyth, þe whech was slayn,
Allmyghty Lorde and Kynge of Blys.

PETRUS. No lengere here wyll we dwelle;
To oure bretheryn þe wey we take.
The treyth to them whan þat we telle,
Grett joye in hert þan wul þei make. (127–46)

Perception of the *sudary* culminates in recognition of its function, and this passage emphasizes John’s knowledge of the Resurrection and Peter’s agreement. Both disciples play a role in this ideal outcome, unlike their stratified roles in the Gospel narrative and wider exegetical tradition. In a play where the body of Christ is never seen within the tomb, the *sudary* finally takes up its conventional role as a cognitive affordance, although here it is tweaked in order to unite the interpretative efforts and epistemic achievements of John and Peter.

The Bodley *Christ’s Resurrection* (Bodleian MS e Museo 160) is a rare example of a text that gives evidence for the “presence of vernacular drama inside churches in Holy Week and at Easter.” Unlike the N-Town plays, which have an unclear association with the liturgy, the Bodley play is preceded by the directive that it is to be staged on “Pas[c]he Daye at Morn.” Such evidence, coupled with the wider structure of the play, has led Peter Meredith to label it under the heading of “late English liturgical drama,” and Clifford Davidson refers to the play as “vernacular drama for liturgical occasions.” Davidson also notes that there is evidence for the play’s composition “in the solitude of a Carthusian cell,” boasting as it does “a meditative aim consistent with that of Nicholas Love’s *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*.”

The majority of *Christ’s Resurrection* is devoted to lengthy articulations of grief by Mary Magdalene and Joseph of Arimathea, for which they receive censure from their respective companions. As in the case of N-Town play 36, *Christ’s Resurrection* centers around the visit to the tomb undertaken by the three Maries and the disciples John and Peter, although in this instance the second group has a third disciple, Andrew. The play also includes two appearances of Christ, first to the Magdalene in the *Noli me tangere* episode and then to the Maries, who kiss his feet as per Matthew 28:9.

Many features of the Bodley play’s use of cloth are dramatically distinctive, although the playwright may have been drawing on established
devotional conventions. The influence of texts such as *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Christ* help to account for the play’s overall meditative strategy but do not clarify its use of cloth. Love mentions the *sudarium* in his account of the Resurrection, but only to deny it the capacity to provide either knowledge of resurrection or emotional consolation. There is no obvious English source for Bodley’s take on the *sudarium*, but it may, as Davidson suggests, have been shaped by Carthusian devotional models.

The Bodley angel introduces the cloth to the Maries along the lines of the *Visitatio Sepulchri*, but there is an apparent difference in its description:

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ANGELUS. Com hidder, and behold with your eye
The play where þe body did lye.
Be joyeos now of mynd!
Loo, here is the cloth droppid blud,
Which was put on hym takyn of þe rud,
Ose yourself did see.
For a remembrance tak it yee,
And hy yow fast to Galilee—
For ther apper shalle hee! (159–67)
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Although it makes sense that this cloth is spotted with blood (a detail also found in iconography), the angel’s description of the *sudarium* is nevertheless rare. The command for the cloth to be taken from the tomb as a “remembrance” is also unusual. The angel’s presentation of the cloth interprets the item in light of the Crucifixion, and in this play the figure positions cloth as a prompt to meditate on Christ’s wounds. This link is sustained by the Magdalene, whose sensory experience of the cloth prompts her to recall the torment Christ endured on the cross:

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MAGDALENE. This cloth with blude þat is so
stayned,
Of a maydens child so sor constraynid,
On cross when he was done! (174–76)
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Her own meditative act on the pain Christ endured on the cross is then turned outwards, and in an address to the audience she instructs them in the correct meditative and emotional response:

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Welle may the teres ron down your cheke!
Welle may your hertes relent,
Myndinge the payn my Lord and master
felte! (181–83)
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The Bodley cloth varies in its capacity to stimulate different emotional states depending on the vantage point given. For the Magdalene it leads her further into meditating on the pain of Christ, or rebuking herself for not being present when he resurrected. For the other Maries it is “proue evident” (191) of Resurrection, which is cause enough to cease mourning. But the blood detail, referred to by Davidson as one of the overwhelming objects of devotion in the play, ensures that for the audience the cloth is a vehicle for meditation on Christ’s suffering.

Even within the same play, cloth is put to differing and on occasion oppositional uses in early English Resurrection plays. The linguistic echoes evident between the York and Towneley Resurrection and Visitatio Sepulchri may account for the presence of cloth within the dramatic action, but a walking and talking Christ player arguably displaces the role of cloth from its seminal liturgical function. Elsewhere, cloth is a meditational tool intended to lead the viewer to the resurrecting body. The systematic linking of the crucified body with the resurrected one from the thirteenth century onwards changed the way the Resurrection was conceived of and required an audience to meditate on the suffering that had secured their salvation. What these plays deploy is not the same cloth found in the Visitatio Sepulchri tradition, but one that suits the demands of late medieval devotion. It acts as an auxiliary mode of proof in tandem with the body of a player, a prompt to a specific meditative act, or as something to be interpreted, with both success and failure possible. Cloth in these plays is an artifact of its time and place.

**Conclusion**

Cloth has played a seminal role in the articulation and celebration of the Resurrection since its appearance in the Gospel of John. The roles cloth assumes within narrative, image, and performance are not always comparable, but its functionality is continually dependent on its primary status as a piece of fabric and its capacity to imply contact with a body. Whether discarded graveclothes, church linen, or a stage prop covered in blood, the role given to cloth within a specific frame can shift according to the type of body implied. How this cloth is acted upon, whether in the secrecy of a tomb or spread out before a congregation, also needs to be considered when accounting for its capacity to be meaningful. Cloth can be understood as an affordance in each of the examples I have discussed. In some instances its relationship to a specific type of body must be grasped in order to lead to a comprehension of Resurrection; on other occasions it
operates as a negative affordance, showing an audience how not to understand both it and the body it once wrapped. How that body is conceived of in each instance is integral to the understanding of how clothing can work to explain corporeal concepts.

NOTES

1 For an in-depth study of the Resurrection in the first few centuries of Christianity, see Vinzent, _Christ’s Resurrection_. Sheingorn also gives an overview of the Resurrection in Christianity and cites two early but marginal texts, the Gospel of Peter and a sermon by Ephrem the Syriac, which do fill in the blanks, in “The Moment of Resurrection,” pp. 113–14.

2 Cave, _Thinking with Literature_, p. 48.

3 The _Legenda Aurea_ divides its approach to the Resurrection into seven parts, providing answers to why Christ rose on the third day, how this was achieved, and what had happened in the intervening period. The work was immensely popular across medieval Europe, and more than 900 manuscripts survive.

4 Cave, _Thinking with Literature_, p. 9.

5 “Afterwards, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, said: I thirst,” John 19:28.

6 Although _blepō_ can signal spiritual understanding, this is clearly not its function in John 20:1. Mary has no access to any spiritual knowledge of what has happened, making the more basic translation of the verb much more appropriate.

7 Renn, _Expository Dictionary of Bible Words_, p. 868.

8 As Renn explains, _eidō_ expresses “the meaning ‘know,’ which is closely related to ‘seeing,’ in the context of mental perception,” _Expository Dictionary of Bible Words_, p. 868.

9 Renn, _Expository Dictionary of Bible Words_, p. 106. Renn notes that the word occurs around 250 times in the New Testament.


12 The word is a Greek transliteration of the Latin _sudarium_. It is found in Luke 19:20, where it is used as a type of purse. In Acts 19:12, it is a handkerchief that Paul uses to heal the sick. See Renn, _Expository Dictionary of Bible Words_, p. 464.


14 In the two other instances outside John (Matthew 27:59 and Luke 23:53), the verb describes Joseph of Arimathea wrapping the dead Christ in a _sindon_. Renn, _Expository Dictionary of Bible Words_, p. 1069.

15 Augustine explicitly rejects this reading in Tractate 120 of his exegesis on the Gospel of John, but in order to do so he has to provide an alternate reading
that is also based on inference. He writes: “Here some, by not giving due attention, suppose that John believed that Jesus had risen again; but there is no indication of this from the words that follow ... What but this, that he saw the sepulchre empty, and believed what the woman had said, that He had been taken away from the tomb?” in Augustine, Tractates. For the original text, see Iohannis evangelium CXXI, p. 664.

16 Vinzent, Christ’s Resurrection, pp. 1–10.
18 For an overview on early Christian iconography, see Jensen, Understanding Early Christian Art.
19 Spier, Picturing the Bible, p. 219; Jensen, Understanding Early Christian Art, p. 162.
20 Jensen, Understanding Early Christian Art, p. 162. See also Villette, La Résurrection du Christ.
21 The one exception to this statement is the wall painting found in the second-century church at Dura Europas, which lies in modern-day Syria. It shows women moving toward a tomb, and art historians agree that this image is likely connected to the women at the tomb from the Gospels. However, no other contemporary examples exist, and so it is unclear if this image is an exception or is exceptional in its survival. See Jensen, Understanding Early Christian Art, p. 162.
22 The Munich Ivory (ca. 400), now held in Milan (Castello Sforzesco, Civiche Raccolte d’Arte applicate ed Incisioni, Avori 9), features two women in prostrate positions before a seated figure carrying a scroll. A tomb with an open door is in the background and has three resurrection panels carved into both sides of the door. Jensen, Understanding Early Christian Art, p. 163; Kurt Weitzmann, Age of Spirituality, p. 504; Hansen, “Acts of Witnessing.”
23 The Drogo Sacramentary (ca. 850, Paris, Bib. Nat., Ms lat. 9428, fol. 58) contains the first image in Western Europe to place liturgical objects in the hands of the women at the tomb. However, there is an earlier artistic tradition where comparable images are found. A number of sixth-century ampullae from Palestine show the women carrying thuribles, and these items were taken by pilgrims back to monasteries in Italy, such as in Monza. What these objects depict, however, is uncertain and warrants further research.
24 Although the earliest extant texts date to the first quarter of the tenth century, critics have conjectured that the monastic practice likely began during the previous century. See Bjork, “On the Dissemination of Quem quaeritis,” p. 51. For a more up-to-date critical overview, see Nils Holger Petersen, “Liturgical Enactment,” pp. 13–29, and Flanigan, “Quid Quaeritis,” pp. 35–60.
25 The earliest extant texts are from Saint-Martial-de-Limoges, ca. 923–934, found in Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS Lat. 1240, fol. 30v. See Young, The Drama of the Medieval Church, I, and Bevington, Medieval Drama. A Visitatio Sepulchri from a tropary in St. Gall, Stiftsbibliothek, MS 484, is dated to the first
half of the tenth century, in Young, *The Drama of the Medieval Church*, I, and Bevington, *Medieval Drama*.


27 Symes urges caution as to how such rubrics are read, stating that their very survival should alert critics to take care with how to read these instructive texts. Symes considers the possibility that the rubrics can function prescriptively or proscriptively, but not as “transcriptions of events,” in “Liturigical Texts,” p. 244.


29 Bradford Bedingfield accounts for the use of cloth in the Anglo-Saxon church, particularly during the Easter period, *The Dramatic Liturgy*, pp. 114–70.

30 Grumett writes that church practices in both the East and West associating altar linen with Christ’s graveclothes stem from the Gospel accounts of Christ’s burial, *Material Eucharist*, pp. 87–89.

31 Cassell’s Latin Dictionary.


33 Deshman, *The Benedictional of Æthelwold*, p. 58.

34 Deshman, *The Benedictional of Æthelwold*, p. 58.

35 The earlier Metz image has a swinging thurible, as do all the St. Gall images that will shortly be discussed. It seems that this artist is premising gesture over the act of swinging the vessel as the thurible hangs still in this image.

36 My reading of gestures in this illumination is indebted to Guillemette Bolens.

37 Ogden compares the Hartker illumination with Aethelwold’s, although he notes the many similarities which link the two images, *The Staging of Drama*, p. 33. For more on the artistic context of these images, see Williamson, *Medieval Ivory Carvings*, p. 210.

38 This suggestion is made by the Victoria & Albert Museum, London, which houses the ivory panel.

39 The E-Codices project in Switzerland dates the manuscript to 990–1000.


41 Quotations are from the edition by Bevington, *Medieval Drama*. Text from Udine, Bibl., fol. 1r–1v.

42 Another eleventh-century *Visitatio Sepulchri* from the Abbey of St. Lambrecht states that two separate pieces of cloth are used to wrap the cross in the *Depositio crucis*, and the one termed *sudarium* is placed at the head (crucis caput). Its extensive rubrics clarify that two cloths are placed in a specific
relationship to the cross, even though both are extended in the announcement of

43 Young stratified different *Visitatio Sepulchri* texts along methodological
lines that have long since been rejected. More recently, Davril has attempted to
account for the origins and differing traditions of the *Visitatio*, though he uses the
title *Quem Queritis*, "L’origine du Quem quaeritis," pp. 119–36. Symes, however,
has issued cautions against taxonomic practices, writing that they "do not help
us to understand how such sources came into existence, and whether or not they
also urges a closer attention to the books that contain these texts and writes that
these contexts should not be radically separated from each other. See the author’s
"Introduction," in *History of Liturgical Books*.

44 For further reading on the topic of Eucharistic prayer and its connection to

45 Text from the York A/Y Memorandum Book, fol. 254r. Translation from

46 King writes that, in the Ordo Paginarium, “the synopsis of action com-


48 King has written on the dating issues of this Book of Hours, but has focused
on the possible commissioners of the book. It is generally held that the illumina-
tions were produced in the early fifteenth century, “Corpus Christi plays and the
‘Bolton Hours,’” pp. 46–62.

49 For more on the context of the Ordo Paginarium, and the hypothesized
state of the York Cycle in 1415, see Twycross, “The Ordo Paginarium Revisited,
with a Digital Camera.”

50 An early thirteenth-century life of St. John of Beverley mentions a resur-
rection play in which the moment of Christ’s raising is paired with the miracu-
loous resuscitation of a boy who fell from the church roof while trying to see the
play. See Badir, “Representations of the Resurrection,” pp. 9–41, and Davidson,

51 Plays termed “liturgical” or “secular” can often be easily distinguished in
respect to their dramatic aims, but there are cases where decisive features over-
lap. The Shrewsbury *Resurrection* play is one such case, as is the Bodley *Christ’s
Resurrection*, which I discuss later in this chapter. So too is the St. Laurence
*Resurrection* play. All three vernacular plays are heavily influenced by the liturgy.
Although distinctions are useful and often necessary when discussing the dra-
matic tradition of the Resurrection, it is worth bearing in mind that such catego-
ries are limited.

52 For an in-depth overview of vernacular Resurrection plays, which includes
both French and English examples, see Happé, “Dramatizing the Resurrection,”
pp. 182–203.

French discusses the practical implementation of these educational demands, *The People of the Parish*, pp. 176–82.


I discuss the impact of the doctrinal changes to real presence in relation to drama in “Doctrinal Orthodoxy and the Dramatic,” pp. 17–36.


Sheingorn discusses this changing context and the necessity that the resurrected Christ performed multiple roles in “The Moment of Resurrection,” pp. 119–21.

For a discussion of what evidence remains of the Coventry Resurrection play, see King and Davidson, *The Coventry Corpus Christi Plays*, pp. 33–41. For more on the Beverley pageant list, see Wyatt, pp. 68–91.

Records between 1498 and 1537 show this play to have been staged on Easter Monday. See Johnston, “Performance Traditions” and Sheingorn, *The Easter Sepulchre*.


Horner, “‘Us Must Make Lies,’” pp. 34–96. See also Beckwith, *Signifying God*, pp. 72–89.

Twycross also conjectures that the play has many humorous elements in “Playing the Resurrection,” pp. 285–86. For more on the music of the York play, see Rastell, *Minstels Playing*, pp. 35–36.


Quotations from the Towneley plays are from the edition edited by Stevens and Cavley, *The Towneley Plays*. The editors note in relation to the Resurrection 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,’” II, p. 605.


Notably, Augustine suggests such a reading. See note 15 in this chapter.

The second stanza quoted from the Towneley play has been cancelled by one reader; see Stevens and Cawley, *The Towneley Plays*, II, p. 607.


For a detailed account of Eucharistic practices in late medieval England, see Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, pp. 91–130.

Play 35 (Harrowing of Hell (Part II); Christ’s Appearance to Mary; Pilate and the Soldiers) stages the revivification of Christ. It separates the “Anima Christi” and “Jesus” into different parts, and Christ’s emergence from the tomb is recounted from the perspective of Pilate’s soldiers.

The performance history of the plays contained within MS Cotton Vespasian D.8 is very unclear, and, whereas the Passion plays (1 & 2) are clearly intended to be performed sequentially, the same cannot be established with certainty for other groupings of plays. Plays 35 and 36 make logical sense in relation to each other, but were not necessarily performed sequentially. See Sugano, *The N-Town Plays*, pp. 1–2.

For an extensive study of East Anglian drama and devotion, see McMurray Gibson, *The Theatre of Devotion*, and Granger, *The N-Town Play*.


All quotations are from the edition edited by Baker, Murphy, and Hall, *The Late Medieval Religious Plays of Bodleian MSS*.


Davidson, “The Bodley,” p. 56.


The Holkham Picture Bible, ca. 1327–1335, has a Visit to the Tomb scene (Add MD 47682, fol. 34v) featuring a cloth covered in spots of blood. This detail is consistent with the cloth Christ is buried with and the wounds that cover his body during the Crucifixion (fol. 32v, 33v).

This might be a detail also present in iconography. In Strasbourg Cathedral, panel b.3 of the North Chapel window has one Mary bending into the horizontal tomb and touching the cloth. In the Abbey of Chartres, in the Saint Père window (217, dated to the early fourteenth century), the first Mary grasps the cloth in her hand. In Tours, window 2 of the apse has a single Mary reaching toward the cloth (1250).