



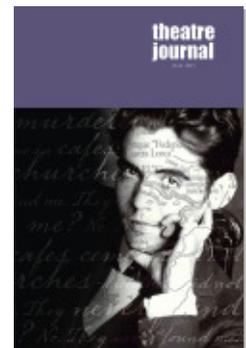
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Jill Stevenson

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Poised at the Threatening Edge: Feeling the Future in Medieval Last Judgment Performances

Jill Stevenson

It seems The End is always near. The Apocalypse has sparked imaginations for centuries, with highly publicized predictions repeatedly thrusting End Times theology into the spotlight. Two recent occasions illustrate its persistence. The first involved Harold Camping, a self-taught Bible scholar who predicted that 21 May 2011 would be Judgment Day. Those who subscribed to his prophecy started a media blitz; in cities across the United States signs appeared in subway cars, at bus stops, and on street corners. In the weeks before May 21st, some of Camping's followers descended on New York City, where they distributed Bibles at street fairs and lingered in public spaces like Times Square carrying signs announcing Judgment Day.¹ A year and a half later, Apocalyptic prophecy once again took center stage when many people interpreted the Mayan calendar's "end" on 21 December 2012 as marking a kind of Doomsday. As the date approached, press outlets reported odd behavior, sometimes even panic, among people from across the globe.² This ongoing fascination with the Apocalypse is also reflected in a seemingly endless stream of films, novels, and other media. The HBO series *The Leftovers*, based on Tom Perrotta's 2011 novel, is one of the more recent examples of this eschatological obsession.³

Jill Stevenson is an associate professor of theatre arts at Marymount Manhattan College. She is the author of Performance, Cognitive Theory, and Devotional Culture: Sensual Piety in Late Medieval York (2010) and Sensational Devotion: Evangelical Performance in Twenty-First-Century America (2013). She coedited the collection Thresholds of Medieval Visual Culture (2012), and has published articles in various journals and anthologies. Her current book project is tentatively titled Reenacting the Future: The Rhetorics of Threat in End Times Performance.

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¹ For a brief overview, see Ashley Parker, "Make My Bed? But You Say the World's Ending," *New York Times*, 20 May 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/20/us/20rapture.html?_r=0; and Laurie Essig, "No Rapture, But the End Days Are Upon Us," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 23 May 2011, available at <http://chronicle.com/blogs/brainstorm/no-rapture-but-the-end-days-are-upon-us/35598>.

² For example, see Ellen Barry, "In Panicky Russia, It's Official: End of World Is Not Near," *New York Times*, 1 December 2012, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/02/world/europe/mayan-end-of-world-stirs-panic-in-russia-and-elsewhere.html>.

³ Other recent films include *This Is the End* (2013; directed by Seth Rogen and Evan Goldberg); *It's a Disaster* (2012; directed by Todd Berger); *Seeking a Friend for the End of the World* (2012; directed by Lorene Scafaria); and *Melancholia* (2011; directed by Lars von Trier). See also Terrence Rafferty, "This Is the Way the World Ends: 'Seeking a Friend for the End of the World' and Other Apocalyptic Movies,"

These examples suggest a compelling human desire to see and seek the End—to live through it—and Christian communities, in particular, have used live performance to try to fulfill that desire. Performances allow believers to feel the sensual, physical reality of an End that Christian eschatology, in all its varied forms and traditions, assumes will one day arrive. According to Caroline Walker Bynum and Paul Freedman, this assertion of an End is a characteristic that Christianity shares, to some extent, with Islam and Judaism, and one that makes eschatology “in the western tradition, the most paradoxical aspect of religiosity.” They write that

[t]here are religious traditions in which self flows from a spirit world to which it almost effortlessly and seamlessly returns, traditions in which earthly existence is a moment in an eternal dreaming. In such a sensibility, neither individual nor collective death is exactly an end. In contrast, the western religious traditions—Islam, Judaism, and Christianity—are all brooded over by the sense of “last things.” A sense of the end, whether soon or distant, individual or collective, contradicts (indeed explodes) itself, for it looks to a moment that gives significance to the course of time by finally denying or erasing (ending) that to which it offers significance.⁴

Although Christian eschatology is often used to promote reform in this life, the theology ultimately does not provide believers with ways to avoid or thwart that inevitable final moment—sometimes the moment is, in fact, celebrated. Instead, eschatology supplies thick narratives designed to help people navigate the End’s ongoing meanings for the present. Ultimately, Christian End Times performances provide spectators with a chance not only to *see* a representation of that End, but also to *feel* their way into and through its prewritten future narrative.

A number of scholars have examined contemporary Christian performances that give spectators a feeling of the End, in particular Hell Houses and Judgement Houses,⁵ and much of this work has productively analyzed the “scare tactics” that those creating these performances often employ in order to generate fear in spectators. Analogous dramaturgical strategies can be seen throughout the history of Christian performance.

New York Times, 15 June 2012, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/17/movies/seeking-a-friend-for-the-end-of-the-world-and-other-apocalyptic-movies.html>; and Maureen Dowd, “Andromeda Is Coming!” *New York Times*, 29 May 2012, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/30/opinion/dowd-andromeda-is-coming.html>. Notably, interest in the biblical Book of Revelation has always spanned the academic and popular worlds, a “mash up” that today includes the *Left Behind* book series, Elaine Pagels’s *Revelations: Visions, Prophecy, and Politics in the Book of Revelation* (2012), and the documentary *Waiting for Armageddon* (2009; directed by Katie Davis, Franco Sacchi, and David Heilbroner), alongside the many films, books, and media sources that appear if one enters *Revelation* into the Amazon.com search engine.

⁴ Accordingly, Caroline Walker Bynum and Paul Freedman maintain that “[i]f eschatology is then essentially paradoxical, we should not be surprised to find that the plethora of eschatological writings produced by the western European Middle Ages utilizes and deepens rather than denies or impoverishes its multifold and contradictory traditions.” See Bynum and Freedman, eds., “Introduction,” in *Last Things: Death and the Apocalypse in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 9.

⁵ Hank Willenbrink, “The Act of Being Saved: Hell House and the Salvific Performative,” *Theatre Journal* 66, no. 1 (2014): 73–92; John Fletcher, *Preaching to Convert* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014), and “Tasteless as Hell: Community Performance, Distinction, and Countertaste in Hell House,” *Theatre Survey* 48, no. 2 (2007): 313–30; Ann Pellegrini, “‘Signaling Through the Flames’: Hell House Performance and Structures of Religious Feeling,” *American Quarterly* 59, no. 3 (2007): 911–35; Kevin J. Wetmore Jr., “The Devil is an Ass: Radical Evil Redefined as Ridiculous Evil from the English Renaissance to Contemporary Hollywood,” *Journal of Religion and Theatre* 9, no. 1 (2010): 28–40, available at <http://www.athe.org/associations/12588/files/Wetmore.pdf>.

For instance, End Times plays from the Middle Ages, such as those that staged the Last Judgment, offer rich examples of this tradition. These medieval performances provide opportunities to build on the scholarship on fear while also expanding our understanding of Christian End Times plays as sites for emotional production. As Donnalee Dox demonstrates, by the beginning of the twelfth century, certain medieval theorists were suggesting that poetry, including dramatic poetry, could “produce emotional responses that in themselves might factor into the process of making intellectual judgments.” Performances accomplish this by supplying representations and depictions that “give material form to moral qualities.”⁶ Various scholars have discussed the ways in which medieval plays depicting Christ’s Passion may have been used to cultivate compassion, pity, or empathy in spectators, usually through the visual and material presence of Christ. Alternatively, Last Judgment plays may reveal a dramaturgical mode that uses the power of absence to provoke a very different feeling and, in doing so, to construct a specific kind of emotional community.⁷ This mode, what I am calling a “dramaturgy of threat,” is perhaps most evident in Christian End Times performances across historical periods, although it may also have applications in other contexts where the goal of a performance is similarly to bring a prewritten future into felt reality. With respect to medieval Last Judgment plays, I contend that producers used a dramaturgy of threat to foster anxiety and, through such emotional production, to leave all spectators, regardless of social status, feeling vulnerable to the reality of the End.

Absence and Anxiety

In the biblical Last Judgment narrative, all souls come before God in order to learn their eternal destinies. The dramatic texts draw on a range of biblical source material, including passages from the Gospels of Matthew (7:13–23) and Luke (13:23–28), “The Judgment of the Nations” parable from Matthew (25:31–45),⁸ as well as elements from

⁶Donnalee Dox, *The Idea of the Theatre in Latin Christian Thought: Augustine to the Fourteenth Century* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), 119.

⁷Barbara Rosenwein defines emotional communities as “groups in which people adhere to the same norms of emotional expression and value—or devalue—the same or related emotions. More than one emotional community may exist—indeed normally does exist—contemporaneously, and these communities may change over time” (2). She also argues that an emotional community “is often a social community. But it is also possibly a ‘textual community,’ created and reinforced by ideologies, teachings, and common presuppositions. . . . Thus emotional communities are in some ways what Foucault called a common ‘discourse’: shared vocabularies and ways of thinking that have a controlling function, a disciplining function” (24–25). Here, Rosenwein is using the term textual very broadly. See Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006).

⁸This is also referred to as “the parable of the sheep and the goats”: “And when the Son of man shall come in his majesty, and all the angels with him, then shall he sit upon the seat of his majesty. And all nations shall be gathered together before him, and he shall separate them one from another, as the shepherd separateth the sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on his left. Then shall the king say to them that shall be on his right hand: Come, ye blessed of my Father, possess you the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave me to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave me to drink; I was a stranger, and you took me in: Naked, and you covered me: sick, and you visited me: I was in prison, and you came to me. Then shall the just answer him, saying: Lord, when did we see thee hungry, and fed thee; thirsty, and gave thee drink? And when did we see thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and covered thee? Or when did we see thee sick or in prison, and came to thee? And the king answering, shall say to them: Amen I say to you, as long as you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to me. Then he shall say to them also that shall be on his left hand: Depart from me, you cursed, into everlasting fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry, and you gave

the Books of Daniel and Isaiah, and, perhaps most notably, the Book of Revelation (20:11–12).⁹ Medieval Last Judgment plays are full of action: angels and Jesus descend; the dead rise from their graves; all souls gather before God, who separates them into two groups—the saved and the damned; and each group makes a pilgrimage to its final destination. The language throughout these plays suggests a very busy and dynamic stage. For instance, a Last Judgment play appears in the fifteenth-century manuscript known as the *N-Town Plays*, a dramatic compilation believed to be a product of East Anglia. The *N-Town* play begins with the archangel Michael proclaiming “Arise! All men arise! Come to judgment” (*Surgite! All men aryse! / Venite ad iudicium*) (ll. 1–2), before instructing all souls to “Hasten you readily to this great trial” (Rape yow redyly to this grett assyse) (l. 5). Once resurrected, Deus tells the “blessed ones” (*benedicti*) to “Come hither to me” (Come hedyr to me) (ll. 40, 42) and directs Saint Peter to “make your way to heaven’s gates / loosen the locks and them undo. / My blessed children, thou bring to me, / To gladden their hearts” (Petyr, to hevyn gatys thu wende and goo, / The lokkys thu losyn and hem undo. / My blyssyd childeryn, thu brynge me to, / Here hertys for to glade) (ll. 49–52).¹⁰ In the *Towneley* play, an angel instructs the souls to “Stand not together, part in two!” (Stand not togeder, parte in two!) (l. 73),¹¹ while in York’s play, terms like “ryse,” “rise vppe,” or “come before” repeatedly appear (ll. 90, 92, 95, 98, 100), as well as directions like “Rise, and fecche youre flessch” (l. 86) and references to the souls coming “out of our graves hither to be brought” (oute of oure graues hidir to be brought) (l. 108).¹²

This verbal emphasis on movement in the English plays—specifically, the sudden congregating of many resurrected bodies—is also present in the continental traditions. One example is the fourteenth-century, Middle French *Jour du Jugement* (*Play of Judgment*). This large-scale play has a cast of ninety-three characters and is extant in 2,438 octosyllabic rhyming couplets, although it appears to have originally been somewhere between 2,700 and 2,800 lines in length.¹³ The first part presents the story of Antichrist,

me not to eat: I was thirsty, and you gave me not to drink. I was a stranger, and you took me not in: naked, and you covered me not: sick and in prison, and you did not visit me. Then they also shall answer him, saying: Lord, when did we see thee hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister to thee? Then he shall answer them, saying: Amen I say to you, as long as you did it not to one of these least, neither did you do it to me.” *The Holy Bible Douay-Rheims Version*, ed. Richard Challoner (Baltimore: John Murphy, 1899), available at <http://drbo.org/index.htm>.

⁹ “And I saw a great white throne, and one sitting upon it, from whose face the earth and heaven fled away, and there was no place found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing in the presence of the throne, and the books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged by those things which were written in the books, according to their works.” *Ibid.*

¹⁰ My modernization; original transcription from “Judgment Day,” in Douglas Sugano, ed., *The N-Town Plays* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2007), available at <http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/sugano-n-town-plays-play-42-judgment-day>.

¹¹ My modernization; original transcription in Martin Stevens and A. C. Cawley, eds., *The Towneley Plays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994). Although previously called the Wakefield cycle, this collection of plays is now most commonly referred to as the Towneley cycle or Towneley manuscript. See Barbara Palmer, “‘Towneley Plays’ or ‘Wakefield Cycle’ Revisited,” *Comparative Drama* 21 (1988): 318–48.

¹² My modernization; original transcription in Richard Beadle, ed., *The York Plays: A Critical Edition of the York Corpus Christi Play as Recorded in British Library Additional MS 35290*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 442–53. For a modernization, see “The Mercers’ Play: The Last Judgment,” in *York Plays: Records of Early English Drama*, available at <http://www.rhaworth.myby.co.uk/pofstp/REED/York47.html>.

¹³ Richard Emmerson and David F. Hult, trans. and eds., *Antichrist and Judgment Day: The Middle French Jour du Jugement* (Asheville, NC: Pegasus Press, 1998), ix.

before the play turns to the Doomsday account. As with the English Last Judgment plays, the *Jour du Jugement* also contains many commands that suggest a great deal of action, especially those spoken during the resurrection of the dead section:

Rise up without any resistance,
you bodies that have lain beneath the earth,
Each and every one of you, get yourselves ready,
body and soul together,
 for I must *assemble* you
 all in order to lead you to the judgment
 of the sovereign King who tells no lies. . . .

(*Levez suz sans nul contredit*,
Corps qui avez en terre esté,
Et soiez trestuit apresté,
Corps et ame, trestout ensamble,
Il convient que je vous assemble
Touz, pour mener au jugement
Dou souverain Roy qui ne ment. . . .) (ll. 1898–1904)

By true resurrection,
all of you around here arise
 both in *body* and soul; wait
 no longer, for it has been commanded by God. . . .

(*Par vray[e] resurreccïon*
Levez suz trestuit environ,
De corps et d'ame, n'attendez,
Plus, de par Dieu est commandez. . . .) (ll. 1919–22)

Arise, surely you weary
 of lying down here in the earth.
 Get up now, make no further delay,
all of you take back your souls
 and *come off* with me
 to the judgment of the All Powerful. . . .

(*Levez suz, trop estes lassé*
De sa jus en terre gesir.
Or suz, sans panre autre respite,
Trestuit voz amez reprenez,
Et avec moy vous en venez
Au jugement le Tout Puissant. . . .) (ll. 1928–33)

Run quickly to Judgment.
 You can put it off no longer,
 of this I am sure: the moment will no more be delayed

(*Au jugement tost acourez*,
Plus ne pouez faire demeure,
Bien say, plus ne demourra l'eure) (ll. 2163–65; emphasis added)¹⁴

¹⁴ All English translations of *Jour du Jugement* are from *ibid.*; all transcriptions of the original text are from Emile Roy, ed., *Le Jour du Jugement: Mystère français sur le Grand Schisme* (Paris: Emile Bouillon, 1902), available at <https://archive.org/stream/lejourdujugemen00roygoog#page/n9/mode/2up>.

The quick-moving couplet rhyme scheme, the many action-oriented imperatives, such as *levez*, *reprenez*, *venez*, and *acourez*, as well as the many words that evoke the gathering and collective movement of many people altogether (*trestuit*/*trestout*, *ensemble*, and *assemble*) would linguistically, rhythmically, and imaginatively bolster the stage action. Spectators experience the final judgment as an event that initiates a burst of activity and mass movement.

In addition, although there is no record of this play's performance and the text itself contains only three stage directions, Richard Emmerson and David Hult argue that the play lends itself to the use of symbolic movement that would reinforce the dialogue.¹⁵ It is unclear where the play was performed, but the scale indicated by the extant text implies a large playing space, which may have included different levels and scaffolds. Emmerson and Hult also suggest that "much of the play's action involves movement between the moral poles" represented by locations on the right and left sides of the space.¹⁶ This use of stage space would have been consonant with the themes of Christian eschatology. As Laura Smoller notes, *movement*—specifically, from periphery to center and from east to west—is key to Christian eschatology, and especially to how End Times theology was used to interpret contemporary events during the Middle Ages.¹⁷ In performance, the *Jour du Jugement* may have generated a living map of this spiritual geography. Furthermore, depending on the staging conventions, spectators might have traversed or even inhabited certain spaces on that map as part of their encounter with the play, thereby archiving the physical reality of this End within their bodies.

The Last Judgment episode also supplied copious opportunities for stage spectacle, something those producing the plays often exploited in impressive fashion. These dramaturgical features further enhanced the sensual reality of the events depicted. For instance, performances of a somewhat later play, the *Mystery of the Antichrist and the Judgment of God* from Modane, France, performed in 1580 and 1606, used various special effects and trick props, including "several limbs that look like the limbs of people killed in the battle with the semblance of blood" (*Plus feront plusieurs membres ressemblants membres des personnes se trouvant morts à la bataille, avec apparence de sang*) and "two dummy bodies to rip up or saw through the middle, from which shall come out entrails and blood" (*deux faux corps pour reysser ou seyer par le milieu, desquels sortiront entrailles et sang*).¹⁸ In addition, a legal contract outlining the agreed-on production elements indicates that those craftsmen hired to build and manage the effects during the performance were experts in handling fire (*maîtrise du feu*).¹⁹ This play was filled with stage elements designed to give the final days of humankind on Earth a sensational reality.

Another particularly spectacular example is Coventry's Last Judgment play, which was produced by the Drapers' company as part of a processional wagon cycle staged regularly from approximately the late fourteenth century until 1579. Although no play

¹⁵ Emmerson and Hult, trans. and eds., *Antichrist and Judgment Day*, xxvi–xxvii.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, xxvi.

¹⁷ Laura A. Smoller, "Of Earthquakes, Hail, Frogs, and Geography: Plague and the Investigation of the Apocalypse in the Later Middle Ages," in Bynum and Freedman, eds., *Last Things*, 159–60.

¹⁸ English translation in Peter Meredith and John E. Tailby, eds., *The Staging of Religious Drama in Europe in the Later Middle Ages: Texts and Documentation in English Translation* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1982), 104–7. Original text from Louis Gros, *Étude sur le Mystère de L'Antéchrist et du Jugement de Dieu* (Chambéry: Imprimeries réunies, 1962), 29, 30.

¹⁹ Gros, *Étude sur le Mystère de L'Antéchrist*, 27.

text survives, guild accounts provide a great deal of information about the pageant's visual and material characteristics. As Pamela King and Clifford Davidson explain, the Drapers' accounts from 1561–1573 indicate that three “worlds” [worldes] were built for the production, with one of them set aflame and destroyed at each of the three stations where the play was performed.²⁰ Although the fire likely occurred near the beginning of the play, the action that followed was apparently filled with elaborate costuming, makeup, music, and other special effects, including fireworks and an earthquake.²¹ As with the Modane play, all of these elements helped make the End a vivid, perhaps even overwhelming sensual experience for spectators.

The devils in these plays likely enhanced that energetic atmosphere through both their language and physicality. For instance, the three angels in the York play speak in eight-line stanzas that follow an ABAB rhyme scheme, while the three devils speak in shorter four-line stanzas, perhaps giving their lines a more animated rhythm and pace. Raucous devils are a particularly prominent feature of the Towneley play. As Pamela King notes, this play “uses the expanded York Doomsday pageant as a framework to which is added a lively interaction of devils, led by Tutivillus.”²² Although the beginning of the pageant text is missing in the manuscript and therefore the play's exact length is unknown, the devils' loquacity, laughter, and seemingly grotesque behaviors commandeer the stage from lines 89 through 385—nearly half of the extant 621-line text.

The devils' colloquial and vulgar language also inserts a potentially comic element into the middle section of the Towneley play, as devils often do in medieval plays. These characters are usually erratic, menacing presences, often running into and out of hell; as the Last Judgment play in the Majorca Codex notes, “three devils shall enter in no particular order, helter skelter.”²³ Audience responses to this “frightening comedy of evil” almost certainly varied.²⁴ Barbara Palmer argues that the “inhabitants of hell . . . figure an assault on the ordinary, the regular, the anticipated” and are “the means by which is expressed that which all men in all ages have most feared: chaos.”²⁵ And yet, Claire Sponsler has suggested in her analysis of medieval morality plays that characters like devils and vices “are typically given the wittiest speeches, the boldest personalities, and the best opportunities for slapstick and buffoonery,” thereby making

²⁰ Pamela King and Clifford Davidson, eds., *The Coventry Corpus Christi Plays* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000), 48.

²¹ The production contract for the Modane play also stipulates many instances of fire and the creation of a device to “make an earthquake when necessary with everything possible to make it convincing” (*feront par engin fere tremblement de terre quand sera requis, et tout ce qu'ils pourront pour lui ressembler*). English translation in Meredith and Tailby, eds., *The Staging of Religious Drama*, 105. The original text is from Gros, *Étude sur le Mystère de L'Antéchrist*, 29.

²² Pamela King, “The End of the World in Medieval English Religious Drama,” *Literature and Theology* 26, no. 4 (2012): 384–99, quote on 393. For more discussion of these devils, see David Bevington, “One Hell of an Ending: Staging Last Judgment in the Towneley Plays and in *Doctor Faustus* A and B,” in *Bring furth the pagants': Essays in Early English Drama Presented to Alexandra F. Johnston*, ed. David Klausner and Karen Sawyer Marsalek (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 292–310.

²³ English translation in Meredith and Tailby, eds., *The Staging of Religious Drama*, 88. Although the manuscript is a late-sixteenth-century copy, Meredith and Tailby note that many of the forty-nine plays in the codex are believed to be considerably earlier (25).

²⁴ David Bevington uses this phrase in his introduction to the play. See “The Last Judgment from Wakefield,” in *Medieval Drama*, ed. David Bevington (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975), 637.

²⁵ Barbara Palmer, “The Inhabitants of Hell: Devils,” in *The Iconography of Hell*, ed. Clifford Davidson and Thomas Seiler (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1992), 34, 35.

them “often the most engaging characters in the play.”²⁶ The devils raised the spiritual stakes, even as they simultaneously (and not necessarily contrarily) supplied exceptional entertainment value. Therefore, while it is nearly impossible to know for certain what mixture of fear and laughter such characters triggered in medieval spectators,²⁷ it is clear that they were often critical to fostering a boisterous representation of the Final Judgment. As with other dramaturgical elements, the devils helped augment the felt reality of this future event.

Overall, the extant texts and documents demonstrate that Last Judgment plays contained a great deal of excess—excessive movement, noise, and spectacle. As scholars have discussed, the violence and spectacularity of these plays likely overwhelmed the audience, thereby instilling fear,²⁸ as Palmer notes, chaos frightens us. But equally important are those moments when that aesthetic shifts. One example is indicated by a stage direction near the beginning of the Rouergue Last Judgment play, a fifteenth-century Provençal text: “the dead shall rise, some from the tombs and others from secret places, and shall all come before God and kneel in silence [*sans dire mot*]. After which, the saved shall mount a scaffold lower than Paradise on the right-hand side, and the damned shall remain on the large scaffold on the left-hand side.”²⁹ In the midst of what appears to be a very busy performance involving a very large cast, silence—“*sans dire mot*”—seems to interrupt the play’s rhythm and, perhaps, shift the spectator’s affective trajectory.

In her work on sensory experiences in medieval devotion, Beth Williamson argues that a shift from visibility to invisibility or from sound to silence within an artwork prompts “a change of register” from the physical sense to a spiritual or inner sense, and she suggests that the careful sequencing of those shifts constitutes “a kind of choreography of the devotional practice.”³⁰ I propose that this kind of devotional choreography was central to the emotion-work of Last Judgment plays and constitutes a particular kind of dramaturgy. Furthermore, those producing these plays may have employed this dramaturgy of threat in order to heighten spectators’ vulnerability, thereby moving them from feeling the specific physical fear of an *as if* possibility to feeling an intimate, inner spiritual anxiety about an *as it will be* reality.

²⁶ Claire Sponsler, *Drama and Resistance: Bodies, Goods, and Theatricality in Late Medieval England* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 80.

²⁷ Jody Enders, *Death by Drama and Other Medieval Urban Legends* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 92–102.

²⁸ See, for example, Lisa LeBlanc, “Social Upheaval and the English Doomsday Plays,” in *End of Days: Essays on the Apocalypse from Antiquity to Modernity*, ed. Karolyn Kinane and Michael Ryan (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2009), 91–92; King, “The End of the World,” 384–99; Pamela Sheingorn and David Bevington, “‘Alle This Was Token Domysday to Drede’: Visual Signs of Last Judgment in the Corpus Christi Cycles and in Late Gothic Art,” in *Homo, Memento Finis: The Iconography of Just Judgment in Medieval Art and Drama*, ed. David Bevington (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1985), 121–45; and Pamela Sheingorn, “‘For God Is Such a Doomsman’: Origins and Development of the Theme of Last Judgment,” in *Homo, Memento Finis*, 15–58.

²⁹ English translation in Meredith and Tailby, eds., *The Staging of Religious Drama*, 88. There is a transcription of the original Provençal in Moshé Lazar, ed., *Le Jugement Dernier (Lo Jutgamen General)* (Paris: Éditions Klincksieck, 1971), 60–61. I discuss this play in more detail in note 52 below with respect to its use of silence, but also tortures in Hell.

³⁰ Beth Williamson, “Sensory Experience in Medieval Devotion: Sound and Vision, Invisibility and Silence,” *Speculum* 88, no. 1 (2013): 29, 23.

Joanna Bourke explains that while *fear* is typically “used to refer to an immediate, objective threat” and *anxiety* “to an anticipated, subjective threat,” the real distinction between the two states hinges on vulnerability. She argues “that the only difference between a ‘fear’ and an ‘anxiety’ is the ability of individuals or groups to *believe* themselves capable of assessing risk or identifying a (supposed) enemy. Put another way, the difference lies in the ability to externalize threat, thus proving a sense of personal invulnerability.”³¹ Scapegoating or “naming an enemy” reduces vulnerability, thereby converting generalized anxiety into a specific, targeted external fear that can be more easily managed. The reverse may have been the goal with medieval Last Judgment plays, where tactical absence triggered the spectator’s sense of vulnerability and thus fomented anxiety about the End Times threat.

Bourke also discusses the conversion of fear into anxiety and writes that “there have been good historical reasons why certain groups might wish to convert fears into anxieties.” Discussing the scrupulousness of mid-twentieth-century Catholics, she examines the ways in which interpretations of emotion shifted from appropriate fear of God to “a manifestation of psychasthenia, a vague and uneasy anxiety.”³² While Bourke considers a cultural shift in interpretations of emotion, I am interested in emotional production, and particularly how performance tactics employed within medieval Last Judgment plays may have activated a conversion of fear into anxiety within spectators.

Shifting spectators from fear to anxiety may have helped these plays better achieve certain devotional goals, especially given how they were usually prefaced by or began with a strong typological narrative.³³ In the case of Chester’s or York’s cycles, evidence suggests that the Last Judgment play was preceded by a series of other pageants that depicted the full Christian master narrative, beginning with the Fall of the Angels and the Creation. Although comprised of fewer plays, Coventry’s production appears to have had a similar structure, with pageants covering biblical episodes from the Annunciation through the Last Judgment. These multi-play events effectively positioned the Last Judgment as the final culminating event in a Christo-centric, teleological history of humankind. York’s play underscores this point by opening with an eighty-line monologue from Deus that recounts key moments in biblical history, thereby reminding spectators of all that they have witnessed during the day-long cycle performance.³⁴ Similarly, the stand-alone play *Jour du Jugement* opens with a 192-line Preacher’s sermon. After briefly summarizing the Creation, fall of Adam and Eve, and the life and death of Jesus, the Preacher situates the Final Judgment typologically:

³¹ Joanna Bourke, “Fear and Anxiety: Writing about Emotion in Modern History,” *History Workshop Journal* 55, no. 1 (2003): 126 (emphasis in original).

³² *Ibid.*, 129, 128.

³³ I believe that the narrative context is critical because many of the nonnarrative medieval spectacles or tableaux vivant that depict hell seem to devote more attention to the tortures, and often depicted these in striking detail. For example, a representation of hell constructed on a barge that traveled down the Arno in Florence in 1304 contained “fires and other punishments and torments . . . and others who appeared like people in the form of naked souls, and they were put in various tortures with very great shouting and screaming and storming.” Likewise, a float of hell included in a 1536 parade in Bourges that preceded a performance of the *Acts of the Apostles* depicted “souls undergoing various torments.” English translation in Meredith and Tailby, eds., *The Staging of Religious Drama*, 67, 91. I analyze this generic difference, and specifically the relationship between modes of production and modes of reception in “Playing with Time’s End: Cultivating Sincere Contrition in Medieval Last Judgment Performances,” in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Early Drama and Performance*, edited by Pamela King (forthcoming, 2016).

³⁴ Beadle, ed., *The York Plays*, 442–44.

He will resuscitate the dead
 and from body and soul will create
 through genuine resurrection
 an extraordinary spectacle.
 This is the day of affliction,
 marked by every bitterness and pain and
 filled with tribulation,
 mentioned by Ezekiel,
 and by the Apostle in his epistle,
 and by all Four Evangelists,
 Daniel and the other prophets,
 the holy fathers and poets.

(Qui les mors resuscitera
 Et de corps et d'ame fera
 Par vraye resurreccion
 Une insoperable vision.
 C'est la journée *trestriteuse*,
Tresamére, tresdoulereuse,
 Plainne de *tribulacion*
 Dont Ezechiés fait mention,
 Et li Apostres en s'espitre,
 Et tuit li quatre Euvangelistre,
 Daniel et autre prophete
 Et li saint Pére et li [poete].) (ll. 89–100; emphasis added)

The repetition of sound—*trestriteuse*, *tresamére*, *tresdoulereuse*, *tribulacion*—rhythmically accentuates the ceaseless nature of hell's torments. Likewise, each “et” the Preacher utters reinforces the many times that the End has been prophesied and therefore the many opportunities that people have had to change their final destiny; the word's repetition sonically grinds this fact into the spectator's body. Given these many admonitions, mercy at the End is unwarranted.

The Preacher then warns spectators about this “day of tears and of dire portent, / a dismal and very horrible day, / a day of misery, a painful day” (*Jours de pleur, de male eürté, / Jours tenebreux et tresorribles, / Jours de misère, jours penibles*) (ll. 104–6) when God “will maintain a fierce and relentless demeanor” (*Con fiers et crueux se tanra*) and “judge according to what is right” (*Si jugera il droitement*) (ll. 124, 127). The prologue ends with a detailed preview of the events of the Apocalypse, “just as Saint John bears witness to it / in his book” (*Si con le tesmoingne en son livre / Saint Jehans*) (ll. 170–71).

There were likely many reasons to open a play with this kind of monologue. Pragmatically, it helped focus the audience; the Preacher's first lines in the *Jour du Jugement* are “[c]alm down, fair gentle folk: / It would be neither a pleasant nor a worthy spectacle / were you to make noise here” (*Faites paiz, belle douce gent, / Pas ne seroit ne bel ne gent / Se vous faisies yci noise*) (ll. 1–3). Yet, these preliminaries, whether a single monologue or a series of plays, were also crucial to framing the Final Judgment as a Christian event prefigured by the Old Testament prophets and thus as the culmination of a larger supercessionist salvation narrative. Therefore, before reenactments of the frightening End Times events actually began, the audience had been primed to view this End to human history through Christ's salvation promise for believers—a promise that might leave some Christian spectators, despite all warnings to the contrary, feeling somewhat secure about their eternal fates.

However, the play is largely meaningless if the audience feels this certainty. The devotional goals of these plays require each spectator to feel the very real possibility of damnation. Scare tactics that provoked fear were certainly one means of achieving that goal. Yet, the plays' designers could not rely too heavily on the kinds of representational tactics often used to evoke such fear; scholars have noted that "the relationship between artwork and audience is particularly complex when the subject matter is the Last Judgment" because to be effective, the audience cannot empathize or identify too strongly with the characters, but must still experience the event "as an accurate vision of the closure of history."³⁵ A kind of oscillation is therefore required between spectating *in* the present and feeling the future *as* present—an oscillation activated by the kind of shift from physical to spiritual sense that Williamson describes. Consequently, despite all of their spectacularity, Last Judgment plays were also replete with absences—with things that did not appear physically or visually onstage, but whose presences were still very much a part of the spectator's felt reality of the performance.³⁶ It is in these absences where fear slides into anxiety, a shift intended to leave spectators feeling vulnerable to the Last Judgment threat, and, by doing so, to foster belief in a historical prewritten future whose physical and material reality must be felt though also necessarily remain deferred.

The Threatening Edge

By maneuvering spectators between encounters with presence and with absence, producers of these plays used a dramaturgy of threat to reenact the Last Judgment future into felt reality. Brian Massumi explains that "[t]hreat is not real in spite of its nonexistence. It is superlatively real, because of it."³⁷ Threat "has an impending reality in the present," it is "affective," and "[w]hat is not actually real can be felt into being."³⁸ Accordingly, Massumi contends that threat's power is not located in its mimetic presentation (this is what differentiates it from danger), but instead in the physical performances it triggers in agitated bodies.³⁹ Those responses validate the threat while also making its "felt reality . . . so superlatively real that it translates into a felt certainty about the world, even in the absence of other grounding for it in the observable world."⁴⁰ And yet, "[t]here is always a remainder of uncertainty. . . . The present is shadowed by a remaindered surplus of indeterminate potential for a next event running forward back to the future, self-renewing."⁴¹ Absence and futurity are therefore crucial to threat's affective value.

³⁵ Sheingorn and Bevington, "Alle This Was Token Domysday to Drede," 142.

³⁶ Other scholars have examined absence as it relates to emotionology and medieval devotion. For example, Robert Davis has examined the function of absence, of "feeling nothing," in late medieval Passion meditation. Arguing that scholarship has tended to equate medieval affective devotion with a particular kind of "emotional self-presencing," he suggests that certain texts reveal how affect was also "engendered through meditation on both presence and absence," with "an 'experience' of absence" sometimes being the goal. Davis, "Feeling Nothing: Affect and Absence in Late Medieval Passion Meditation," lecture delivered on 23 January 2014, sponsored by the Center for Medieval Studies of Fordham University. Thanks to Professor Davis for generously sharing the transcript of his lecture and for allowing me to cite it here.

³⁷ Brian Massumi, "The Future Birth of the Affective Fact: The Political Ontology of Threat," in *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 53.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 54.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 59, 64.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 53.

Much of medieval Christian drama wrestled with issues of absence, and specifically with, in Jody Enders's words, "what is probably the greatest tale of absent presence of all time: the story of Christ."⁴² The earliest *Visitatio* liturgical dramas, which depict the three Marys visiting the empty tomb on Easter morning, reflected "the widespread medieval fascination with how a body like Christ's might speak from its crypt."⁴³ Moreover, as Enders notes, medieval theology characterized hell by God's absence, an absence that she suggests may have been "most keenly felt . . . in the theater designed to glorify him."⁴⁴ Most biblical plays generated that feeling by giving "voices to the mute and presence to the absent."⁴⁵

Last Judgment plays contributed to this tradition: Christ's descent to earth and his physical presence among, and even physical engagement with, humankind represent a striking moment of divine presence. Writing about York's Last Judgment play, Pamela King argues that it "enacts for all time and from a heavenly perspective, the moment of consecration of the Host, when Christ comes among his people";⁴⁶ Christ's physical return to earth at the End evokes his physical presence in the Eucharist. This sacramental element is present, to different degrees, in all of the Last Judgment plays.

However, hovering over this salvation promise is the final judgment's threat, which rests on a unique future-oriented relationship between presence and absence. Writing in the late sixth century, Gregory the Great maintained that "[n]ow [God] is not seen, and is near, then He shall be seen, and shall not be near. He hath not yet appeared in judgment, and if He be sought, He is found. For in a wonderful way, when He appeareth in judgment He is at once able to be seen, and unable to be found" (*Modo enim non videtur, et prope est; tunc videbitur, et prope non erit. Necdum in iudicio apparuit, et si quaeritur, invenitur. Nam miro modo cum in iudicio apparuerit, et videri potest, et non potest inveniri*).⁴⁷ Gregory's verbs slide from the more precise indicative mood to passive infinitives—"to be seen" and "to be found"—as he navigates these complicated shifts in time and presence.

This unique tension between the visible and invisible at the Last Judgment may be one reason that plays about this event developed relatively late in the history of medieval biblical drama, not appearing until the late eleventh century. When they did emerge, it happened during a significant cultural shift toward interpreting "present behavior in its relation to eternal destiny," with a new focus on individual penance.⁴⁸ No longer

⁴²Jody Enders, *The Medieval Theater of Cruelty: Rhetoric, Memory, Violence* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), 76. In this book, especially in chapter 2, Enders examines the relationship between memory and absence, particularly as it relates to violence (71–82). She argues that "mnemotechnics makes things present by requiring that they first be absent" (75). For an excellent study of the heterogeneous nature of representation in the early Middle Ages and how drama was a means of grappling with the complicated nexus of representation, spirituality, presence, and visibility, see Michal Kobiakka, *This Is My Body: Representational Practices in the Early Middle Ages* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999).

⁴³Enders, *The Medieval Theater of Cruelty*, 76.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 78.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 76.

⁴⁶Pamela King, *The York Mystery Cycle and the Worship of the City* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2006), 28.

⁴⁷*Moralia* XVIII, 15, as transcribed in *Patrologiae Latinae*, ed. J. P. Migne, vol. 76 (Paris: Apud Garnier Fratres, 1878), 46. English translation from the Lectionary Central website, *Morals on the Book of Job by St. Gregory the Great*, ed. John Henry Parker, J. G. F., and J. Rivington (1844), available at <http://www.lectionarycentral.com/GregoryMoralia/Book18.html>. Also quoted in Sheingorn, "For God is Such a Doomsman," 36.

⁴⁸Sheingorn, "For God Is Such a Doomsman," 17.

was it assumed that being a Christian guaranteed salvation; instead, intentions became crucial when evaluating a person's actions. As Susan Kramer explains, "[w]hile earlier penitential theories had been concerned primarily with imposing works of satisfaction, late-eleventh- and early-twelfth-century theories placed increased emphasis on the penitent's state of mind and whether or not the sinner was truly contrite."⁴⁹ Accordingly, the eschatological threat could no longer be resolved through visible actions, behaviors, and emotional displays. As the Preacher in the *Jour du Jugement* warns,

No one is so untainted by sin
 that he should not tremble on that day,
 for at that time the *private thoughts*
 of everyone will be *displayed*.
 If a man has but a single sin,
 yet will it be *uncovered*,
 for the books will be *opened* that
 contain all their *thoughts*.

(Nuls n'est ja de pechié si mondes
 Qu'il ne tramble a celle journée,
 Et adont sera *démonstrée*
 La *conscience* de chascun.
 Se uns homs de pechié n'a c'un,
 Si sera il tout *descouvert*,
 Quar li livre seront *ouvert*
 De trestoute[s] leur *conscience[s]*.) (ll. 112–19; emphasis added)

The language here emphasizes displaying (*démonstrée*), exposing (*descouvert*), and opening up to public view (*ouvert*) not just any thoughts, but one's innermost thoughts, desires, and feelings—one's conscience. Likewise, Sarah Beckwith suggests that in York's play, goodness is not determined merely by actions, since "the good souls have certainly done bad things, as they are aware"; instead, the goodness of these souls is "defined by the direction of their wills. . . . Their sincerity comes not from a quantification of good deeds, but rather an awareness of their own sin." Alternatively, bad souls are damned because "they look for ways not to know themselves, to hide from the imminent judgment."⁵⁰ The issue of salvation does not merely pertain to what can be seen by others—good or bad acts—but now revolves around what is invisible and what can only be known and felt in one's conscience. While all will eventually be revealed by God at the final judgment, only those who in life have acknowledged their sins and felt true contrition will be saved. Arguably, the threat of the End was now about absence—the absence of this sincere interior feeling.

As Pamela Sheingorn notes, "clergy quickly realized that fear of the Last Judgment could motivate contrition" and consequently apocalyptic imagery became more ubiquitous in church art, with many of these images containing "horrifying scenes of

⁴⁹ Susan R. Kramer, "'We Speak to God with Our Thoughts': Abelard and the Implications of Private Communication with God," *Church History* 69, no. 1 (2000): 20–21. Karen Wagner also notes that "[b]y the 12th century, *compunctio* and *contrition* are front and centre in discussions of penance" (218); see her "*Cum Aliquis Venerit Ad Sacerdotem*: Penitential Experience in the Central Middle Ages," in *A New History of Penance*, ed. Abigail Firey (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 201–18. Sheingorn makes a related claim in "For God Is Such a Doomsman," 38.

⁵⁰ Sarah Beckwith, *Signifying God: Social Relation and Symbolic Act in the York Corpus Christi Plays* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 111–12.

hell's torment."⁵¹ Yet, that same tactic is not employed in most of the medieval plays; while the plays often contain descriptive language about hell, and producers seem to have had the technical capabilities to bring hell's terrible torments to life, the interior of hell is usually absent from the stage picture. As Emerson and Hult write, "[l]ike many other plays that deal with Hell, the *Jour du Jugement* does not enact the punishments within Hell but instead briefly describes them."⁵² Spectators see the doorway or mouth of an unseen hell into which the damned souls are eventually led, but are themselves left visually and physically poised at its edge; hell's punishments remain just offstage. They may be heard, but they seem to be visually absent from the stage space, becoming what Andrew Sofer might call "the 'not there' yet 'not not there'" of the play, whose "gravitational effects" urge spectators from feeling fear to anxiety.⁵³ Indeed, offstage sounds from hell could enhance the unpredictability of this visually and physically absent threat, thereby increasing a spectator's anxiety.

Like all threats, the threat of hell—eternal torments with the certain absence of God—must remain deferred. I propose, however, that moments of anxiety triggered by absences were opportunities for spectators to *feel* this threat into being. The dramaturgical use of tactical absence to cultivate this threat is apparent in even the earliest metaphorical performances of the Last Judgment. Liturgical *Sponsus* plays that emerged in the eleventh century presented this event through the allegory of the wise and foolish virgins. The theme was *vigilant* (and I would say *anxious*) watchfulness—Jesus, the bridegroom, is coming, but nobody knows when; therefore all must remain alert. As Sheingorn notes, *Sponsus* plays used strategies like simultaneous action to make the audience complicit in the foolish virgins' failure. She explains that "[i]f the bridegroom receives the wise virgins while the foolish virgins process . . . and if [during this] the attention of the audience is held by the lament of the foolish virgins, then the audience too will have failed . . . by not 'looking out for the coming of the judge.'"⁵⁴ The central

⁵¹ Sheingorn, "For God Is Such a Doomsman," 38, 41.

⁵² Emerson and Hult, trans. and eds., *Antichrist and Judgment Day*, xxv. One exception is the Rouergue Last Judgment, which contains a lengthy scene in hell. After Christ delivers his final judgment, damning the sinful souls to hell, they are heard from inside hell groaning and howling. A bit later, devils reemerge from the bottom of hell, and, one by one, they bring out different vices in order to torture them. Some are made to swallow molten lead (Pride) or silver (Avarice), while others are thrown into a fire (Anger) as the devils dance. During this series of scenes, jubilant violent torture appears to dominate the stage. However, silence is also employed, perhaps to heighten the impact of the torture; stage directions note that the devils torture some of the vices, such as Pride, "in silence" (*sans dire mot*). There are also suggestions of oscillation between the visible and hidden. For example, after all of the vices are tortured, they are put into the pit that is sealed. Then "the devils begin to turn the wheels [of the torments] and bring iron pitchforks and gaffs to torment the souls inside when anyone pokes his head out of the pit because of the pressure, and those within throw fire and smoke out of the hole when it is time to speak." Moreover, the text indicates that during the torture scenes, the vices, which had previously been played by actors, were replaced by marionettes; the actors speak while hidden behind a throne set piece. Although there are many possible reasons for this choice, one may have been the desire to maintain a degree of cognitive or empathetic distance for the spectators. We might interpret this shift as urging another kind of shift in register. Translations of the stage directions are in Meredith and Tailby, eds., *The Staging of Religious Drama*, 111. For a transcription of the original Provençal, see Lazar, ed., *Le Jugement Dernier*.

⁵³ These phrases are borrowed from Andrew Sofer's analysis of what he calls "dark matter," "the invisible forces at work in the world of the performance or play, such as characters who never appear, events that take place offstage, noises off, [or] the narrated past" (333). See Sofer, "Spectral Readings," *Theatre Journal* 64, no. 3 (2012): 332, 333 (emphasis in original); see also Sofer, *Dark Matter: Invisibility in Drama, Theater, and Performance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013).

⁵⁴ Sheingorn, "For God Is Such a Doomsman," 34.

moment hinges on a relationship between visibility and invisibility, between presence and absence, which the performances allow spectators to experience physically.

Although the later medieval plays, such as the English pageants and the *Jour du Jugement*, used more realistic and literal representations to provoke fear, these also employed absences strategically—staging threats of hell’s torments rather than the torments themselves—in order to generate anxiety. The Hell Mouth illustrates this quite clearly. Several records of Hell Mouths from medieval and early modern drama exist, among them images in Renwart Cysat’s 1583 stage plans for the first and second days of Lucerne’s Passion play and in a drawing by Hubert Cailleau of the northern French Valenciennes Passion play (1547).⁵⁵ Staging notes for another French Passion play, this one produced in Metz in 1437, describe a Hell Mouth that “opened and closed of its own accord when the devils wanted to go in or come out of it. And this great head had two great steel eyes which glittered wonderfully” (*elle se ouvroit et reclooit seule quand les diables y voullioient entrer ou issir. Et avoit celle hure deux gros yeulx d’acier qui reluisoient a merveille*).⁵⁶ Among evidence explicitly related to Last Judgment plays, there is a 1433 guild record detailing the set, props, and costumes for York’s Last Judgment pageant, which specifically notes a Hell Mouth,⁵⁷ and the documents related to Coventry’s Last Judgment pageant. King and Davidson note that a Hell Mouth property “appears prominently in the dramatic records of the Drapers’ company [and] was frequently repaired, repainted, and re-made.”⁵⁸ Moreover, after 1566, the Drapers appear to have paid a person to manage the fire and smoke at the Hell Mouth.⁵⁹ When it is not clear whether or not a Hell Mouth was used, the extant records sometimes suggest a dramaturgical emphasis on the threshold of this abyss; for instance, those hired to build Modane’s play were contracted to “make and supply fireworks . . . for each of the devils every time they emerge from Hell” (*Feront et fourniront des fusées . . . à chacun des diables toutes les fois qu’ils sortiront de l’enfer*), and to “make a great blaze of fire and noise every time the devils take some dead to Hell” (*feront grand flambée de feu et bruit toutes les fois que les diables porteront quelques morts en enfer*).⁶⁰

These set pieces, along with the fire and other effects that often accompanied them, allowed these performances to play at the edge of hell’s violence. The gaping maw embellished by smoke and flames heightened the threat of what lay within and possibly

⁵⁵ Cysat’s design appears in Luzern, Zentralbibliothek, MSS L Sc I: 20 and 21. Cailleau’s drawing appears in Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris: Valenciennes MS Français 12536, fols. 1v-2r. As William Tydeman notes of this second image, “[t]here is much difference of opinion among scholars as to the accuracy and reliability of the drawing, but it compares positively with the data from Mons”; see Tydeman, ed., *The Medieval European Stage, 500–1550* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 550–51. Reproductions of Cysat’s images are also reproduced by Tydeman on pp. 381–82.

⁵⁶ The English translation is in Meredith and Tailby, eds., *The Staging of Religious Drama*, 90. Original text from Louis Petit de Julleville, *Histoire du Théâtre en France: Les Mystères*, vol. 2 (Paris: Hachette, 1880), 13.

⁵⁷ Alexandra F. Johnston and Margaret Rogerson, eds., *Records of Early English Drama: York*, 2 vols. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), 55. For a detailed analysis of this record, see Johnston and Margaret Dorrell, “The Doomsday Pageant of the York Mercers, 1433,” *Leeds Studies in English* 5 (1971): 29–34, and “The York Mercers and Their Pageant of Doomsday, 1433–1526,” *Leeds Studies in English* 6 (1972): 10–35; and Peter Meredith, “The Development of the York Mercers’ Pageant Waggon,” *Medieval English Theatre* 1 (1979): 5–18.

⁵⁸ King and Davidson, eds., *The Coventry Corpus Christi Plays*, 50.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* For a transcription of the original record, see *Records of Early English Drama: Coventry*, ed. R. W. Ingram (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), 237.

⁶⁰ The English translation is in Meredith and Tailby, eds., *The Staging of Religious Drama*, 105; the original text is from Gros, *Étude sur le Mystère de L’Antéchrist*, 29.

even tempted spectators with the subversively playful, yet menacing bodies of devils running in and out. And while some medieval plays also presented heaven onstage, typically also as a threshold or entryway,⁶¹ the raucous activity and stage effects like fireworks that surrounded the Hell Mouth likely gave this threshold a more compelling material and sensual presence in the world of the play.

Moreover, in all of the extant English plays, the damned and devils appear to receive far more stage time than the blessed and the angels. The same is true in the *Jour du Jugement*, which gives sinful actions and characters far more emphasis. Emerson and Hult argue that this and other eschatological plays “necessarily accentuate the negative,” and thus in the *Jour du Jugement*, “the sinners—Antichrist, the multitude of his followers, and the vast majority of those judged—seem more important than the virtuous. Even the devils are not so much defeated but contained, remaining as eternal punishers of the damned, who by far outnumber the saved.”⁶² They also note that the angels are depersonalized and only numbered, while the devils are differentiated through vivid symbolic names.⁶³ Even when the blessed characters and angels do appear or speak about God’s protection, these scenes almost always contain dire warnings about imminent threats:

Be care not to pay any attention
to [Antichrist] or to those perfidious miracles of his
for it is a poisonous draught, not a healing elixir,
which will completely pollute
all those who place their trust in him

(Gardez n’i mettez vostre estude
En li n’en ces mauvais miracles,
Quar c’est velins, non pas traicles,
Qui trestout envelismera
La gent qu’en li se fierà). (ll. 528–32)

Furthermore, at the end of the play, after God sentences all souls to heaven or hell, many more speeches are directed at the damned to remind them of their sins and the eternal punishments awaiting them. Therefore, while dualism is often evident in the dramatic structure of these plays and may have been reinforced through staging choices, in performance, the theatrical energy likely emerged from and circulated around the devils, the damned, and the entryway to hell.

Sharing the space for so long with the disorderly, yet entertaining and potentially tempting devils may have raised anxiety; such temptations are, certainly, among the things that can pollute the blessed. However, I would also propose that a dynamic interplay between the seen and unseen is critical. Having so much stage time devoted to the damned, but never seeing them actually face their fate in hell, might generate anxiety. So also, sound and movement to and around the visually elaborate Hell Mouth—the frenetic activity outside juxtaposed against the still void within—may have cultivated within spectators an unsettled anxiety by leaving them on the precipice of eternal destiny and thereby stoking uncertainty about where they will be at their own

⁶¹ Thanks to Megan Sanborn Jones for prompting me to think more about heaven’s absence from the stage and how it relates to my arguments about threat.

⁶² Emerson and Hult, trans. and eds., *Antichrist and Judgment Day*, xiii.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, ix.

End—a future that they know has already been written. In this way, a dramaturgy of threat is used to produce anxiety that will give the Last Judgment's eternal (yet deferred) future threat a felt reality in the present.

Reenacting the Future

Other scholars have studied performances that allow participants to live through possible future events.⁶⁴ In those cases, the goal is often to convince people to change their present attitudes or actions in order to avoid terrible consequences, or else it is to simulate one of several possible future narratives so that people are prepared to react appropriately if a similar event occurs. Christian End Times performances operate in a somewhat different temporal register, aiming to reenact a historical event, but one whose actuality remains deferred even as it must also resonate in the spectator's body with the same degree of reality as does the historical past: spectators must experience this reenacted future not as possibility, but as a felt historical certainty.⁶⁵

Perhaps the only way to give that kind of future an affective reality is to feel its absence, to feel anxious about its *not* not there-ness. Last Judgment plays definitely used scare tactics and instilled fear—fear that kept spectators perceiving in the physical present. But the plays also seemed designed to cultivate a different kind of feeling, one that might carry the audience “from contemporary time into eschatological time, [into] the intersection of the timeless with time.”⁶⁶ By creating meaningful religious experiences of a future event that the targeted Christian spectators considered inevitable, these plays staged a future that was already written.

Accordingly, the devotional memory that these plays archived within the spectator might be understood as what Ann Kaplan calls “future-tense trauma.”⁶⁷ She analyzes how the narrator in dystopian films “interpellates the viewer of the film as a future human being” in order to depict “what our future will be unless humans change.”⁶⁸ By demanding “that viewers experience futurist traumatic scenarios,” Kaplan believes that these films may change “public consciousness through vicarious witnessing.”⁶⁹ In this

⁶⁴ Scott Magelssen, *Simming: Participatory Performance and the Making of Meaning* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014); Tracy C. Davis, *Stages of Emergency: Cold War Nuclear Civil Defense* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007). Two other compelling studies that examine futurity in performance are: José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: NYU Press, 2009); and Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (London: Routledge, 2001).

⁶⁵ With respect to the German-language tradition, both Hildegard Elisabeth Keller and Elke Koch have examined how these plays elide a staged, enacted future and an experienced present. See Keller, “‘Losendt obenthür’: Weltgerichtsspiele als Aktualisierungsmedien der Zeit: Am Beispiel des ‘Berner Weltgerichtsspiels’ und des ‘Churer Weltgerichtsspiels,’” in *Ritual und Inszenierung: Geistliches und weltliches Drama des Mittelalters und der Frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Hans-Joachim Ziegeler (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2004), 49–70; and Koch, “Endzeit als Ereignis: Zur Performativität von Drohung und Verheißung im Weltgerichtsspiel des späten Mittelalters,” in *Drohung und Verheißung: Mikroprozesse in Verhältnissen von Macht und Subjekt*, ed. Evamaria Heisler, Elke Koch, and Thomas Scheffer (Freiburg: Rombach, 2007), 234–62. For a discussion of these sources, see Glenn Ehrstine, “German Drama,” in *Oxford Bibliographies Online*, available at <http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/>.

⁶⁶ Sheingorn and Bevington, “Alle This Was Token Domysday to Drede,” 143–44.

⁶⁷ E. Ann Kaplan, “Trauma Studies Moving Forward: Interdisciplinary Perspectives,” *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* 27, no. 2 (2013): 53–65, quote on 53.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 60, 64.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 64.

case, future-tense trauma aspires toward change in order to stop a possible disastrous future. With Last Judgment plays, the future event is predetermined and therefore the spectator must feel vulnerable not to the event itself, but to the timeless threat beyond it.⁷⁰ The plays achieve this by leaving spectators poised at its edge, archiving that future threat in the spectator's body as traumatic anxiety.

Although fear can certainly initiate trauma, anxiety's distinctive emotional valence is uniquely valuable, given what Sianne Ngai calls its "flatness or ongoingness" and often strange "status as an affect without determinate object or target."⁷¹ Moreover, as she notes, anxiety is "averted, deferred for analysis to a future which never arrives" and therefore has a special future-oriented temporality.⁷² In the prevalent ancient and medieval theories of emotion, anxiety and fear are usually related. For example, as Simo Knuuttila demonstrates, the influential and widely circulated medical compendium *Pantegni*, initially compiled by Constantine of Africa in the eleventh century, lists six emotions as relevant to medicine because they had physiological consequences. Two of them—joy and anger—are paired because they "are associated with the movement of the vital spirit from the heart to the extreme parts," while fear (*timor*) and anxiety (*angustia*) are paired because they are associated "with the movement toward the heart."⁷³ However, while fear and anxiety share directionality, they differ in intensity: anxiety, like joy, is categorized as slow, while fear and anger are quick.⁷⁴ Therefore both fear and anxiety produce physiological effects that drive into the heart, but anxiety has a slow and thus perhaps deferred quality that may allow it to linger into the future. Moreover, several medieval theories classified anxiety (*fatigatio*; *agonia*) as a particular type of fear—the fear of failure.⁷⁵ Anxiety about the final judgment could easily be interpreted as a slow-burning, future-oriented fear of failing—of failing to have a sincere innermost feeling, of failing to have a true "conscience" and thus of failing God at the End.

By the eleventh and twelfth centuries, many theologians, such as Bernard of Clairvaux, considered affective devotional experiences "as the ground for certainty concerning one's salvific status."⁷⁶ Sarah McNamer has discussed this phenomenon in her work on medieval compassion, demonstrating that an array of affective devotional texts from this period were designed "to teach their readers . . . how to feel."⁷⁷ Arguing

⁷⁰ As Bernard McGinn explains, "[t]he apocalyptic view of history is far from any modern idea of progress: no form of human effort within history prepares for the End, but it is still this end, understood as pure divine irruption, which gives meaning to the whole. . . . What sets apocalyptic eschatology apart from its biblical predecessors . . . is its conviction of God's absolute and predetermined control over the whole of history, a mystery hidden from all ages but now revealed" (7–8). See McGinn, "John's Apocalypse and the Apocalyptic Mentality," in *The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, ed. Richard Emmerson and Bernard McGinn (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), 3–19. For more work on medieval Christian eschatology, see the essays in Bynum and Freedman, eds., *Last Things*; Richard Emmerson and Ronald Herzman, *The Apocalyptic Imagination in Medieval Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992); and Stephen O'Leary, *Arguing the Apocalypse: A Theory of Millennial Rhetoric* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

⁷¹ Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 7, 246.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 209.

⁷³ Simo Knuuttila, *Emotions in Ancient and Medieval Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 215.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 109, 233.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 204.

⁷⁷ Sarah McNamer, *Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 2.

“for a performative model of affect as the default mode for this period,” she shows how certain forms of devotional literature functioned as intimate scripts designed to produce emotional responses in the reader that would “prove her . . . worthiness to him who sees her heart.”⁷⁸ In these cases, a strong, ardent inner emotion—“a deeply felt compassion”—provided both the reader and God with certainty about the devotee’s interior state.⁷⁹

Emerging in this same period, Last Judgment plays may have aimed at a related though opposite goal. They also functioned as “scripts for the performance of feeling—scripts that often explicitly aspire to performative efficacy”;⁸⁰ however, rather than stability and certainty, I argue that the emotion scripts of Last Judgment plays were designed to evacuate or diffuse emotion. While earthquakes, fires, devils, and descriptions of torture provoked a strong, quick-moving physical fear of God’s judgment, the absences onstage—those things that remained unseen, often just out of view—produced in spectators a more unsettling, restless, slow-moving anxiety that left them uncertain of their inner spiritual state. Rather than the sure, focused fear of hell’s punishments, spectators were urged to feel an indeterminate, ongoing anxiety about whether they were truly worthy of salvation. And it was this feeling of uncertainty that could make the End Times threat into an affective fact.

Although this anxiety was cause for individual concern, it could also serve as an effective equalizer. As Bourke asserts, emotions “mediate between the individual and the social. . . . Emotions lead to a negotiation of the boundaries between self and other or one community and another. They align individuals with communities.”⁸¹ Fear, in particular, “sorts people into positions of social hierarchy.”⁸² She explains that “[e]motion-displays of fear are exercises of power: who becomes frightened and what is the outcome of their displays” matters to the “power of particular institutions and their diverse discourses.”⁸³ Alternatively, anxiety’s indeterminacy, its “uncertainty,”⁸⁴ and, as Sara Ahmed suggests, its “detachment from one given object” that allows it “to accumulate,”⁸⁵ may collapse these social hierarchies.

Those producing medieval Last Judgment plays were usually members of the laity; this was almost certainly true of all the English pageants. Even if the play itself was written by clergy, the production needs necessitated that laity were significantly involved in its design, management, and performance—the contract from Modane providing one clear example. Consequently, many of the dramaturgical choices that I have discussed may have been made and subsequently deployed by the laity.

If these lay producers did indeed seek to shift spectators from fear to anxiety, perhaps they were motivated by the desire to foster a more inclusive emotional community among spectators, a devotional community that might even recall an earlier mode of ritual performance. As Clifford Flanagan explains, the early, pre-medieval Christian liturgy was “not only oriented toward the future,” but was considered “the actual experience of that future,” one in which collective “participation of the congregation”

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 13, 49.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁸¹ Bourke, “Fear and Anxiety,” 124.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 129.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 127.

⁸⁵ Sara Ahmed, “Affective Economies,” *Social Text* 22, no. 2 (2004): 125.

was the “model for understanding liturgical actions.”⁸⁶ However, in the early medieval period, and definitely by the high and late Middle Ages, when Last Judgment plays were performed, the liturgy had become “preoccupied with commemorating past events, especially the life of Jesus,” and firmly connected the divine presence almost exclusively with “the words and actions of the [priestly] hierarchy rather than with those of the worshipping community.”⁸⁷ In this way, the medieval liturgy mitigated the laity’s intimate ritual access not only to the body and presence of Christ, but also to what Flanagan calls the earlier liturgy’s “orientation toward a future breaking into the present by virtue of cultic acts.”⁸⁸

Scholars have analyzed how public events like Corpus Christi processions or medieval plays that depicted biblical events like the Crucifixion gave lay spectators a degree of unmediated access to the body of Christ—access that the clergy otherwise controlled.⁸⁹ Other work has demonstrated how the laity took it upon themselves to forge opportunities for such access by exerting control over church spaces, developing personal rituals, and interacting with devotional books and objects in sophisticated, idiosyncratic ways that at times challenged the Church’s orthodoxy.⁹⁰ The medieval Last Judgment plays may reflect a different strategy for achieving a similar goal, one that represented, in some respect, an affective return to the earlier pre-medieval liturgical model for cultivating a devotional community oriented toward the future.

Those who produced these plays may have used a dramaturgy of threat to construct a different kind of emotional community than did the medieval liturgy, an emotional community in which all could participate and be implicated in equally. By cultivating anxiety, the plays could yield new emotional alignments, creating a devotional community of Christians that merged classes and dissolved social boundaries, such as that between clergy and laity. In this way, the performances may have forged new,

⁸⁶ C. Clifford Flanagan, “The Apocalypse and the Medieval Liturgy,” in Emmerson and McGinn, eds., *The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, 340–41, 349.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 342, 349.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 343.

⁸⁹ Examples include: Sarah Beckwith, *Christ’s Body: Identity, Culture and Society in Late Medieval Writings* (London: Routledge, 1993), and *Signifying God*; Gail McMurray Gibson, *The Theater of Devotion: East Anglian Drama and Society in the Late Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); Sponsler, *Drama and Resistance*; and Jill Stevenson, *Performance, Cognitive Theory, and Devotional Culture: Sensual Piety in Late Medieval York* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

⁹⁰ For example, although a rood screen physically separated laypeople from the Elevation of the Host during worship and in doing so partially obscured their visual access, there are accounts from the Middle Ages of laypeople running from church to church to see the Elevation as many times as they could in a day, thereby creating different rhythms of worship than those officially prescribed by the Mass; see Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, 1400–1580* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 97–99. There are many primary and secondary sources that demonstrate degrees of spiritual agency within lay devotion, among them: *The Book of Margery Kempe*, trans. B. A. Windeatt (New York: Penguin, 1985); Claire Cross Barnwell and Ann Rycraft, eds., *Mass and Parish in Late Medieval England: The Use of York* (Reading, UK: Spire Books, 2005); Katherine French, *The People of the Parish: Community Life in a Late Medieval English Diocese* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001); Gervase Rosser, “Communities of Parish and Guild in the Late Middle Ages,” in *Parish, Church and People: Local Studies in Lay Religion, 1350–1750*, ed. Susan Wright (London: Hutchinson 1988), 29–55; Eamon Duffy, *Marking the Hours: English People and Their Prayers, 1240–1570* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006); Susan Foister, “Private Devotion,” in *Gothic Art for England, 1400–1547*, ed. Richard Marks and Paul Williamson (London: V&A Publications, 2003), 334–36; and Stevenson, *Performance, Cognitive Theory, and Devotional Culture*.

sometimes unexpected alliances,⁹¹ thereby generating (if only for the duration of the play) what Lauren Berlant might call an “intimate public,”⁹² one grounded in the knowledge that all will eventually stand before God to be judged at the End of Time, but that nobody can be absolutely certain of what God will see in their hearts. The emotion-work of these plays therefore aims at the *even-ing* that is at the heart of the Last Judgment account; for in both contemporary and medieval End Times narratives, that great leveling is often the message. In the *Left Behind* book series, even a devoted, Bible-believing pastor is not raptured.⁹³ And as the Chester Last Judgment pageant teaches, at the End, a king, queen, emperor, merchant, judge, and even pope may all find themselves together among the damned.

Medieval religious performances that can make that social *even-ing* a deeply felt reality for all spectators serve a particularly powerful and unique devotional function. On a larger scale, a dramaturgy of threat could be employed in any cultural performance whose goal is to make an ostensibly prewritten future feel real to a diverse and otherwise stratified audience. By cultivating anxious uncertainty through absence, this dramaturgy encourages spectators to see the performance as a reenactment of that future narrative, and thus to experience the reality of that future as a felt certainty.⁹⁴

⁹¹ Ahmed writes that “emotions *do things*, and they align individuals with communities—or bodily space with social space—through the very intensity of their attachments. . . . [E]motions work by sticking figures together (adherence), a sticking that creates the very effect of a collective (coherence)”; see “Affective Economies,” 119 (emphasis in original).

⁹² Lauren Berlant, *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008).

⁹³ Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, *Left Behind: A Novel of the Earth's Last Days* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 1995). This is the first novel in the series of sixteen.

⁹⁴ One example is the political campaign, particularly high-stakes campaigns like those for the US presidency. I interpret these campaigns as cultural performances designed to make a future term with this potential president feel like a prewritten reality. The threat posed by alternative candidates, and the anxious uncertainty that this threat is designed to cultivate in voters, is a crucial part of that performance. Significantly, this threat is usually constructed dramaturgically, most often by means of tactical absences—unspoken and unseen elements—rather than through present, tangible facts and examples.