

Play Time

Gender, anti-Semitism and Temporality in Medieval Biblical Drama

Daisy Black

Manchester University Press
Manchester and New York

In loving remembrance of four strong women,
Nora Scruby, Alice Black, Peggy Young and Lynda Swaine

and with love for two in my present,
Sue Black and Emma Rush.

Contents

List of images	p. 5
Acknowledgements	p. 6
List of abbreviations	p. 10
Introduction: What God was doing before he created the world.	p.10
1. The old man and the pregnant virgin: Linear time and Jewish conversion in the N-Town plays.	p.43
2. Grave new world: Fantasies of supersession and explosive questions in the York and Chester flood plays.	p. 77
3. Time out of joint: Queering the Nativity in the Towneley <i>Second Shepherds' Play</i> .	p. 110
4. Passion meets Passover: Temporal origami in the Towneley <i>Herod the Great</i> .	p. 145
5. The spectators' God's-eye view.	p. 177
Bibliography	p. 196
Index	TBC

Illustrations

Figure 1: One of the soldiers helps the stage crew prepare the pageant wagon for the Crucifixion pageant. ‘The Death and Crucifixion of Christ’ performed by St Chad’s Church and the York Butcher’s Guild in *The York Mystery Plays*, dir. by Tom Straszewski (York, 6th September 2018). p.15

Figure 2: A shining God watches as stage crew pull his platform into place. ‘The Creation of the World to the Fifth Day’, performed by the York Guild of Building in *The York Mystery Plays*, dir. by Tom Straszewski (York, 6th September 2018). p. 15

Figure 3: BNF, Manuscrits, Français 28, f. 66v. p. 85

Figure 4: ‘BL Add MS 47682 fol. 8r.’ p. 85

Figure 5: Peter Baltens, *A Flemish Kermis with a Performance of the Farce, ‘Een cluyte van Plaeyerwater’*, c.1570. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. p. 110

Acknowledgements

Like the plays it studies, this book has demanded a true community performance during a fragile time.

Life as an early career researcher holds much in common with some of the insecure, ‘queer’ models of time I address in chapter three, with its unstable signs and lack of reliable futurity.

Each temporary teaching position produces materials with a limited future. The teacher will not be there to repeat those classes, and, in many cases, will not see their students graduate.

Each unsuccessful job application represents a future that did not happen, and takes time and resources that might have been spent on research.

Each conference reveals that a worrying number of scholars whose research has been crucial, innovative and brilliant, are absent.

The current, precarious higher education climate survives on a cycle of endless striving which leaves its researchers open to feelings of amateurism and imposter syndrome. Several of the scholars whose work has been fundamental in developing this book are not currently in secure employment.

I am now fortunate to have a position which has unequivocally and liberally supported this research. I have also been privileged to benefit from the support networks I list below, and from the financial and emotional support of my partner, Andrew. This book has only survived and grown due to a vast ‘guild’ of colleagues spanning many universities, disciplines, research environments and performance spaces. They have offered their time, encouragement, skills and dazzling belief in this project.

This pageant is yours, too.

This book would not have been finished without the stability and support provided by the University of Wolverhampton. I am indebted to their insightful Early Researcher Award Scheme, which gave me the time and structure I needed to complete this project. Particular thanks to my colleagues Frank Wilson, Josiane Boutonnet, Aidan Byrne, Benjamin Colbert, Sebastian Groes, Debra Cureton and Sarah Schofield, who have given me so much support in

Sample chapter from monograph. Copyright Manchester University Press and Daisy Black.

all my academic work. Thank you also to my anonymous readers, whose detailed feedback has done so much to improve this book.

Anke Bernau from the University of Manchester has shared her insight, encouragement and scholarly bravery from the very beginning of this project. Thank you to Jacqueline Pearson and Gale Owen-Crocker for sharing their wealth of knowledge, enthusiasm and eye for detail, and David Matthews and Greg Walker for their constructive feedback and support. Special thanks to my Manchester medievalist colleagues Hannah Priest, Kate Ash, Chris Monk, Stephen Gordon, Pam Walker, Kathy Frances and Linda Sever for years of advice, good humour and support. Particular thanks to Meredith Carroll for bringing this book from manuscript to publication.

The early stages of this research were supported by the generous contribution of the Liddon Fund from the Society of the Faith. Thank you also to the AHRC for funding a performance of a mystery play as part of their Afterlife of Heritage Research project and for their sponsorship through the 2018 AHRC/BBC Radio 3 New Generation Thinkers award. The support of my former colleagues at the University of Hull was also key in developing this book. I am particularly indebted to the constructive feedback on early drafts and the scholarly support of Janet Clare, Veronica O'Mara, Elisabeth Salter and Lesley Coote.

Thank you to my community of mentors, allies and colleagues on the Gender and Medieval Studies network, who have seen this project develop over the years. Liz Herbert McAvoy, Patricia Skinner, Roberta Magnani and Laura Varnham have not only provided mentorship for my work but also regularly act as fierce supporters, advocates and opportunity-makers for many postgraduate and early career researchers in our field. Laura was particularly generous in helping me with the proposal stage of this book. Thank you to Rachel Moss, Diane Heath, Amy Morgan, Jade Godsall, Mary Bateman, Hannah Piercy and Charlotte Steenbrugge for organising key conferences during this project, sharing their knowledge and answering questions about things as diverse as theology, childbirth, queer time and sheep (for what I did not, in the end, call the 'queer sheep chapter'). The collegiality and support of the global online community who gathers to write under the #remoteretreat tag has also helped impose

Sample chapter from monograph. Copyright Manchester University Press and Daisy Black.

temporal structure on the writing process. Particular thanks to my formidable battalion of proofing angels; Lucy Allen-Goss, Victoria Biggs, Aidan Byrne, Jan Danek, James Howard and Laura Kalas-Williams.

Thank you to St Peter's Chaplaincy, Manchester History Festival and Wolverhampton Literature Festival for enabling me to stage some of the plays featured in this book, and to my storytelling and folk communities for teaching me how community performance works and why it is important. Thank you always to my cohort of unruly women, Emma Rush, Carmel Clarkson and Rachel Mann, whose creativity inspires me so much.

Finally, to my family, Andrew Swaine, David Black and Sue Black. No time spent with you is ever long enough.

List of Abbreviations

EETS	Early English Text Society. EETS volumes are designated 'o.s.' (original series), 'e.s.' (extra series) or 's.s.' (supplementary series). The various publishers and places of publication will be given separately for each text.
GLQ	<i>A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies</i>
JEGP	<i>Journal of English and Germanic Philology</i>
JMEMS	<i>Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies</i>
METH	<i>Medieval English Theatre</i>
MLQ	<i>Modern Language Quarterly: A Journal of Literary History</i>
MLAA	<i>The Modern Language Association of America</i>
MRDE	<i>Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England</i>
NLH	<i>New Literary History</i>
PMLA	<i>Publications of the Modern Language Association of America</i>
REED	<i>Records of Early English Drama</i>
ROMARD	<i>Research on Medieval and Renaissance Drama</i>
RORD	<i>Research Opportunities in Renaissance Drama</i>
SPELL	<i>Swiss Papers in English Language and Literature</i>
TCR	<i>The Chaucer Review</i>
WSIQ	<i>Women's Studies International Quarterly</i>
ZAA	<i>Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik: A Quarterly of Language, Literature and Culture.</i>

Introduction:

What God was doing before He created the world.

Time may change me
But I can't trace time.

(David Bowie, *Changes*, 1971).

You are my eternal Father, but I am scattered in times whose order I do not understand.

(Augustine, *Confessions*, 379-400AD).

In his 1971 hit *Changes*, David Bowie articulated a problem that also caused a great deal of bother for Saint Augustine. Although we may think we know what time is, and although we can see its impact on our lives through measuring change, as soon as we try to describe *what* time is we, struggle. Where Bowie's song examined concepts of time through the relationship between generations and their experiences of gender, Augustine understood his own disordered experience of time in relation to a higher model of authority. Throughout chapter eleven of *Confessions*, Augustine negotiates the slippery relationship between God's eternal divinity and the temporality constituted in the act of Creation. Longing for answers, Augustine vividly imagines what it would be like to question Moses in person about God's creation of the world:

May I hear and understand how in the beginning you made heaven and earth (Gen. 1, 1).
Moses wrote this. He wrote this and went his way, passing out of this world from you and to you. He is not now before me, but if he were, I would clasp him and ask him and through you beg him to explain to me the creation. I would concentrate my bodily ears to the sounds breaking forth from his mouth. If he spoke Hebrew, he would in vain make an impact on my sense of hearing, for the sounds would not touch my mind at all. If he spoke Latin, I would know what he meant.¹

Here, Augustine fashions Moses, father of Hebrew law, as a desired, embodied speaker from whom he might demand answers. In imagining clasping Moses, Augustine becomes an urgent audience member, concentrating his ears and begging him to explain his scripture.

¹ Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. by Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), XI, iii (5), p. 223.

Yet at the same time, Augustine recognises the impossibility of his imaginative act of desire. Separated from Creation and scripture by the passage of time, he can only approach the mysteries of Creation through the less visceral processes of oral and written narrative transmission and translation. Even if he were able to bring a figure from the Hebrew past to speak in his presence, Augustine recognises that he would still not understand him. Unless Moses were to speak in a language which did not exist in his own time – Latin, the language of the Christian church, rather than in Hebrew, the language of Jewish law, in which Augustine believes Moses wrote the book of Genesis – their conversation would be fruitless. There is a tension between authority and intelligibility here. In this fantasy encounter, the very thing which would mark Moses as authentic is also the thing which makes his knowledge inaccessible. And yet, Augustine muses, if Moses did speak in Latin, ‘how would I know whether or not he was telling me the truth?’² This articulates one of the central problems encountered when confronting questions of beginning. As all notions of ‘past’ and ‘beginning’ are formed and informed by the composite desires, ideals and languages of the present, the ‘truth’ will remain elusive.

Augustine next famously grapples with the ‘old error’ assumed in the philosophical question, ‘what was God doing before he made heaven and earth?’³ Concluding that there *was* no time before Creation, he argues that all time, and thus human history, began in Creation:

Since, therefore, you are the cause of all times, if any time existed before you made heaven and earth, how can anyone say that you abstained from working? You made time itself. Time could not elapse before you made time.⁴

Here, Augustine adopts an idea of divine eternity as atemporal – outside of time – with time, like the world, being a Created thing. God’s eternity, in this model, is in a perpetual present.⁵ Yet his conclusion that time did not exist before Creation only underlines the disjunction between the ways he believed eternal, divine time operated and his own experience of time as a continuous, if elusive ‘present’ composed of succession of moments that might be called forth from the past and anticipated in the future.⁶ This feeling of disjunction later came to be

² Augustine, *Confessions*, XI, iii, p. 223.

³ Augustine, *Confessions*, XI, x, p. 228.

⁴ Augustine, *Confessions*, XI, xiii, p. 229.

⁵ Augustine, *Confessions*, XI, xiii, p. 230: ‘In the sublimity of an eternity which is always in the present, you are before all things past and transcend all things future.’

⁶ See Wesley Stevens, “A present sense of things past: Quid est enim tempus?,” in *Time and Eternity: The Medieval Discourse*, ed. by Gerhard Jaritz and Moreno-Riaño Gerson (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), pp. 9-28.

one of the primary *foci* of medieval and early modern theological debates concerning personal and divine experiences of time and eternity, wherein time was associated with the postlapsarian world and yet also seen as redeemable, reclaimable, and an essential part of personal salvation.⁷ Later theologians developed the way they imagined God engaged with time. Thomas Aquinas, like Augustine, claimed God's experience of time was composed of an eternal 'now', but also adopted Boethius' idea of divine eternity as a present in which all events, past and future, exist: '[God's eternity] embraces the boundless extent of past and future, and by virtue of its simple comprehension, it ponders all things as if they were being enacted in the present.'⁸ These theologians tried to conceptualise God's role in relation to human action. They asked whether God was an ever-present spectator of human action, his eternity situated somewhere spatially and temporally distant from the worldly 'playing space', or whether God shared all experiences with his human 'actors'. Would God, for example, be able to experience moments of time-bound human emotion such as anticipation or surprise?

For late medieval playwrights, however, the glib question 'what was God doing before he made heaven and earth?' held even more complications. Augustine's embodied longing to resurrect physically a figure from the Hebrew past, to have Moses before him, to 'clasp him and...beg him to explain to me the creation', holds much in common with the religious lay performances of Bible pageants in England's civic centres between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries. Plays seeking to dramatize the act of Creation, along with the other Bible narratives, engaged in the kind of dialogue and explication Augustine desired from his imagined encounter with Moses. They placed figures from the Hebrew and Christian scriptures in front of an audience, speaking the audience's own language. In doing so, these performances, like Augustine, negotiated various models of time and eternity. These models included the typological and supersessionary narratives inherent in a Bible constructed of multiple 'Hebrew' and 'Christian' scriptures and histories; circular and parallel narratives dependent on prophecy and fulfilment; the birth of Christ and its effect on time, and events such as the Flood, whose waters promised both an end of time and a new beginning. While many of the plays within the surviving body of medieval biblical drama deal directly with

⁷ During the sixteenth century Augustine's theology was 'reclaimed' by various Protestant groups, who cast him as an early Protestant thinker. See Arnoud S. Q. Visser, *Reading Augustine in the Reformation: The Flexibility of Intellectual Authority in Europe, 1500-1620* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 3-11 and Alec Ryrie, *Being Protestant in Reformation Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 441-6.

⁸ Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. by P.G. Walsh (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), V.6, ll. 16-17.

questions of time, particularly in Creation and Doomsday pageants, others find questions and experiences of time a rich source of conflict, negotiation and, occasionally, laughter. This book argues that questions concerning divine and human experiences of time were not only the preserve of prominent early and medieval theologians and religious scholars. These questions were physically embodied in, appeared in the dialogue of, and, to some extent, needed to be solved practically by medieval civic plays and their lay creators, performers and audiences. It finds that these plays supported multiple, co-existing and subjective experiences of time, and that these experiences were intimately connected to experiences of gender and race. Moreover, it argues that one of the principal causes of antagonism between the characters of the biblical plays is their ability (or inability) to *define*, and thus to manage, time.

Before Creation

Any play, but especially a play which represents the first in a series of pageants, has to begin somewhere. *The Fall of the Angels*, the first play recorded in the surviving manuscript of the York pageants, BL Add MS 35290, was performed by the Barkers' guild, who were responsible for the preparation of leather. It opens with God speaking in Latin, before addressing his audience in English. Yet in practical performance, this pageant would have begun long before this moment. Before God could give this speech, and before the 'time' of the performance could really begin, the performers would have had to clear and establish their playing space. As the first pageant performed at each station in the York cycle, this would have been no small feat. Each pageant was played on a moveable wagon stage at the first station, outside Holy Trinity Priory, at dawn on Corpus Christi day. From there, it proceeded down Micklegate and over the River Ouse, performing at the specified stations along the way.⁹ The pageants representing later episodes from the Bible followed in order and, as the day progressed, the proximity of the stations meant that it would have been possible to view the pageants out of chronological order. We know a number of problems attended this kind of processual performance, not least when certain pageants took unauthorised stops or delayed the whole procession by taking too long to move on. Such an incident occurred in 1554, when the Girdlers were fined 20 shillings for being too slow in leaving one station, thus 'stoppyng of the rest of the pageantz folowyng and to the

⁹ See Richard Beadle, 'The York Corpus Christi Play', in *Medieval English Theatre*, ed. by Richard Beadle and Alan J. Fletcher (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 99-124, (p. 102) and Meg Twycross, 'Forget the 4.30 am Start: Recovering a Palimpsest in the York Ordo Paginarum', *METH*, 25 (2005), 98-152.

disordering of the same” for “an wholle hower.”¹⁰ However, while *The Fall of the Angels* would not have had to deal with problems caused by other pageants in front of them, the Barkers had additional challenges to contend with. While the following pageants could have been sure of at least a defined, if rather busier, performance space, *The Fall of the Angels* would have been the first pageant to reach each station. The Barkers therefore needed repeatedly to perform the theatrical labour required to transform the street spaces of York into playing spaces.

This labour would have been less of a challenge in the cycle’s early decades, when the pageants were a more integrated part of the Corpus Christi procession, whose passage through the streets would have established a sacred playing space for each guild’s performance.¹¹ However, as Richard Beadle argues, when the civic Corpus Christi plays ‘began to displace the ecclesiastical procession of Corpus Christi from its own official liturgical occasion (the first Thursday after Trinity Sunday) to the day after,’ this labour would have fallen on each guild’s pageant-makers.¹² Before the York God could give his opening speech, and before the pageant’s performance time could begin, the company would have had to prepare and establish their space. In his discussion of staging conventions in medieval English theatre, Philip Butterworth draws attention to the stage-labour required to do this:

The theatrical contract between player and audience begins when the player is first seen and/or heard in the guise of his adopted *persona*. Such recognition may occur before the player has started to play. However, the contract is reinforced when the player steps onto or over a demarcated threshold that constitutes the agreed playing space. [...] Delineation of the playing space did not always exist prior to performance. Sometimes the space needed to be created by the player on his first arrival into the ambit of the audience.¹³

This ‘theatrical contract’ had temporal, as well as spatial functions. Before God could ‘create’ the heavens and earth, a number of practical things needed to happen. Space had to

¹⁰ Alexandra F. Johnston and Margaret Rogerson, ed., *REED: York*, vol. 1 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979) p. 312.

¹¹ See Meg Twycross on the 1415 *Ordo paginarum* and on whether the guilds were performing plays or other dramatic displays in ‘The *Ordo paginarum* Revisited, with a Digital Camera’, in *Bring Furth the Pageants: Essays in Early English Drama Presented to Alexandra F. Johnston*, ed. by David N. Klausner and Karen Sawyer Marsalek (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), pp. 105-31 (pp. 110-11).

¹² Beadle, ‘The York Corpus Christi Play’, p. 105. See also Alexandra F. Johnston, ‘The procession and play of the Corpus Christi in York after 1426’, *Leeds Studies in English*, 7 (1974), 55-62.

¹³ Philip Butterworth, *Staging Conventions in Medieval English Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 78.

be made among the spectators for the wagon, then the wagon needed to be pulled into place and secured. Only then could the performer representing God enter this newly-created performance space, his bodily presence investing it with meaning before he began his opening speech. The 2018 York plays, which were performed on wagons in the streets of York, as well as in more structured outdoor performance settings, demonstrated the complexity of the mechanical and dramatic processes required to effect the transition between the pageants.¹⁴ Processional music from the York, Leeds, Doncaster and Gloucester Waits, as well as other local medieval music groups heralded the arrival of each new pageant wagon. As the wagons were pulled into place, secured and set up, the audience could see the actors representing the Bible characters fully costumed and waiting to go on. Certain pageants, such as the *Crucifixion* (sponsored by the York Butchers' Guild), blurred the roles of actors and stage hands, with the soldiers preparing the pageant wagon along with other stage hands even as they prepared to commit the theological and theatrical labour of crucifying Christ (**Figure 1**). Others, including God in the York Guild of Building's *The Creation of the World to the Fifth Day*, stood aloof, not wanting to risk damaging their elaborate costumes in the mechanical stage business (**Figure 2**).¹⁵

[figure 1 near here]. Caption: 'One of the soldiers helps the stage crew prepare the pageant wagon for the Crucifixion pageant. 'The Death and Crucifixion of Christ' performed by St Chad's Church and the York Butcher's Gild in *The York Mystery Plays*, dir. by Tom Straszewski (York, 6th September 2018).'

[figure 2 near here]. Caption: 'A shining God watches as stage crew pull his platform into place. 'The Creation of the World to the Fifth Day', performed by the York Guild of Building in *The York Mystery Plays*, dir. by Tom Straszewski (York, 6th September 2018).'

We know that the medieval God was aided in establishing his performance space through the use of spectacular devices such as costume, brightly coloured cloths decorating his wagon and golden masks, an echo of which can still be seen in the gold-faced God surviving in the stained glass of York Minster.¹⁶ However given that the wagons did not offer 'offstage' spaces, and would have been more manoeuvrable if the actors were not on

¹⁴ See <<https://www.yorkmysteryplays.co.uk/the-plays/>> [accessed 1 September 2019].

¹⁵ On the modern wagons used when the York plays are performed today and the physical challenges attending them, see the essays by Mike Tyler, Peter Brown and Tony Wright in *The York Mystery Plays: Performance in the City*, ed. by Margaret Rogerson (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2011), pp. 116-134.

¹⁶ On the manipulation of light, see Meg Twycross, 'The Sun in York (Part One): Illumination, Reflection, and Timekeeping for the Corpus Christi', *METH*, 40 (2018), 148-94 and Richard Beadle, 'Masks, Mimes and Miracles: Medieval English Theatricality and its Illusions', in *From Script to Stage in Early Modern England*, ed. by Peter Holland and Stephen Orgel (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp. 32-42 (pp. 34-5).

them, it is likely that the early God, like his modern descendants, would have been visible to his audience throughout this space-preparation process.¹⁷ Unlike today's Stanislavski-trained actors, medieval performers did not see themselves as inhabiting, or 'becoming' the religious figures they played. Rather, they represented the *personae* of these figures for the brief duration of the play. Sharon Aronson-Lehavi has argued that 'this differentiation posits the actor as a mediator who connects spectators with the holy characters while simultaneously maintaining his own identity as distinct from the character which is being performed.'¹⁸ This means that it is unlikely York's God was, as modern theatre practitioners would term it, 'in character' before the pageant. This may have created an interesting dialogue between audience perceptions of the guildsman preparing the space for his performance and the Creator he is preparing to represent. For example, before the pageant began, 'God' might have helped his colleagues. Given God's player would have been cast for having the clearest and loudest voice, this might have involved interacting with the audience and cast members to clear the area.¹⁹ While these actions are rooted in the mechanical concerns of the late medieval performance 'present', they also hold curious resonances with the 'eternal time' God was about to embody. In helping fashion a performance space, whether through physical or vocal labour, the guildsman performs the role of Creator before he *plays* the Creator: making ordered space out of chaos. This means the pageant's narrative of creation is not only repetitive; it is also prior: space must be created for Creation.

An imaginative consideration of these mechanical theatrical necessities demonstrates what happens to theological concepts when they are placed within the physical processes of performance. This initial crafting of performance space enables God's acts of creation within the pageant in which he forms heaven, earth and hell. It also provides a microcosm of Augustine's simultaneously temporal and eternal heaven and earth:

See, heaven and earth exist, they cry aloud that they are made, for they suffer change and variation. But in anything which is not made and yet is, there is nothing which was not previously present.²⁰

¹⁷ See Butterworth, *Staging Conventions*, pp. 78-90 and Erika T. Lin, *Shakespeare and the Materiality of Performance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 23-37.

¹⁸ Sharon Aronson-Lehavi, *Street Scenes: Late Medieval Acting and Performance* (Chippenham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 56.

¹⁹ On verbal delivery and auditions, see Butterworth, *Staging Conventions*, pp. 100-108 and Beadle, 'The York Corpus Christi Play', p. 105.

²⁰ Augustine, *Confessions*, XI. iv, p. 224.

Distinguishing between performers and spectators and establishing a theatrical contract, the Barkers instigate change whilst creating a new thing – a performance space – out of a thing previously present – the familiar streets of York. Moreover, God’s occupation of this space as he ‘steps [...] over a demarcated threshold that constitutes the agreed playing space’ collapses the transient street-space into God’s own divine eternity.²¹ With play time beginning long before the first words are spoken, the practical processes of performance create out of the familiar streets a performance space touched by eternity. The Barker’s guild would likely have given a brusque response to Augustine’s question, ‘what was God doing before he made heaven and earth?’ – noting that he was very busy indeed.

Once the spatial and visual elements of establishing the performance space had been completed the Barkers’ God would have been able to deliver his opening line: ‘Ego sum Alpha et O[mega], vita, via, Veritas primus et novissimus’ (I am alpha and omega, life, the way, / Truth first and last).²² Opening at the close, the York cycle begins with a quote which combines aspects of the Gospel of John’s ‘I am the way, and the truth and life’ with *The Book of Revelation*’s ‘I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end.’²³ This hybrid approach to scripture suggests that, both in God’s experience of eternity and in the practical staging of the pageants, time occupies a circular moment which weaves a beginning and end of the same material. When it moves into the vernacular, however, God’s eternity becomes more troublesome:

I am gracyus and grete, God withoutyn begynnyng,
 I am maker unmade, all mighte es in me.
 I am lyfe and way unto welth wynyng;
 I am formaste and fyrste, als I byd sall it be.
 My blyssyng o ble sall be blendyng
 And heldand, fro harme to be hydande,
 My body in blys ay abydande
 Unendande, withoutyn any endyng.

Sen I am maker unmade, and most es of mighte,

²¹ Butterworth, *Staging Conventions*, p. 78.

²² Richard Beadle, ed., ‘The Fall of the Angels’, in *The York Plays* (London: Edward Arnold, 1982), pp. 49-53, l. 1.

²³ John 14.6 and Revelation 1.8. All of the Bible quotations appearing in this book are taken from the Douay-Rheims Catholic Bible. See <www.drbo.org> [accessed 1 September 2019].

²³ Beadle, ed., ‘The Fall of the Angels’, ll. 9-10

And ay sall be endeles, and noghte es but I,
 Unto my dygnyté dere sall diewly be dyghte
 A place full of plenté to my plesyng at ply;
 And therewith als wyll I have wroght
 Many dyvers doynge bedene
 Whilke warke sall mekely contene,
 And all sall be made even of noghte.²⁴

This speech introduces repetitive motifs which suggest that God's creative work operates in a different way to the time-bound works of his medieval audience. Just as the Middle Ages supported a range of ways in which time was experienced, theologized and quantified, so concepts of eternity demonstrate a similar diverse complexity.²⁵ This speech engages with eternity in a variety of those forms. For example, eternity was often presented as the divine experience of the human temporal state: God experiences all events as part of a simultaneous, eternal present, while humans only experience, and observe, time. This is reflected in the speech's use of concepts of first and last, both of which hint at a linear understanding of time whilst simultaneously preceding and exceeding it. Alternatively, eternity might be conceived of as a concept entirely *outside* of time. We see this in God's apparently paradoxical statement, 'Sen I am maker unmade, and most es of mighte / And ay sall be endeles, and noghte es but I.'²⁶ Time and eternity might also be constructed as antithetical, moralized concepts belonging to the pre- and postlapsarian worlds. We glimpse this kind of moralistic reading of time after the fall of Lucifer in this pageant. God notes that the light of the angels 'faded when þe fendes fell', and henceforth separates their darkness from his light. The angels' fall and fading therefore embodies change while marking the first ever day and introducing the idea of quantitative, measured time into the cycle.²⁷ Yet the medium of this speech as a dramatic performance repeatedly frustrates this figuring of divine eternity. Twice, God stresses that he is 'maker unmade', simultaneously calling attention to the fact that he, unlike the narratives of Creation that will follow, is not 'made'. Yet the nature of the pageant disrupts this, as the audience have already witnessed a small part of the processes of theatrical 'making' and craft required for the Barker's guild to represent the figure of God standing in front of them. While the York God's actions are therefore rooted in the practical

²⁴ Beadle, ed., 'The Fall of the Angels', ll. 2-24.

²⁵ See for example the diverse approaches collated in Gerhard Jaritz and Gerson Moreno-Riaño, eds., *Time and Eternity: The Medieval Discourse* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003).

²⁶ Beadle, ed., 'The Fall of the Angels', ll. 9-10

²⁷ Beadle, ed., 'The Fall of the Angels', l. 148.

concerns of the pageant's performance time, they also reflect the paradox of divine eternity inhabited by this 'maker unmade'.

Greg Walker has found in this passage evidence of the playwright 'struggling with an impossibility, attempting to represent sequentially in time a mystery that was logically and theologically unknowable because it was beyond time, and so incapable of sequentiality.'²⁸ This challenge is compounded by the fact that, even as the Barkers' God attempts to outline the difference between his experience of eternity and the temporal state of his audience, his performance is also affected by audience time. In delivering these lines in the yet barely-established space, the actor representing God would have had not only to get his audience's attention at a potentially *ungodly* hour of the morning, but also have had to communicate across the competing attractions of his civic playing space.²⁹ As the performances progressed, these might have included jostling, chattering crowds, food and drink merchants, music and other pageants playing in close proximity. This means that God's first line, 'Ego sum Alpha et O[mega], vita, via, Veritas primus et novissimus' would have been ironic if pre-existing, late medieval noise threatened to impinge on God's ultimate statement of beginning, ending and eternity. God's speech also alters his audience's physical experience of their 'present', introducing new rhythms to their soundscape. Delivered across the hubbub of an expectant city-scape, this speech would have broken up the random noises of the street by introducing a new time and beat. The patterns of stressed alliteration such as 'maker, unmade, mighte' on either side of a caesura would have introduced a regular rhythm to the street. This creates a sense of double-ness: the very speech God uses to assert his participation in eternity imposes temporal order upon his audience. God's alliterative, stress-based speech sets the dominant verse form for the rest of the York plays, with the created beings that follow taking up and perpetuating his original 'voice'.

While the divine introduction of poetic order performs as an echo of God's role as Creator by fashioning structure out of incoherence, it also calls into question God's occupation of eternity. There are three states operating here; that of the unmade God, the created and sequential and the simultaneous. Again, this poses a practical and theological problem similar to that confronted by Augustine. Arguing that God could not have created

²⁸ Greg Walker, '“In the Beginning...”: Performing the Creation in the York *Corpus Christi* Play', in *The Oxford Handbook of Tudor Drama*, ed. by Thomas Betteridge and Greg Walker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 36-54, (p. 39).

²⁹ See Clare Wright, 'Acoustic Tyranny: Metre, Alliteration and Voice in York's *Christ Before Herod*', *METH*, 34 (2012), 3-29.

the word ‘without using a transient utterance’, Augustine claimed that ‘it is not the case that what was being said comes to an end, and something else is then said, so that everything is uttered in a succession and with a conclusion, but everything is said in the simultaneity of eternity.’³⁰ Rather than collapsing eternity into the world, God’s words brings a new time into the medieval streets of York at the very moment he brings the world into being. Theatrical performance necessarily participates in succession and conclusion, and during its course the York God’s forty-line speech announces the successive creation of heaven, hell, earth and the angels. It also introduces Lucifer and, in so doing, anticipates the first moment of dramatic conflict.

I am not claiming here that Augustine’s God and the York God are the same, or that York’s audiences and Augustine experienced time in a similar manner. However, what this analysis does show is that the kinds of theological and temporal problems which have conventionally been read by historians as being carried out chiefly within the religious classes were, in fact, being engaged with, embodied and even laughed at by the middle-ranking guild classes of York and their diverse audiences. In order to stage their plays, medieval producers of Bible pageants had to negotiate, confront, and occasionally practically solve issues of time and eternity. They also had to wrangle with the theological issues engaged by their desire to present the disparate texts of the Hebrew and Christian scriptures as though they were all part of one divine, coherent, overarching narrative. Late medieval pageants often chose to do this through staging moments of character conflict, in which two characters appear to have very different experiences of their own time. As this book will later examine, the York God’s eternity differs greatly from that of Lucifer, who has a very different relationship to time. Other pageants, however, put Bible characters in conflict with one another when they ‘read’ their own times differently from one another. While early drama criticism has tended to focus principally on communal, shared experiences of time, little work has examined what happens to characters’ experiences of time when they are placed in dialogue with differing or opposing understandings – particularly where this occurs between two characters inhabiting the same moment. One character might define time in a way that does not hold true for another. Characters might also seek to manage how they and those around them experience time; invest their own time with meaning through recourse to prior (and future) times; or highlight the differences and similarities between the times from which their narratives derive and the late medieval contexts in which their pageants are

³⁰ Augustine, *Confessions*, XI. vii, p. 226.

performed. Characters may also be observed changing their own temporal approaches by learning to read their time differently, as well as consciously attempting to assert control over time through violent action.

This book argues that negotiations of time lie behind some of the most fraught depictions of conflict staged between biblical characters. It examines the functions this serves, asking what happens when moments in time are not universally experienced in the same way; how these subjective experiences of time resist conventional authorities; and why gender and race are so central to these conflicts. In doing so, it focuses on subjective, qualitative temporality (time as perceived, experienced and engaged with by an individual), as opposed to the quantitative temporality of mathematically constructed time (a scientific tool of measurement used for the calculation of change). Its methodology is aligned with arguments that claim a temporality rooted in a person's, or in this case, a character's, understanding of the world. Experiential models of time have a long critical history, encompassing existential, historicist and phenomenological philosophical debates, including those of Immanuel Kant, Georg Hegel, Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger.³¹ The idea of time as something a human being projects onto the world is particularly useful when examining drama and live performance. As a medium that necessarily relies upon acts of communication between characters and audience, dramatic performance offers numerous possibilities for interpretation and opens up multiple perspectives *on* time and characters' perceptions of their own place *in* time. Giving voices to many characters and inviting their varying viewpoints of roles within, and relationships to, their time, as well as an audience who, individually and collectively, bring their own associations and experiences, dramatic performance has the ability to bring several moments into close proximity. Temporal subjectivity is therefore central, both to the ways characters relate to each other and to the scriptural narratives in which they participate. Subjective character experiences of time tend to become highly visible when late medieval plays choose to stage episodes of conflict which do not appear in the Hebrew or Christian Bibles.

These conflicts frequently occur between men and women. While moments of conflict between Mary and Joseph, and Noah and his wife, have received a lot of critical

³¹ See Barbara Adam, *Time* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004), pp. 34-64; James G. Hart, 'Phenomenological Time: Its Religious Significance', in *Religion and Time*, ed. by Anindita Niyogi Balslev and J. N. Mohanty (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1993), pp. 17-45 and Mark Currie, *About Time: Narrative, Fiction and the Philosophy of Time* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), p. 52: 'For Heidegger, [...] time is not something which exists in the world and is then reflected in the human mind, but something which arises from a human being (Dasein) and is then projected onto the world.'

attention due to their negotiations of gender, this book argues that their conflict is also deeply rooted in the characters' opposing and subjective experiences of their scriptural narratives. Time is an overlooked and yet highly important part of these episodes of gender conflict, which, in turn, provide the vehicle through which the plays' complex theological negotiations of time are conducted. An examination of the ways the plays present gender also has the ability to change the ways we look at time. Just as memory studies have witnessed differences in the roles performed by men and women in processes of community memorialisation and recollection, so female experiences of time in medieval drama often differ from male experiences.³² While time is not consistently 'gendered' in the plays, this book finds that several of the male characters it encounters – Joseph, Herod, Mak and Noah – tend to desire and expect time to be structured, whether this involves the passive assumption of a linear continuation of a certain state of time, the anticipation of the beginning of a new era, an attempt to conform to a linear family timeline based on reproduction, or an active attempt to direct the course of time. Where these characters try to order something that is, essentially, un-orderable, their perspective is consequently challenged or dismantled by the plays' female characters, who provide alternative temporal viewpoints. However, while all the plays examined appear to offer overarching models of a Christological, typological time which brings events from Jewish and Christian scriptures into one narrative, this is not consistently or exclusively the approach of the men in the plays. The following chapters give examples of characters who threaten to interfere with scriptural narratives. The N-Town Joseph does this unconsciously by adhering to a pre-Christian belief system; the Noah's wives of Chester and York delay the departure of the ark and challenge Noah's self-figuring as a proto-Christ; the sheep-stealing antics of Mak in the Towneley *Second Shepherds' Play* interrupt the narrative of the Nativity; and Herod takes deliberate action to prevent a (Christian) future from happening. While the women in the plays I examine – the pregnant Mary, the vocal Noah's wife, resourceful Gyll and the militant mothers of the massacre of the Innocents – are involved in forms of temporal 'unruliness', it does not always follow that the resulting conflict is depicted as negative.

In focusing on how such moments constitute theological negotiations of time, this book moves away from familiar readings which interpret altercation in early drama as being

³² See Elisabeth Van Houts, *Memory and Gender in Medieval Europe 900-1200* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1999) and Mette B. Bruun, and Stephanie Glaser, eds., *Negotiating Heritage: Memories of the Middle Ages* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008).

chiefly comic ‘unruliness’.³³ The value of a feminist approach to these altercations has been ably underlined by Nicole Nolan Sidhu, whose work *Indecent Exposure* conducts an important critique of the ‘unruly woman’ category by placing figures such as Noah’s wife, Gyll and the mothers of the Innocents within their guild cultures. She argues that, rather than merely playing to a comic type, these characters indicate the independence, confidence and self-command that made women productive members of their middle-rank households.³⁴ Where other critics have read certain pageants as critiques of formulaic, comic literary misogyny (misogyny which is often thrown into relief when directed at the virtuous Mary), their approach can overlook how some of the other pageants’ troublesome women, as chapter four demonstrates, are at least partially successful in their rebellions.³⁵

While the pageants examined in the following chapters all contain elements of physical and verbal comedy, I have not therefore made comedy the primary focus of my analysis. This is in part because it has been so well-covered elsewhere; lately in Emma Maggie Solberg’s fascinating examination of the N-Town Mary as a trickster and divine comedienne.³⁶ In fact, the critical preoccupation with the comedy of episodes such as ‘Joseph’s doubt’ and the battle between Herod’s soldiers and the mothers of the Innocents has at times tended to obscure the huge amount of theological and emotional labour done in these scenes. Moreover, where the rebellion of Noah’s wife and Mak and Gyll’s ill-fated sheep plot have often been read as comic diversions from the ‘main events’ of their Bible narratives, this book shows that they also perform crucial roles in communicating the theological complexity of those narratives. In doing so, I demonstrate how the emotional tone of the plays, and the performance of emotion – whether it takes the form of Herod and Joseph’s fear, the mothers’ anger, Mary’s exasperation and tenderness, the shepherds’ political frustration or the spectators’ laughter – is the vehicle through which the plays

³³ The wealth of work concerning medieval depictions of female ‘unruliness’ will be engaged with in more detail later. Early thinkers considering this characterisation have included Hardin Craig, *English Religious Drama of the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955); V. A. Kolve, *The Play Called Corpus Christi* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1966) and Rosemary Woolf, *The English Mystery Plays* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972). As the following chapters demonstrate, this category is proven unstable when the plays’ performance contexts are taken into consideration.

³⁴ Nicole Nolan Sidhu, *Indecent Exposure: Gender, Politics, and Obscene Comedy in Middle English Literature* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), pp. 190-206.

³⁵ See Katie Normington’s comprehensive investigation of gender in the plays in *Gender and Medieval Drama* (Woodbridge: D.S. Brewer, 2004), particularly her chapters on ‘holy women’ and ‘vulgar women’; Theresa Coletti, ‘Purity and Danger: The Paradox of Mary’s Body and the En-gendering of the Infancy Narrative in the English Mystery Cycles’, in *Feminist Approaches to the Body in Medieval Literature*, ed. by Linda Lomperis and Sarah Stanbury (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), pp. 65-95 and Emma Maggie Solberg, *Virgin Whore* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2018).

³⁶ Solberg, *Virgin Whore*, pp. 9-10.

illustrate and articulate the human experience of theological and intellectual conflict. As chapters one and three argue in discussing the N-Town and Towneley pageants' close focus on the bodies of Joseph, Mary, Mak and Gyll, this work aims to reframe how we approach moments of gendered conflict in these plays by asking new questions about the times and performances engaged in the act of dramatic embodiment.

Whose time?

The texts that form the basis for this study are all concerned with questions of theological transition, both in biblical narrative and in the plays' own manuscript and performance contexts. When characters experiencing or interpreting time differently from one another are placed in dialogue, the resulting conflict threatens to destabilise one of their temporal perspectives. Contesting experiences of time in medieval biblical drama do their most interesting work during episodes of transition, supersession, or communion between moments which, on a linear structuring of time, would otherwise be organised into the categories of past, present and future. Often, these moments of conflict highlight the fragility of transition, and in particular challenge the Christian preoccupation with what it presented as a superseded Jewish past. Kathleen Biddick argues that 'Christians believed that the New Testament superseded the Hebrew Bible and redefined it as the Old Testament. Exegetically it maps the figures of the Old Testament onto their fulfilment in the New Testament.'³⁷ Supersession, through which one state is replaced, redefined or succeeded by another, is a key principle throughout the course of this book, and was one of the chief methods used by medieval biblical drama to reconcile its stories into one narrative. Its fragility as a model becomes particularly visible in plays which dramatize episodes which do not securely belong to 'Christian' history or law. These include episodes from the Hebrew Bible which fall before Christ and yet were performed for an audience informed by Christianity, and times immediately before the birth of Christ or occurring during his infancy. Conflicts between characters in these plays therefore tend to show a preoccupation with the ways the past is understood, interpreted and experienced. The first chapter, for example, is specifically concerned with the ambiguity of supersession, examining how the N-Town Joseph, who

³⁷ Kathleen Biddick, *The Typological Imaginary: Circumcision, Technology, History* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), p. 4. This book will throughout refer to the 'Hebrew/Christian Testament' or 'Hebrew/Christian Bible' in an attempt to avoid the supersessionary power-structures implied by the use of 'Old' and 'New Testament', though along with other theologians I acknowledge that these terms are not entirely accurate due to the Aramaic texts making up the earlier collection of scriptures.

comes from a time in which a virgin birth is an impossibility, fails to understand the meaning of his wife's miraculously pregnant body. The result is a performance of doubt in which the holy couple, arguing from pre- and post-Christian viewpoints, cannot be reconciled without divine intervention. This conflict negotiates a moment of change by using Joseph's doubt to ask *when*, exactly, Christian law replaced Jewish law. As the York Noah's angry responses to his wife indicate in chapter two, supersessionary models are threatened when placed in dialogue with different understandings of time. In interrogating the ways these models are subverted through characters whose world-views support alternative readings, this book also aims to re-evaluate the ways Jews, Judaism and Hebrew narratives are represented in medieval drama. Following Kathleen Davis' linking of women and Jews as disruptive temporal forces, the idea that certain arrangements of time obfuscate and distort minority histories is particularly pertinent for this study.³⁸ Lisa Lampert has also engaged with medieval Christian constructions of Judaism and gender, arguing that both women and Judaism represented a point of origin for (male-centric) Christianity, and yet nevertheless also acted as obstacles to narratives of Christian supersession.³⁹ The past proves troublesome in all of the plays studied, particularly where they involve the performance of Hebrew scripture in a late medieval Christian environment, or depict characters that were historically Jewish and not Christian.

The past thirty years have witnessed exciting developments in the study of medieval Christian approaches to Judaism, particularly concerning what Gavin Langmuir has termed the 'birth trauma' of medieval Christianity.⁴⁰ This comprised a set of beliefs that relied upon Hebrew Scripture to validate the Christian present, while struggling with Judaism's continued presence beyond the resurrection of Jesus. This figuring of Judaism both as superseded anachronism and as crucial in the formation of Christian identity appears throughout the narratives and the characterisations of the figures represented in this study. It should be emphasised at this stage that my usage of 'Jewish' here, and throughout this book, refers to medieval Christian constructions of Judaism, rather than the practices or theologies of real Jews.⁴¹ Given England had not contained any non-fictional populations of Jews since 1290,

³⁸ Kathleen Davis, *Periodization and Sovereignty: How Ideas of Feudalism and Secularization Govern the Politics of Time* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

³⁹ Lisa Lampert, *Gender and Jewish Difference from Paul to Shakespeare* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), pp. 1-17.

⁴⁰ See Gavin I. Langmuir, *History, Religion, and Antisemitism* (London: I.B. Tauris and Co. Ltd., 1990), p. 282.

⁴¹ Here, I adopt the definition of antisemitism proposed by Gavin Langmuir, which distinguishes anti-Judaism (a hostility towards the Jewish religion) from antisemitism (an irrational hostility directed against imagined characteristics of Jews which were fantastical and not visible in the practices of 'real' Jews): 'If antisemitism is

the Jews of late medieval English plays were imaginary constructions more influenced by local and European anti-Semitic stereotypes than drawn from encounters with real Jews or a deep familiarity with Jewish theology.⁴² Throughout the centuries following the expulsion, English narratives representing ‘Jews’ enacted a series of cultural and literary resurrections and defeats. These ranged from characterisations of Jews as violent torturers in blood libel and host desecration narratives, to depictions of learned but ultimately defeated verbal combatants of disputation literature.⁴³ Most of these texts involved the conversion, countering or erasure of their Jewish characters, and late medieval biblical drama similarly structured their pageants around resistance or doubt followed by conversion and conviction.

Due to its multiple roles in Christian society – teaching, self-justification and literary heritage – the Jewish ‘past’ could neither remain in the past nor operate fully within the present. As a result, it was repeatedly resurrected, re-imagined, woven into typological discourses, cut away from and then reattached to medieval Christian faith.⁴⁴ These multiple imaginings of Judaism have been awarded a range of terminologies, including ‘spectral’, ‘figurative’, ‘protean’ and ‘virtual’.⁴⁵ Each of these terms encapsulate something that flits ambiguously between presence and absence, past and present. Models of time developed within Jewish culture were very different from those projected upon Judaism by medieval Christianity. Sacha Stern has noted that time, questions of time and the use of time are not prominent early rabbinic literature, which, unlike the younger Christian religion, had no need to invest in constructing mutual interdependence between Hebrew and Christian, past and present.⁴⁶ Medieval Christian configurations of ‘Judaism’ and ‘Christianity’, conversely,

defined as chimerical beliefs or fantasies about “Jews,” as irrational beliefs that attribute to all those symbolized as “Jews”, menacing characteristics or conduct that no Jews had been observed to possess or engage in, then antisemitism first appeared in medieval Europe in the twelfth century.’ See Langmuir, *History, Religion, and Antisemitism*, pp. 297-8.

⁴² For an overview of the gradual curtailing of Jewish rights and their eventual expulsion see the essays contained in Patricia Skinner, ed., *The Jews in Medieval Britain: Historical, Literary and Archaeological Perspectives* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2003), pp. 15-70 and Robert C. Stacey, ‘The Conversion of Jews to Christianity in Thirteenth-Century England’, *Speculum*, 67.2 (1992), 263-83.

⁴³ See Anthony Bale, *The Jew in the Medieval Book: English Antisemitisms, 1350-1500* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 165.

⁴⁴ See Miri Rubin, *Gentile Tales: The Narrative Assault on Late Medieval Jews* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 7 and Anna Sapir Abulafia, *Christians and Jews in Dispute: Disputational Literature and the Rise of Anti-Judaism in the West (c. 1000-1150)* (Aldershot: Valorium, Ashgate Publishing Limited, 1998), pp. 34-42.

⁴⁵ See the chapters of Sheila Delany, Denise L. Despres, Timothy S. Jones and Sylvia Tomasch in Sheila Delany, ed., *Chaucer and the Jews: Sources, Contexts, Meanings* (London: Routledge, 2002) and Steven Kruger, *The Spectral Jew: Conversion and Embodiment in Medieval Europe* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), p. xvii, which identifies ‘a dependence upon the Jewish ancestor that is simultaneously an erasure. [...] Jewishness is a spectral presence, strongly felt and yet just as strongly derealized.’

⁴⁶ See Sacha Stern, ‘The Rabbinic Concept of Time from Antiquity to the Middle Ages’, in *Time and Eternity*, ed. by Gerhard Jaritz and Gerson Moreno-Riaño (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), pp. 129-45.

demanded a constant play with time; either through magnifying their distance and difference or by allowing the two religions to touch or overlap. The treatment of the past in the plays examined in this book, whether the ‘past’ is figured as ‘Jewish’, pre-diluvian, or scriptural, likewise attempts to make sense of something that is both present and absent, close and distant. The past may become authorising or threatening as it is alternately used to bolster or destabilise the values of the present. Performances of Hebrew narratives for an audience whose faith was primarily informed by the Christian Testament were rooted in an endless quest for good time management.

The plays’ negotiation of events from the Hebrew and Christian Bibles, and the complex typologies and acts of supersession they produce, calls for a re-evaluation of the representation of Jews, Judaism and the Hebrew Bible in medieval drama. Portrayals of Judaism in obviously anti-Semitic plays such as the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* and the assumption of the Virgin pageants have received a great deal of critical attention, and have been particularly aided by the interdisciplinary studies of Lisa Lampert, Ruth Evans, Miri Rubin and Anthony Bale on the cultural stereotyping of Jews.⁴⁷ Yet works that do turn their attention to portrayals of Judaism in early English drama tend to focus chiefly on those specifically named as ‘Jews’ in the plays. For example, although Stephen Spector has noted that ‘most of the characters in the mystery plays are ethnically Jewish, comparatively few are referred to as Jews’, he only engages with those characters unambiguously identified as Jews in the plays’ dialogue, stage directions or headings.⁴⁸ As a consequence, his analysis covers only representations of Jews placed in specifically antagonistic roles, particularly those appearing as persecutors of Christ. While the more insidious anti-Semitism inherent in colonising narratives of time has been examined in relation to other texts, it is only now becoming an object of focus in relation to medieval drama. This book continues the work begun by Emma Maggie Solberg in *Virgin Whore*, which considers the racial stereotyping of

⁴⁷ See Lisa Lampert, ‘The Once and Future Jew: The Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*, Little Robert of Bury and Historical Memory’, *Jewish History*, 15.3 (2001), 235-55; Rubin, *Gentile Tales*, p. 39; Ruth Evans, “‘When a Body meets a Body’: Fergus and Mary in the York Cycle”, in *New Medieval Literatures*, Vol. 1, ed. by Wendy Scase, Rita Copeland and David Lawton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), pp. 193-212 and Anthony Bale, *Feeling Persecuted: Christians, Jews and Images of Violence in the Middle Ages* (London: Reaktion Books, 2010), pp. 111-2.

⁴⁸ See Stephen Spector, ‘Anti-Semitism and the English Mystery Plays’, *Comparative Drama*, 13.1 (1979), 3-16 (p. 6). This develops Edward N. Calisch’s early description of Jewish monstrosity in the New Testament plays in *The Jew in English Literature, As Author and As Subject* (Richmond, VA: The Bell Book Publishing Co., 1909), p. 20 and that of M. J. Landa, *The Jew in Drama* (London: P.S. King and Son, 1926), p. 15. More work has been conducted on depictions of the Jew in Early Modern drama, though again, this work is preoccupied with those specifically named as ‘Jews’. See James Shapiro, *Shakespeare and the Jews* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1996).

Joseph's decrepitude as Jewish, by examining other characters who, while part of the Christian narrative, are also 'ethnically Jewish' and who are used to dramatize negotiations between scriptures and times.⁴⁹ This book argues that, while these characters are figured through stereotypes designed to diminish their gendered authority, they nevertheless expose the problems with Christian supersessionary ideologies and thereby disrupt them. Through creating characters who articulate their subjective experiences of time, these plays covertly question what, exactly, constitutes 'past' and the difficulty of making it 'stay' in the past.

Scattered times

Biblical lay drama found a home within a period of increased public time-consciousness. Staged between the late fourteenth and sixteenth centuries, biblical pageants were performed across two centuries which saw changes in the ways in which time was available to be used, experienced, measured, commoditised, performed and dedicated to secular or sacred matters.⁵⁰ Jacques Le Goff noted that, from the twelfth century there was growing recognition of the co-existence of different understandings and models of time.⁵¹ This was due in part to theological and liturgical developments promoting what Mikhail Bakhtin has termed a 'vertical' model of divine time, in which biblical events were not only placed in typological dialogue with one another, with the present informing and re-forming the past, but which allowed for moments of simultaneity as well as the circular time of liturgy.⁵² Meanwhile the structuring of time in medieval legal and historical chronicles privileged linearity and, seeking a complete record of events, did not necessarily establish causal relationships between them.⁵³ Nor did chroniclers restrict their accounts to contemporary events, but reconciled their work with earlier records. Some even included

⁴⁹ Solberg, *Virgin Whore*, p. 24.

⁵⁰ See A. J. Gurevich, *Categories of Medieval Culture*, trans. by G. L. Campbell (London: Routledge, Keegan & Paul, 1985), pp. 111-12.

p. 139 and Charles Hepworth Holland, *The Idea of Time* (Chichester: John Wiley and Sons, 1999), pp. 7-20.

⁵¹ Jacques Le Goff, *Time, Work and Culture in the Middle Ages*, trans. by Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1980), pp. 29-42.

⁵² Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel', in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* by M. M. Bakhtin, ed. and trans. by Michael Holquist and Caryl Emerson (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1981), pp. 84-258 (p. 157): 'everything that on earth is divided by time, here, in this verticality, coalesces into eternity, into pure simultaneous coexistence.'

⁵³ For an overview of the development of 'modern' approaches to history, the increase of historical organisation into causal patterns and the drive to reconcile sacred and secular histories into complementary and continuous narratives, see Lynn Hunt, *Measuring Time, Making History* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2008), pp. 52-65.

descriptions of the Last Judgement so as not to leave their narrative incomplete.⁵⁴ Despite such completionism, enquiries into medieval narratives of national origin have suggested that a beginning was never absolute. Time resisted linear arrangement even within texts attempting to order it as such.⁵⁵ In the vertical model of time, divine events could co-exist alongside the chronicles' linear histories and the cyclical 'church time' of the religious year, which enabled certain historical moments (such as the Crucifixion on Good Friday) to be re-experienced annually.⁵⁶

At the same time, the rise of the merchant classes and introduction of mechanical clocks to town centres in the fourteenth century meant that a lay person living, working and worshipping in a town was also aware of the multiple times of secular trade, work and economic reckoning.⁵⁷ G. J. Whitrow has argued that the invention of the mechanical clock was preceded by an increased belief in discontinuous, atomic time which could be split into minutes.⁵⁸ The installation of town clocks brought immediate time-consciousness into the public and economic sphere, encouraging people to consider where they and their activities stood in relation to time and exposing the differences between the rhythms of the craft and mercantile year and the liturgical calendar. Towards the last decades of the performances of biblical drama, some of these models were being challenged. Alec Ryrie has noted that time had become a tool of salvation that the diligent Christian was encouraged to use wisely, while time-collapsing events such as the Mass were re-theologised as performances of memory and Protestant theologies began to favour more linear spiritual narratives which saw humanity's progress towards reconciliation with God.⁵⁹

A flourishing of new critical works on the computation and perception of time in the medieval period have complicated earlier ideas that proposed medieval understandings of

⁵⁴ Gurevich, *Categories of Medieval Culture*, pp. 114-15.

⁵⁵ See D. Vance Smith, *The Book of the Incipit: Beginnings in the Fourteenth Century* (Minneapolis, MI: University of Minnesota Press, 2001); Anke Bernau, 'Britain': Originary Myths and the Stories of Peoples', in *The Oxford Handbook of Medieval Literature in English*, ed. by Elainereharne and Greg Walker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 629-48 and James Simpson, *Burning to Read: English Fundamentalism and its Reformation Opponents* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), pp. 184-221.

⁵⁶ See for example Carolyn Dinshaw's discussion of the *Northern Homily Cycle* in which, she explains, 'the preacher gives his lay audience what amounts to a tutorial on time, engaging concepts such as linearity and cycles, change and permanence, terrestrial time and human time.' See Carolyn Dinshaw, *How Soon is Now?: Medieval Texts, Amateur Readers, and the Queerness of Time* (London: Duke University Press, 2012), p. 44.

⁵⁷ See Le Goff, *Time, Work and Culture in the Middle Ages*, p. 37.

⁵⁸ G. J. Whitrow, *Time in History: Views of Time from Prehistory to the Present Day* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 71-86.

⁵⁹ See Ryrie, *Being Protestant in Reformation Britain*, pp. 410-27.

time as predominantly linear and cyclical.⁶⁰ This has contributed to the exploration of experiences in which multiple times collapsed and overlapped, with the past present in the everyday and the sacred times of the Bible rubbing shoulders with the secular times of urban life.⁶¹ Recent research has included the concept of ‘palimpsested’ time, which suggests that the certain works are formed by layers of temporal accretions that, Raeleen Chai-Elsholz argues, ‘cross-pollinate with their predecessors, contemporaries, and successors.’⁶² We are also gaining a greater understanding of how the past and the future were conceptualised and used. Mary Carruthers’ pioneering work on medieval memory theory has provided a valuable tool for literary criticism, including Theodore K. Lerud’s work on dramatic performance and devotional memory.⁶³ Meanwhile, an increased focus on works dealing with medieval lay attitudes to prophecy and the future reveal contradictory beliefs. Michael Foster’s work, for example, has found beliefs in an imminent apocalypse co-existing alongside increased evidence of legal and financial investments for the future.⁶⁴ Together, a range of discourses have developed on multi-temporality, topological time, temporal collapse and anachronic objects (where material artefacts accrues temporal associations which bring incidents from past, present and future together).⁶⁵ As a consequence, medieval lay understandings of time have emerged as every bit as complex as those held in religious and educational establishments, with lay time being polychronic, overlapping and simultaneous.

These models of temporal multiplicity have led to the acknowledgement within literary studies that a variety of temporal perspectives may be present in a single medieval text.⁶⁶ For example, Karen Elaine Smyth’s work on Lydgate and Hoccleve reads her texts as

⁶⁰ See for example J. A. Burrow’s influential work on the ‘six ages of man’ and A. J. Gurevich’s argument for linear and cyclical time models: one in which the birth of Christ determines the direction of all subsequent developments, and the other, which witnesses the cyclical journey of the man and the world, ending with mankind’s return to the Creator and time’s own return to eternity. J. A. Burrow, *The Ages of Man: A Study in Medieval Writing and Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986) and Gurevich, *Categories of Medieval Culture*, pp. 111-12.

⁶¹ See D. Vance Smith, ‘Irregular Histories: Forgetting Ourselves’, *NLH*, 28.2 (1997), 161-84.

⁶² Raeleen Chai-Elsholz, ‘Introduction: Palimpsests and “Palimpsestuous” Reinscriptions’, in *Palimpsests and the Literary Imagination of Medieval England*, ed. by Leo Carruthers, Raeleen Chai-Elsholz and Tatjana Silec (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 1-20 (p. 2). See also Sarah Dillon, *The Palimpsest: Literature, Criticism, Theory* (London: Continuum, 2007), pp. 4-5.

⁶³ Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 231-33 and Theodore K. Lerud, *Memory, Images, and the English Corpus Christi Drama* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 43-44.

⁶⁴ Michael Foster, ed., *Spiritual Temporalities in Late-Medieval Europe* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), pp. 1-8.

⁶⁵ See Alexander Nagel and Christopher S. Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance* (New York, NY: Zone Books, 2010).

⁶⁶ See Paul Strohm, *Theory and the Premodern Text* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p. 66 on ‘the different temporal implications of described actions’ and Currie, *About Time*, pp 1-10 on the workings of time in narrative fiction.

‘agents and products of this hybrid and sophisticated secular time consciousness.’⁶⁷ Other discourses have begun to focus more on the temporal experiences of small groups or individuals, whilst articulating a growing suspicion that ecclesiastical and secular depictions of historical linearity, narratives of origin and discourses of supersession exercise what Kathleen Davis has called an ‘exclusionary force’ which distorts or occludes minority histories.⁶⁸ The idea that certain arrangements of time act to obfuscate the times of others is particularly pertinent to this study, as it rests at the intersection of gendered and racial histories of exclusion. As the following chapters demonstrate, this process is seen at work when the York Noah’s insistence that the Flood constitutes a new beginning attempts to override his wife’s remembrance of her friends; when the N-Town Mary’s Christian time over-writes the Hebrew time of Joseph; when the Towneley *Second Shepherds’ Play* poses a deliberate swerve away from the procreative, child-oriented drive of the Nativity story and when the Towneley Herod attempts to alter the course of scriptural time by murdering infants. The idea that linear models of history operate to exclude or re-fashion the times of certain groups or people has been bolstered by postcolonial approaches towards time, nationhood and space.⁶⁹ This was taken as the starting-point for an important collection of essays edited by Elizabeth Cox, Liz Herbert McAvoy and Roberta Magnani, which examined how texts across a number of disciplines challenge linear time to ‘reveal the inherent instability of a coherent linear temporality or monolithic cultural memory.’⁷⁰ This resistance of linear time also underpins the queer theories scrutinised in chapter three of this work. While this book aims to challenge the idea of linear time as a ‘norm’, each of the plays examined does demonstrate that, while there might be an official, or authorised, way of reading time, it is not the *only* way of reading.

The question of times being subject to an ‘exclusionary force’ has led to a search for different temporal models that facilitate the recovery of these minority histories. One of the most exciting attempts to do this in medieval studies can be found in Carolyn Dinshaw’s

⁶⁷ Karen Elaine Smyth, *Imagining of Time in Lydgate and Hoccleve’s Verse* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), p. 1.

⁶⁸ Davis, *Periodization and Sovereignty*, p. 3.

⁶⁹ See Kathleen Biddick’s *The Typological Imaginary*, pp. 21-44 and *The Shock of Medievalism* (London: Duke University Press, 1997), and Jennifer Summit’s discussion of the Reformation’s cartographic attempts to erase the Catholic past in ‘Leland’s *Itinerary* and the Remains of the Medieval Past’, in *Reading the Medieval in Early Modern England*, ed. by Gordon McMullan and David Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 159-76.

⁷⁰ Liz Herbert McAvoy, ‘Introduction: *In Principio*: The Queer Matrix of Gender, Time and Memory in the Middle Ages’, in *reconsidering Gender, Time and Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2015), pp. 1-12.

discussions of simultaneous, collapsed and asynchronous time.⁷¹ Focusing on individuals, Dinshaw works on the queer experiences of those who find they are out of sync with their own time. The third chapter of this book complicates this definition of queerness, noting that the multiplicity of experiences of time in operation in a performance resist the easy identification of a particular individual's experience as either 'normative' or 'queer'. However, it does find a highly useful model in Dinshaw's examination of temporal experience as subjective, and, as her discussion of Margery Kempe makes clear, often experienced in conflict with others. The idea that individuals in the Middle Ages experienced time differently from one another, and that that these individuals may have been aware of this difference, is key in this study. This book also heeds Caroline Walker Bynum's call for a 'female' approach to history – 'history in the comic mode' – as a response to what she considers to be the masculinity of the linear tragic narrative. Walker Bynum's definition of comic narrative is particularly pertinent when considered in relation to narratives which interrupt or complicate stories of supersession or linearity: 'If tragedy tells a cogent story, with a moral and a hero', she argues, 'comedy tells many stories [...] Comedy is about compromise. In comedy there is resolution only for a moment.'⁷² As chapters one and two show, the multivalent narratives which emerge through the staging of temporal conflict between biblical characters are rarely comfortably resolved by the plays' conclusions. This explains both why so many of these episodes of temporal conflict happen in plays which are also considered comic (and inversely, identifies the problem with simply discussing these plays as comic without going on to probe the questions they are asking). The following plays all exhibit a need to suppress certain temporal experiences which prove troubling. Yet because this occurs within scriptural time, or even happens when figures from the scriptures are the ones asking the awkward questions, a weight is lent to those experiences which is never entirely lifted through laughter.

Play time

⁷¹ See Carolyn Dinshaw, 'Temporalities', in *Oxford Twenty-First Century Approaches to Literature*, ed. by Paul Strohm (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 107-23 and *How Soon is Now?* Dinshaw's analysis, and that of others working on multiple temporalities in the Middle Ages, contradicts the belief that ideas of 'simultaneous time' only came into being with the synchronisation of the railways. See Adam, *Time*, p. 115.

⁷² See Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York, NY: Zone Books, 1991), p. 24.

Narratives that pull moments into patterns of cause and effect tend to provide us with a model of time that must necessarily disregard simultaneity in favour of succession. Dramatic performance admits many more dimensions. Because it involves dialogue between characters as well as non-verbal forms of communication, particularly facial expression, performance has the ability to generate multiple voices. This provides an opportunity for temporal perspectives and conflicts that other forms of literature do not as easily admit. For example, as we will see in chapter two, the book of Genesis only mentions Noah's wife as an accessory to her husband: a silent member of the saved few. In medieval dramatizations however, we see Noah's wife is not happy with the supersessionary narrative of her plotline. She resists, remembers and remonstrates. She voices her opinions. This not only raises uncomfortable questions about the ethics of the Flood, it also forces Noah to think about and explain his own interpretation of what is happening. To stage the Bible involves introducing characters whose viewpoints might not necessarily align with their scriptural sources. Drama is in the business of enacting messy histories: resisting linearity and supersession, offering alternative narratives, forming diversions and raising questions which cannot be easily answered. While other works examining multiple perspectives on time have tended to focus on texts which were limited to those who were able to afford, procure and read manuscripts, medieval biblical plays were highly accessible, and enacted and explored their temporal questions in public. While the pageants employed a number of dramatic devices to engage the audience with a composite 'now' of medieval and scriptural times, performance time would not have been collectively experienced by its audiences.⁷³ In giving flesh to a complex array of roles within and relationships to scriptural time, as well as involving an audience who, individually and collectively, brought to the plays their own associations, desires and values, dramatic performance is in the privileged position of conducting its temporal negotiations in a manner which crosses classes, education levels and genders.

Frequently performed by sponsoring craft guilds, medieval biblical drama also promoted the intersection of urban, lay working time with religious time, intimately linking the crafts of these guilds with the act of Creation.⁷⁴ Plays were used to mark time, and York and Chester's cycles were initially performed annually during the feast of Corpus Christi: a feast of divine embodiment which celebrated the simultaneity of Christ's presence in the

⁷³ John McGavin and Greg Walker, *Imagining Spectatorship: From the Mysteries to the Shakespearean Stage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 1.

⁷⁴ See Nicole R. Rice and Margaret Aziza Pappano, *The Civic Cycles: Artisan Drama and Identity in Premodern England* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2015).

consecrated bread, his body on the cross and his last meal with his disciples.⁷⁵ Choosing to celebrate the adoration of the Eucharist with drama depicting, as David Mills argues, ‘the reassuring framework of universal history from the beginning of Creation to the end of historical time’, the pageants at York and Chester dealt with a complex array of times as they aligned key moments from Hebrew and Christian scriptures with the temporal rhythms of urban life.⁷⁶ Their focus on Corpus Christi also meant that these plays were performing these histories during a feast particularly invested in the bodily and the visual. As well as performing time, the plays were themselves subject *to* time. Pamela King has examined how the movement of the Chester pageants to Whitsun changed the plays’ liturgical associations, as well as the selection of events to be performed, in order to accommodate the changing theologies of its performance context.⁷⁷ The ways the plays were staged also affected how their narratives were received by their audiences. The annual, wagon-based York plays participated in very different relationships to narrative time in comparison to static, non-cyclic plays, which tended to take a more linear direction. An audience at York or Chester might have encountered episodes out of chronological order, in which events from Hebrew and New Testament scripture could be performed at adjacent stations and thus invite visual and aural comparison (and competition). Moreover, even repeated performances of biblical episodes would have appeared differently in each new space, potentially transforming that space for its future use. For example, the last performance station in the York cycle was the Pavement: a civic space used throughout the rest of the year for public punishment, including execution. The staging of the *Crucifixion* in such a space would have had the simultaneous effect of being the ‘fit’ place for executing a criminal, aligning Christ with the criminals usually executed there, while problematically linking Christ’s persecutors to the civic authorities who sentenced medieval men to die in that same spot.⁷⁸

While works in other areas of medieval literary studies show a growing interest in matters of time, time has long been a recurring theme in drama criticism. Among these, four

⁷⁵ See Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 271-87.

⁷⁶ David Mills, ‘The Chester Cycle’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*, ed. by Beadle, pp. 109-33 (p. 115). See also Erica Magnus, ‘Time on the Stage’, *KronoScope*, 4.1 (2004), 95-126 (pp. 116-7).

⁷⁷ See Pamela King’s extensive work on the relationship between liturgical and performance times, including *The York Mystery Cycle and the Worship of the City* (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 2006) and ‘Playing Pentecost in York and Chester: Transformations and Texts’, *METH*, 29 (2007), 60-74.

⁷⁸ Sarah Beckwith, *Signifying God: Social Relation and Symbolic Act in the York Corpus Christi Plays* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2001), pp. xv-xvi and Daisy Black, ‘“Nayles Large and Lang”: Masculine Identity and the Anachronic Object in the York *Crucifixion* Play’, *Medieval Feminist Forum*, 50.2 (2015), 85-104.

approaches have proved most pervasive. These include work on the plays' performance contexts;⁷⁹ work assessing how the plays altered during the religious changes of the sixteenth century;⁸⁰ work on the challenges of staging the plays in post-medieval / contemporary contexts;⁸¹ and work examining how specific temporal models or phenomena (such as anachronism, typology or topology) operate within the plays.⁸² Four of these areas are primarily concerned with the times encountered through the process of dramatic production; that is, the influence of time and context on the plays. This book intends to develop this last category, by examining the approaches to time created and experienced within the fabric of the plays themselves. Discussions of anachronism and prolepsis constitute some of the earliest temporal approaches to the plays, and continue to be an important element of medieval drama criticism. V. A. Kolve, for example, aimed to situate the plays within medieval discourses of time, eternity and a seven-epoch history of the world.⁸³ Listing the many kinds of anachronisms found within the plays (including medieval settings and costumes, figures of speech and references to local figures, places and buildings), he argued for a conceptual blurring between times. However, as I demonstrate throughout this book, identifying temporal play merely as 'anachronism' relies on the assumption that a pageant's time runs in a predictably linear fashion, and this is rarely the case. Moreover, because Kolve argued that 'the past was played as an image of the present time' his primary focus was on the imaginings of similarities, rather than potential areas of conflict between times.⁸⁴ Subsequent scholarship has likewise tended to continue to approach dramatic anachronism by assuming it arises from a need to suggest similarity between times. James Simpson, Elisabeth Dutton and Robert S. Sturges, for example, draw attention to the political uses of anachronism to challenge certain elements of the plays' performance contexts – for example, by identifying where plays draw unfavourable comparisons between local powers and

⁷⁹ For examples of contextual approaches, see Clifford Davidson, *Material Culture and Medieval Drama* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1999) and Gail McMurray Gibson, *The Theater of Devotion: East Anglian Drama and Society in the Late Middle Ages* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1989)

⁸⁰ See Jessica Dell, David Klausner and Helen Ostovich, eds., *The Chester Cycle in Context, 1555-1575: Religion, Drama, and the Impact of Change* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2012); Coletti, 'The Chester Cycle in Sixteenth-Century Religious Culture', pp. 531-47 and Richard K. Emmerson, 'Dramatic History: On the Diachronic and Synchronic in the Study of Early English Drama', *JMEMS*, 35.1 (2005), 39-66.

⁸¹ See Rogerson, ed., *The York Mystery Plays: Performance in the City* and Roland Reed, 'The Slaughter of the Innocents', *Early Theatre*, 3 (2000), 219-28.

⁸² See Thomas Rendall, 'Visual Typology in the Abraham and Isaac Plays', *Modern Philology*, 81 (1984), 221-32 and Pamela Sheingorn's review of typological approaches in Pamela Sheingorn, 'Typology and the Teaching of Medieval Drama', in *Approaches to Teaching Medieval English Drama*, ed. by Richard K. Emmerson, (New York, NY: MLA, 1990) pp. 90-100.

⁸³ Kolve, *The Play Called Corpus Christi*, pp. 101-23.

⁸⁴ Kolve, *The Play Called Corpus Christi*, p. 110.

biblical tyrants.⁸⁵ This book, however, discusses the temporal work done by incidents of anachronism that deliberately jar with their contexts, rather than draw similarities between them. What, for example, are we to make of the Chester Noah's wife when she swears by Christ in a manner which defies medieval sermons against swearing *and* suggests a knowledge of the New Testament (a knowledge her husband does not appear to share)? Given she categorically refuses Noah's fashioning of himself as a proto-Christ, her choice of swear-object is not accidental. It draws attention to the failure of typological associations between the Flood and Crucifixion, and invests the wife's speech with a violent agency that resists Noah's own interpretation of the Flood. Anachronistic difference can therefore be just as important as similarity.

Discussions of anachronism continue to inform historicist approaches to early drama. Historicist, or contextual, approaches have formed the bulk of medieval drama criticism, which have been greatly supported by the valuable new sources of evidence emerging from the Records of Early English Drama project. Key studies from Gail McMurray Gibson and Penny Granger have discussed the N-Town plays in relation to their late fifteenth-century East Anglian context, they have expanded the possibilities of dramatic anachronism by conducting a detailed analysis of how plays and manuscripts related to the other contemporary cultural and religious products.⁸⁶ These studies have also been supported by parallel investigations into aspects of modern performances of medieval plays, including staging, material culture, casting and acting.⁸⁷ The contextual details these studies made available have opened the plays up to consideration of the ways audience members and actors might experience performances.⁸⁸ These approaches have been complemented by works seeking to establish how medieval drama was shaped by the religious changes of the

⁸⁵ See Robert S. Sturges, *The Circulation of Power in Medieval; Biblical Drama* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Elisabeth Dutton, 'Secular Medieval Drama', in *The Oxford Handbook of Medieval Literature in English*, ed. by Elaine Treharne and Greg Walker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 384-94 (p. 384) and James Simpson, *The Oxford English Literary History, Vol. 2, 1350-1547: Reform and Cultural Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 514-15 (p. 518): 'By strategic use of anachronism [...] the cycle plays certainly projected a penetrating critique of institutions adjacent to, and standing over, the urban matrix of craft guilds.'

⁸⁶ McMurray Gibson, *The Theater of Devotion* and Penny Granger, *The N-Town Play: Drama and Liturgy in Medieval East Anglia* (Woodbridge: D.S. Brewer, 2009).

⁸⁷ Philip Butterworth, Clifford Davidson and Meg Twycross have provided some of the most extensive contributions to discussions of staging and costume in medieval drama since the late 1970s. See for example Butterworth, *Staging Conventions*; Clifford Davidson, *Gesture in Medieval Drama and Art* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2001) and Meg Twycross' initiation of debates concerning cross-playing in her article "'Transvestism" in the Mystery Plays', *METH*, 5.2 (1983), 123-80.

⁸⁸ See Jody Enders on the transmission of biblical and social 'truths' through violence in medieval drama in Jody Enders, *The Medieval Theater of Cruelty: Rhetoric, Memory, Violence* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999).

sixteenth century, showing that, as audiences and authorities changed, the telling of biblical narratives changed too. This is part of a wider movement to resist the ‘canonical partition’ between medieval and Early Modern drama, and scholars have identified evidence that what had formerly been considered ‘medieval’ dramatic styles continued late into the sixteenth century.⁸⁹ The focus of this book is therefore made possible by a wide range of approaches working to elucidate the historical, civic and religious contexts of late medieval biblical drama, particularly those concerning gender in the plays, the play’s original performance contexts and dramatic receptions of biblical narrative. These investigations have identified the potential multiplicity of perspectives within audience, local authority and national political responses to medieval biblical plays. A need now arises for a corresponding analysis of the ways the characters represented in these plays also operate under multiple agendas and temporal perspectives.

Where drama criticism has engaged with specific models of time in biblical drama, it has tended to focus on only one aspect of time, without asking whether the play also supports other co-existing or conflicting temporal truths. For example, Pamela Sheingorn finds that typological readings of the plays rely on ‘filling in the gaps’ in biblical narrative, and transform Hebrew scripture into a foreshadowing of Christ.⁹⁰ Typology, she claims, insists that from the divine perspective – and, therefore, the only correct perspective – events in the Hebrew Testament point towards Christ.⁹¹ The creative and cultural influence of the pervasive typological analysis of the plays became particularly evident in the 2018 performance of the York Mystery Plays, in which director Tom Straszewski carefully re-structured that year’s pageants by typological pairing rather than chronological sequence. This allowed for the performance of pageants which had not always been included in prior productions. Yet while the importance of typology in the plays has rightly received a lot of critical attention, nobody has yet interrogated how successful it actually is within the plays. Throughout this book, I demonstrate that typological machinations within the plays are

⁸⁹ See Raphael Falco, ‘Medieval and Reformation Roots’, in *A Companion to Renaissance Drama*, ed. by Arthur F. Kinney (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), pp. 239-56; Coletti, ‘The Chester Cycle in Sixteenth-Century Religious Culture’, pp. 531-47; Greg Walker, ‘When Did ‘the Medieval’ End? Retrospection, Foresight, and the End(s) of the English Middle Ages’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Medieval Literature in English*, ed. by Elaine Treharne, Greg Walker and William Green (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 725-38 and Kurt A. Schreyer, *Shakespeare’s Medieval Craft: Remnants of the Mysteries on the London Stage* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014).

⁹⁰ See Sheingorn, ‘Typology and the Teaching of Medieval Drama’, pp. 90-100; Walter Meyers, ‘Typology and the Audience of the English Cycle Plays’, *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, 81 (1975), 5-17 and Rosemary Woolf, ‘The Effect of Typology on the English Medieval Plays of Abraham and Isaac’, *Speculum*, 32 (1957), 805-25.

⁹¹ Sheingorn, ‘Typology and the Teaching of Medieval Drama’, p. 90.

vulnerable to contradiction, and that processes bringing together events from the Hebrew and Christian Testaments are just as likely to highlight the disjunctions between these times as secure Christological foreshadowing or anticipation. This is often due to the presence of a character who either unconsciously contradicts typological readings by responding to time in a different way, or is who is actively trying to deny typological processes. This kind of typological contradiction frequently occurs when the plays are, in Sheingorn's words, 'filling in the gaps' and showing things that do not appear in the Bible, such as Joseph confronting Mary about her pregnancy, what the shepherds were up to before the angel arrived, Herod's decision-making process before he orders the slaughter of the Innocents, and the members of the community who are drowned by the Flood.

While typological readings of the plays have been by far the most popular of those approaches that *do* consider specific models of time, discussions of other experiences of time are also beginning to appear. Pamela King's work on the York Cycle's relationship to the fifteenth-century liturgical calendar argues that the plays ordered their narratives so that all events derived meaning from the Christian 'centre' – that is, from Redemption.⁹² While she identifies the typological pairing of episodes from the Hebrew and Christian scriptures in both liturgy and pageants, she also suggests that the plays were also heavily invested with the organisation of history which saw Christ as a moment of definitive change. This is considered further in the first chapter of this book, which finds that the concept of a temporal 'centre' equally invites problematic ambiguity about where, when and with whom this 'centre' resides. When, as my colleague James Howard so delightfully phrased in discussing this project with me, was 'Christian o' Clock'? Works addressing typology in the plays are presently limited by the fact that, while they tend to consider a single aspect or experience of typology within a play or cycle, they rarely address what happens to these models when they are placed in dialogue with alternative models of time.⁹³ This is in contrast to the work on time being done in later drama, in which models of temporal collapse, typology, spectrality, topology and queer experiences of time have informed readings of plays which dramatize or respond to the medieval 'past.'⁹⁴ In interrogating the ways medieval drama frames moments

⁹² See Pamela M. King, 'Calendar and Text: Christ's Ministry in the York Plays and the Liturgy', *Medium Aevum*, 67.1 (1998), 30-59 (p. 40).

⁹³ One notable exception is Sarah Elliott Novacich's *Shaping the Archive in Late Medieval England: History, Poetry, and Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), which will be examined in chapter two.

⁹⁴ See for example Stephen Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001); Jonathan Gil Harris, *Untimely Matter in the Time of Shakespeare* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009); Sarah Beckwith, *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University

of gendered and Jewish-Christian conflict, the following chapters engage some of these methodologies to argue that time constitutes a crucial element in understanding both the staging of conflict and lay medieval attitudes towards these biblical episodes. It argues that not only were complex models of time in operation – often simultaneously – in these plays, but that they also provide evidence for the ways medieval laypeople engaged with, embodied and understood time.

Resisting chronology

Appropriately for a book which discusses conflicts that complicate linear models of time, I structure my argument out of sync with biblical chronology. The first chapter considers the Incarnation at the beginning of the gospels; the second moves ‘backwards’ to examine the Flood; the third the Nativity, and the fourth the slaughter of the Innocents. This deliberate movement across episodes which represent a series of ‘fissures’ Christian theology claimed to have established in time is also related to the increasing complexity of models of time operating in each episode. Chapters one and two draw on medieval figurations of Judaism and of Hebrew texts as ‘past’ to examine how typology and supersession are used and challenged in the plays. The first chapter foregrounds the key issues raised in this study through a close examination of the Incarnation, an event frequently treated in medieval and modern chronologies as a point of transition. It examines the series of conflicts staged between Mary and Joseph in the Marian pageants of the N-Town manuscript in relation to the temporal problem of the Incarnation as a moment of supersession which ‘undoes’, or replaces, former understandings and laws. My choice of the N-Town pageants here is due to the fact that, of all the surviving medieval biblical pageant collections, they amplify the doubt narrative most by staging repetitive scenes of doubt, enlightenment and reconciliation. These plays also place Joseph’s body under as much scrutiny as Mary’s. Underpinned by work in Jewish studies, which theorises both Jewish and female bodies as resistant to narratives of supersession and assimilation, it finds that the play’s repetitive performances of conversion not only question how successfully Joseph has moved between ‘Jewish’ and ‘Christian’ times, but also challenge how successful linear, transitional models of time actually are. The second chapter, which witnesses Noah and his wife’s altercations before, during and after the

Press, 2011) and Gordon McMullan and David Matthews, eds., ‘Introduction’, in *Reading the Medieval in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 1-14 and Kathryn Schwarz, ‘Queer Futility: Or, *The Life and Death of King John*’ in *Shakespeare: A Queer Companion to the Complete Works of Shakespeare*, ed. by Madhavi Menon (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), pp. 163-71.

Flood in the York and Chester cycles, complicates supersessionary models by introducing competing models of temporal understanding. These plays demonstrate an ongoing concern with the past – how it is to be managed, recollected or forgotten – and examine what happens when characters experience an act of destructive divine punishment differently from one another. Noah's wife refuses to forget the past. Engaging with medieval theories concerning remembrance, beginnings, annihilation and renewal as well as Carolyn Dinshaw's work on temporal collapse and Jonathan Gil Harris' model of explosive time as 'the untimely interruption of a past', this chapter finds that, while Noah adheres to a supersessionary understanding of the Flood which demands the erasure of the past, his wife engages with models of time that recall the past into the present.⁹⁵ The York wife's performative speech acts and the Chester wife's rejection of an exclusive model of salvation form a feminine counter-typology which frustrates Noah's own typological understanding of himself as a precursor to Christ. Her acts of remembrance also puncture Noah and God's desire for a new 'beginning' founded on oblivion.

Where the first two chapters are concerned with the use and management of the past, the third chapter focuses instead on the questions of futurity and delay raised when a play deliberately complicates its own timeline. This occurs in the Towneley *Second Shepherds' Play*, in which the sheep-in-the-manger plot forms a moment of creative play that interrupts the time of the Nativity. The chapter uses this play to re-evaluate current models of queer time, and particularly models that hinge on the presupposition that there is a normative, or homogenous, way of experiencing time. Rather, it suggests, we might more productively consider the play in relation to Lee Edelman's narrower idea of queer narratives demonstrating a resistance towards concepts of futurity centred upon heterosexual reproduction.⁹⁶ Engaging with 'queer' time as an interruptive complication of times directed towards procreation, the chapter examines the *Play's* delayed and inverted Nativity where a woman appears to give 'birth' to a sheep. It includes a discussion of the non-linear production history of the Towneley manuscript, Huntingdon MS HM1 and its role as a nostalgia object, before examining the play's grotesque figuring of human reproduction and pregnancy as failure. The images of parenthood which are so crucial in the other three chapters of this book are disrupted through the parodic interruption of Mak and Gyll's curiously non-reproductive narrative. In doing so, the play substitutes the child with a sheep:

⁹⁵ Gil Harris, *Untimely Matter in the Time of Shakespeare*, p. 91 and Dinshaw, *How Soon is Now?*

⁹⁶ Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

a queer icon which produces a false signifier of futurity and frustrates the play's initial drive towards reproduction. The final chapter examines the clash between mothers and soldiers in the Towneley *Herod the Great* pageant. It asks what happens when Herod recognises he occupies a time of theological transition and takes steps to prevent it. Engaging with Michel Serres' 'crumpled handkerchief' model of folded, topological time, it examines how the Towneley *Herod the Great* amplifies the ways its gospel source brings together multiple events from Hebrew and Christian scripture in processes of prophecy and validation.⁹⁷ Terrified of both past and future, Herod enacts devastating violence in an attempt to tear his own pages out of history. However, as this chapter shows, the mothers of the Innocents act as agents of topological resistance to Herod's plans, binding moments in Christian and Hebrew history securely together even as they fruitlessly fight his soldiers.

The monograph's conclusion returns briefly to York's *The Fall of the Angels* to examine how structures of anticipation built into the play enabled the audience briefly to occupy God's experience of eternity. It also asks what happens to this God-like perspective if a play breaks this contract of narrative anticipation. The conclusion also turns its attention to the temporal assumptions that are still prevalent in our own critical practice. In discussing a short episode from the 1611 manuscript of the Cornish play *Gwreans an bys*, it critiques 'medieval' and 'early modern' critical periodization and the supersessionary models of theatre they produce. In doing so, it finds that, like the moments of temporal conflict patterned throughout the plays of this book, such models are confounded by the rich diversity of ways the representation of biblical dramatic *personae* and their audiences seek to assimilate, deny, preserve or violently obliterate the past.

⁹⁷ Michel Serres and Bruno Latour, *Conversations on Science, Culture, and Time*, trans. by Roxanne Lapidus (Michigan, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1995), p. 60.