Medieval Disability Sourcebook

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Croxton \textit{Play of the Sacrament}^1 (ca. 1461–1546)  

\textit{Contributed by Cameron Hunt McNabb}

\section*{Introduction^2}

The Croxton \textit{Play of the Sacrament} stages the story of a Jewish merchant Jonathas and his companions as they purchase the Host, put it through a series of trials to test the Real Presence, and ultimately convert to Christianity. It is also a spectacle of theater, with bleeding cauldrons and exploding ovens. But an overlooked source of the play's theatricality is its representation of disability. The play explores both physical and mental disability primarily through its Jewish protagonists' grappling with doubt over the transubstantiation of the Host. Such disabling doubt manifests in two metaphors: Jonathas' dismembered hand and the Jews' descriptions of their "wode"-ness (or "madness").

In the first case, during one of the trials Jonathas and the other Jews put the Host through, the Host adheres to Jonathas' hand, and in Jonathas' attempt to nail it to a post (mimicking the Crucifixion in the Host's "new passyoun" (l. 38)), his own hand is dismembered. When the figure of Jesus appears at the play's end, he moralizes to Jonathas, "on thyn hand thow art but lame, / And ys thowor thy own cruelnese. / For thyn hurt thu mayest thiselfe blame" (770-72). Then Jonathas' physical healing occurs as a direct result of his repentence: "Thow wasthest thyn hart with grete contrycion. / Go to the caw-dron—thi care shal be the lesse— / And to-wche thyn hand to thy savacion" (ll. 775-77). The cause-and-effect relationship between doubt and disability, belief and healing in the play supports Edward Wheatley's religious model, as the Church—through the forgiveness of Jesus and the Bishop in the play—controls the means of physical and spiritual restoration. However, Jonathas' experience of disability can also be seen as redemptive. The play aligns him, not the Christian figures, with Christ through their shared "passyoun" (l. 38), and Jonathas' doubt, symbolized by his dismembered hand, is nailed to the symbolic cross, too. The play considers Jonathas and the other Jews culpable for their doubt but also participatory in the work of their redemption.

While Jonathas' dis- and re-memberment spectacularly displays difference (to adapt David T. Mitchell and Sharon Snyder's description of disability as "the difference [that] demands display"), the play's most sustained engagement with disability is actually its deployment of "wode"ness as a metaphor for doubt. Throughout the various trials of the Host, the Jewish protagonists use the word "wode" to describe their disbelief at the Host's miraculous powers. Intriguingly, though, the word "wode" is first employed to describe the Host itself, which "bledyth as yt were woode" (l. 483), drawing yet another parallel between the doubting Jewish figures and the redeeming Christ. Here, Jonathas and the Host are linguistically linked early in the play, just as they are physically linked later in his dismemberment. Moreover, Jonathas' initial description of the sacred, holy Host as "wode" before his own confession of disbelief as "woodnesse" (l. 502) highlights madness, and disability generally, as a subjective category. "Wode"ness may be in the eye of the beholder. By the play's end, though, the Jews' conversions appear to heal their madness, as the figure of Jesus instructs them to "kepe my commandementes in your thow-
ght. / And unto my Godhed to take credence [belief, trust]” (ll. 729–30), and Jonathas’ mental restoration parallels his the physical healing of his hand.

The play’s exploration of disability demonstrates the category’s complexity and ambivalence in late medieval England. The Christian merchant Aristorius initially frames the play’s construct of doubt as disability and Christ as cure, much in the Christus medicus tradition. Two announcers open the play with the prayer that “Jhesu yow sawe from treyn [suffering] and tene [pain]” (l. 76; omitted below) and Aristorius opens the play with the line, “Now Cryst that ys our Cre-tour from shame He cure us” (l. 81). Moreover, the play aligns the Host specifically with healing, as the Clerk remarks that bread and wine “ys holesom, as sayeth the fesycyon” (l. 343). However, in Aristorius’ selling of the Host to Jonathas, he becomes one who “from shame He [will] cure,” and the play questions many of the rigid categories initially invoked. The Croxton Play of the Sacrament does align doubt with disability and posits orthodox faith as the only cure; however, in the process, it also evokes striking similarities between doubter and believer and casts both as essential in the work of redemption.

Bibliography


The Namys and Numbere of the Players

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Nine may play yt at ease.

[Two announcers give a summary of the play to advertise its performance]

Explicit.° Here after foloweth the Play of
the Conversyon of Ser Jonathas the Jewe
by Myracle of the Blyssed Sacrament.

81 ARISTORIUS Now Cryst that ys our
Creatour from shame He cure us.
He maynteyn us with myrth that meve°
on the molde,°
Unto Hys endelesse joye myghtly He
restore us.
All tho that in Hys name in peas well
them hold,
For of a merchante most myght therof
my tale ys told:
In Eraclea ys non suche whoso wyll
understond,
For of all Aragon I am most myghty of
sylver and of gold,
For and yt wer a countré to by now
wold I nat wond.°
Syr Arystory ys my name,

90 A merchaunte myghty of a royall araye.
Ful wyde in this worlde spryngyth my
fame,
Fere kend° and knowen—the sothe° for
to saye—
In all maner of londys without ony
naye.

[Aristorius boasts of his riches]

125 PRESBYTER No man shall you tary°
ne trowble thys tyde,°
But every man delygently shall do yow
plesance.°
And I unto my connyng to the best
shall hem guyde
Unto Godes plesyng to serve yow to
attrueaunce.º
For ye be worthy and notable in sub-
stance of good—
130 Of merchauntes of Aragon ye have no
pere—
And therof thank God that dyed on the
Roode,º
That was your makere and hath yow
dere!º
ARISTORIUS Forsoth, syr pryst,
yower talkyng ys good,
And therfor after your talkyng, I wyll
atteynº
To woursheyppe my God that dyed on the
Roode.
Never whyll that I lyve ageynº that whyll
I seyn.º
But Petyr Powle, my clark, I praye thee
goo wele pleynº
Thorowght all Eraelea that thow ne
wondeº
And wytteº yf ony merchaunte be come
to this reyn,º
140 Of Surrey or of Sabé or of Shelysdown.º
CLERICUS At your wyll for to walke, I
wyl not say nay
Smertlyº to go serche at the wateres
syde.
Yf ony plesaunt bargyn be to your paye,
As swyftly as I can, I shall hym to yow
gyde.
Now whyll I walke by thys pathes wyde,
And seke the haven both up and down,
To werteº yf ony onknowth shyppes
therin do ryde,
Of Surrey or of Saby or of Shelysdown.
Now shall the merchants man with-
drawe hym and the Jewe Jon-
athas shall make hys bost.
149 JONATHAS Now almyghty Machom-
et,º marke in thi magesté,
150 Whose lawes tendrely I have to fulfyll
After my dethe, bryng me to thy hyh
seeº
My sowle for to save—yf yt be thy
wyll—
For myn entent ys for to fulfyll.
As my gloryus God, thee to honer,
To do agen thy entent, yt shall grueº
me yll,
Or agen thyn lawe for to reporte.

Jonathas boasts of his riches

189 Jew Jonathas ys my name.
190 Jazon and Jazdon, thei waytyn on my
wyll;
Masfat and Malchus, they do the same.
As ye may knowe, yt ys bothe rycht and
skyll,º
I tell yow all, bi dal and by hylleº
In Eraelea ys noon so moche of myght,
Werfor ye owe tenderli to tende me
tyll.º
For I am chefe merchaunte of Jewes—I
tell yow be ryght!
But Jazon and Jazdon, a mater wollde I
mene.
Mervelously yt ys ment in mynde:
The beleve of thys Cristen men ys false,
as I wene.º
200 For they beleve on a cake—me thynk yt
ys onkyndº —
And all they seye how the prest dothe
yt bynd,º
And beº the myght of hys word make yt
flesh and blode,
And thus be a conceyteº they wolde
make us blynd,
Rode  Cross  a straw...talis a straw for this tale (it's not worth a straw)  
faie  happen  pales  
walls  privey  test, [also] secret place  meve  speak  wyste  knew  cheve  succeed  wyghtly  quick- 
ly  wreke  avenged  ontrewe  antrue  wyles  tricks  wyld  wild, mad  byld  made  bete  bear  byggly  
firmly  bent  determined  castyn  throw  care  pain, sorrow  wyst  known  caste  deliberate  prest  
presed  agast  afraid  paye  satisfaction  jentyll  gentle, noble (pun on Gentile)  arn  are  lynde  linden  
tree  forsayd  aforesaid  pase  way  carpe  tell  sawe  words  attayntyd  condemned
On thes wordys ther law growndyd
hath He,
That He sayd on Shere Thursday° at
Hys sopere:
He brake the brede and sayd, “Accipite,”°
And gave Hys dyscyplys them for to
to chere.
And more He sayd to them there,
Whyle they were all togethere and sum,
Syttyng at the table soo clere.°
“Comedite corpus meum,”
And thys powre He gave Peter to
proclame,
And how the same shuld be suffycyent°
to all prechors—
The bysshoppys and curates saye the
same—
And soo as I understond do all Hys
progenytors.
JASON Yea, sum men in that law re-
herse another:
410 They say of a maydyn borne was Hee,
And how Joachyms dowghter° shuld be
Hys mothere,
And how Gabrell apperyd and sayd,
“Ave”°
And with that worde she shuld concey-
vyd be,”
And that in hyr shuld lyght° the Holy
Gost.
Ageyns owr law thys ys false heresy!
And yett they saye He ys of myghtes
most.
JASDON They saye that Jhesu to be
owr kyng,
But I wene He bowght° that full dere.
But they make a royall aray of Hys
uprysyng,”°
420 And that in every place ys prechyd,
farre and nere.
And how He to Hys dyscyples agayn
dyd appere—
To Thomas and to Mary Mawdelen—
And syth° how He styed” by Hys own
powre.
And thys ye know well ys heresy full
playn!
MASPHAT Yea, and also they say He
sent them wyrt and wisdom
For to understond every langwage.
When the Holy Gost to them came,
They faryd° as dronk men of pymentes
or vernage.°
And sythen how that He lykenyd Hym-
self a Lord of Parage,"°
On Hys Fatherys ryght hond He Hym
sett.
They hold Hym wyser than ever was
Syble° sage
And strenger than Alexander that all
the worlde dedgett.
MALCHUS Yea, yet they saye as fals—I
dare laye° my hedde—
How they that be ded shall com agayn
to Judgement,
And owr dredfull Judge shal be thys
same brede.
And how lyfe everlastyng them shuld
be lent,
And thus they hold all at on consent.°
Because that Phylyppe° sayd for a lytyll
glosse,"°
To turne us from owr beleve ys ther
entent,
440 For that he sayd, “Judicar vivos et mor-
tuos.”°
JONATHAS Now serys, ye have rehearsed the substance of thy lawe,
But thys bred I wold myght be put in a prefe.°
Whether this be He that in Bosra of us had awa,
Ther staynyd were Hys clothys, this may we belefe.
Thys may we know ther had He grefe.°
For owr old bookys veryfy thus,
Theron He was jugett° to be hangyd as a thafe:
"Tinctis Bosra vestibus."°
JASON Yf thys be He that on Calvery was mad red,°
Onto my mynd I shall kenne° yow a conceyt good.
Surely with owr daggars we shall ses on° thys brede,
And so with clowtes° we shall know yf He have eny blood.
JASDON Now, by Machomyth so myghty that mevyth in my mode,°
Thys ys masterly ment thys matter thus to meve.°
And with owr strokys, we shall fray° Hym as He was on the Rood.°
That He was ondon with grett repreve.°
MASPHAT Yea, I pray yow, smyte ye in the myddys° of the cake,
And so shall we smyte theron woundys fyve.
We wyll not spare to wyrke yt wrake,°
To prove in thys brede yf ther be eny lyfe.
MALCHUS Loo, here is fowr galouns of oyle clere.
Have doon fast, blowe up the fere.°
Syr, bryng that ylke° cake nere, Manly, with all yowre myghte.
JONATHAS And I shall bryng the ylke cak,
And throwe yt in I undertake.

prefe test grefe grief jugett judged Tinctis Bosra vestibus “With dyed garments from Bozrah” [Latin; Isaiah 63.1] mad red made red (killed) kenne tell ses on seize on (pun on season) clowtes strokes mevyth moves my mind meve carry out fray attack Rood Cross repreve shame myddys midst, middle wrake harm prene stab lende deliver afze terrorfy pylght promise punche dagger augus an iron-working tool buffett blow bleyke make pale with fear harrow help were confusion woode mad iwys indeed furneys furnace dyght arranged, done fere fire ylke same
Out, out! Yt werkethe me wrake!°
I may not awoyd° yt owt of my hond!
I wynne God in a lake,
And in woodnesse,° I gyynne° to wake:°
I renne, I lepe over this lond!

JASON Renne, felawes, renne for Cok-
kes peyn!°
Fast we had owr mayster agene.
Hold prestly on thyss pleyn,
And faste bynd hyme to a poste.

JASDON Here is an hamer and naylys three, I seye.
Lyffte up his armys, felawe, on hey,"
Whyll I dryve thes nayles, I yow praye,
With strong strokys fast.

MASPHAT Now, set on, felourse, with mayne° and myght
And pluke hys armes awey in fyght.
Wät yfe he twyche," felouse, arght."°
Alas, balys° breweth° ryght bade.

JONATHAS Now have don, felawys,
That ye this harme hawe° hade.

JASON And I shall rape° me redely° anon,
To pluke owt the naylys that stond so fast.
And beare thys bred and also thys bone,
And into the cawdron I wyll yt cast.

MASPHAT And I shall with thyss dagger
so stowte,
Putt yt down that yt myght plawe."°
And steare" the clotho rounde abowte,
That no thyng therof shal be rawe."°

MALCHUS Owt and harow! What devyll ys herein?
All thyss oyle waxyth° redde as blood,
And owt of the cawdron yt begynneth
to run.
I am so aferd, I am nere woode!°

Here shall Jason and hys compenye
goo to Ser Jonathas, sayng:
JASON Ah, master, master! What chere ys° with yow?
I can nott see owr werke wyll avayle.
I beseche yow, avance° yow now.

680 Sumwhatt with yowr counsayle.

JONATHAS The best counsayle that I now wott,°
That I can deme, farre and nere,
Ys to make an ovyn as redd hott
As ever yt can be made with fere.
And when ye see yt soo hott appere,
Then throw yt into the ovyn fast!
Sone shall he stanche° hys bledyng chere.°
When ye have donne stoppe° yt, be not agast.

[They kindle a fire and cast the Host into a hot oven.]

Here the owyn must ryve asunder and blede owt at the cranys° and an image appere owt with woundys bledyng.

713 MASPHAT Owt, owt! Here ys a grete wondere!
Thys ovyn bledyth owt on every syde.
MALCHUS Yea, the ovyn on peacys gynnryth to ryve asundre:
Thys ys a mervelows case, thys tyde!
JESUS O mirabiles Judei attendite et videte
Si est dolor sicut dolor meus.°
Oh, ye mervelows Jewys!
Why ar ye to yowr Kyng onkynd?
And I, so bytterly bowt yow to my blysse.

720 Why fare ye thus fule° with yowre frende?
Why peyne yow me and straytty° me pynde?°
And I, yowr love so derely have bowght.
Why are ye so unstedfast in yor mynde?
Why wrath° ye me, I greve yow nowght?
Why wyll ye nott beleve that I have tawght?
And forsake yor fowle neclence,
And kepe my commandementes in yowr thought,

730 And unto my Godhed to take credence?°

[The Image of Jesus continues to question Jonathas and his companions’ disobedience]

741 JONATHAS “Tu es protector vite mee a quo trepidabo.”°
O Thu, Lord, whyche art my defendowr,
For dred of Thee I trymble and quake.
Of Thy gret mercy, lett us receyve the showre,
And mekely I aske mercy amendys to make.

Here shall they knele down all on ther kneyes, sayng:

JASON Ah, Lord, with sorow and care
and grete wepyng,
All we felawys lett us saye thus:
With condolent harte and grete sorow-
yng,
“Lacrimis nostris conscienciam nostram
baptizemus.”°

JASDON Oh Thow, blyssyd lord of
mykyll° myght,
Of Thy gret mercy, Thow hast shewyd
us the path.
Lord, owt of grevous slepe, and owt of
dyrknes to lyght,

What chere ys How are avance assist; help wott know stanche staunch, stop from bleeding chere body, appearance donne stoppe stopped cranys crannies O mirabiles Judei...dolor meus Oh marvelous Jewys, attend and see if there is any sorrow that is like my sorrow [Latin] fule foul strayttly at once pynde stabbed wrath rage against credence belief, trust Tu es protector...trepidabo “You are the protector of my life; whom will I fear?” [Latin; Psalm 26.1] Lacrimis nostris...baptizemus With our tears, let us baptize our consciences [Latin] mykyll much
Ne gravis sompus irruat.°

MASPHAT Oh Lord, I was very cursyd, for I wold know Thy crede
I can no mennys° make but crye to Thee thus:
O gracyows Lorde, forgfyfe me my mysdede,
With lamentable hart, “Miserere mei Deus.”°

MALCHUS Lord I have offendyd Thee in many a sundry vyse,"°
That styckyth at my hart as hard as a core.

760 Lord, by the water of contrycion, lett me arysye.
“Asparges me Domine ysopo et mundabor.”°

JESUS All ye that desyryn my servaunt-es for to be,
And to fullfyll the preceptes of my lawys,
The intent of my commandement knowe ye:
“Ite et ostendite vos sacerdotibus meis.”°
To all yow that desyre in eny wyse
To ask mercy, to graunt yt redy I am.
Remember and lett yowr wyttes suf-fyce,
“Et tunc non avertam a vobis faciem mean.”°

770 No Jonathas, on thyn hand thow art but lame,
And ys thorow thyn own cruelnesse,
For thyn hurt thu mayest thiselfe blame.
Thow woldyst preve thy powre Me to oppresse,
But now I consydre thy necesse,"°
Thow washesh thyn hart with grete contrycion.

Go to the cawdron—thi care° shal be the lesse—
And towche thyn hand to thy salvacion.
Here shall Ser Jonathas put hys hand into the cawdron and yt shal be hole agayn and then say as folowyth:

JONATHAS Oh Thow, my Lord, God, and Savyowr osanna!°
Thow, Kyng of Jewys and of Jerusalem!

780 O Thow, myghty strong Lyon of Juda! Blyssyd be the tyme that Thu were in Bedlem.°
Oh Thu, myghty, strong, gloryows, and gracyows oyle streme,
Thow, myghty conquerrowr of infernall tene,"°
I am quyrt° of moche combrance° thorowgh Thy meane,"°
That ever blyssyd mort Thou bene.
Alas, that ever I dyd agaynst Thy wyll,
In my wytt to be soo wood."°
That I so ongoodly wyrk shuld soo gryll,"°
Agens my mys governaunce,"° Thow gladdyst me with good.

790 I was soo prowde to preve Thee on the Roode—°
And Thou haste sent me lyghtyng° that late was lame—
To bete Thee and boyle Thee, I was myghty in moode,"°
And now Thou hast put me from duresse and dysfame."°
But Lord, I take my leve at Thy hygh presens
And put me in Thy myghty mercy.

The bysshoppe wyll I goo fetche to se owr offens,
And onto hym shew owr lyfe how that we be gylyty.  

*Here shall the master Jew goo to the byshopp and hys men knele styll.*

[The Bishop blesses Jonathas and his companions. He then raises the Host.]

*Here shall the image change agayn into brede.*

**EPISCOPUS** Oh, Thu largyfluent°  
Lord, most of lyghtnesse,  
Onto owr prayers Thow hast applied.°  
Thu hast receyvyd them with grett sweetness,  
For all owr dredfull dedys,° Thu hast not us denyed.

**830** Full mykyll° owte° Thy name for to be magnyfied,  
With mansuete° myrth and gret sweetnes.  
And as our gracuyous God for to be gloryfyed,  
For Thu shewyst us gret gladnes.  
Now wyll I take thys Holy Sacrament,  
With humble hart and gret devocion,  
And all we wyll gon with on consent°  
And beare yt to chyrche with solemne processyon.  
Now folow me, and all summe,  
And all tho that bene here, both more and lesse.

**840** Thys holy song, *O sacrum convivium,*°  
Lett us syng all with grett sweetnesse.

[The Bishop blesses the audience entreats them to repent]

**900** ARISTORIUS Holy father, I knele to yow under benedycuté,°  
I have offendyd in the syn of covytys:  
I sold owr Lordys body for lucre° of mony,  
And delyveryd to the wyckyd with cursyd advyce,  
And for that presumpcion getreyly I agryse.°  
That I presumed to go to the autere,  
There to handyll the Holy Sacryfyce,  
I were worthy to be putt in brennyng fyre.  
But gracuyous lord, I can no more,  
But put me to Goddys mercy and to yowr grace.

**910** My cursyd werkys for to restore,  
I aske penance now in thys place.  
**EPISCOPUS** Now for thys offence that thu hast donne,  
Agens the Kyng of Hevyn and Emper-owr of Hell,  
Ever whyll thu lyvest, good dedys for to done  
And nevermore for to bye nore sell.  
Chastys° thy body, as I shall thee tell,  
With fastyng and prayng and other good wyrk,  
To withstond the temtacyon of fendes of Hell  
And to call to God for grace, looke thu never be irke.°

[The bishop rebukes the priest]

**928** JONATHAS And I aske Crystendom, with great devocion,  
With repentant hart in all degrees,  
I aske for us all a generall absolucion.  
*Here the Juys must knele al down.*  
For that we knele all upon owr knees,  
For we have grevyd° owr Lord on ground,  
And put Hym to a new paynfull passion:

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largyfluent: bounteous  
applied: complied  
dedys: deeds  
mykyll: much  
owte: ought  
mansuete: gentle  
on consent: agreement  
O sacrum convivium: O sacred feast [Latin]  
benedycuté: blessing  
lucre: profit  
agryse: shudder with fear  
Chastys: chastize  
irke: weary  
neclygens: negligence  
pyxys: pyxes (containers for the Host)  
grevyd: grieved
With daggars styckyd Hym with grevos wounds
New naylyd Hym to a post, and with pynsonys° pluckyd Hym down.

[Jason, Jasdon, Masphat, and Malchus repent]

_Here shall the bysshoppe crysten the Jewys with gret solemnyté._

952 **EPISCOPUS** Now the Holy Gost at thys tyme mot yow blysse,
As ye knele all now in Hys name.
And with the water of baptyme° I shall yow blysse,
To save yow all from the fendes blame.
Now that fendys powre for to make lame—
In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Gost—
To save yow from the devyllys flame,
I crysten yow all, both lest and most.

[Jonathas and Aristorius express their repentance again]

988 **EPISCOPUS** God omnypotent evermore looke ye serve,
With devocion and prayre° whyll that ye may.
990 Dowt yt not He wyll yow preserve,
For eche good prayer that ye sey to Hys pay.°
And therfor in every dew° tyme loke ye nat delay,
For to serve the Holy Trynyté—
And also Mary that swete may° —
And kepe yow in perfyte love and charyté.
Crystes commandementes ten there bee,
Kepe well them doo, as I yow tell.
Almyght God shall yow please in every degré,

And so shall ye save your souls° from Hell.
1000 For there ys payn and sorow cruel,
And in Hevyn ther ys both joy and blysse,
More then eny towng can tell.
There angellys syng with grett sweetnesse,
To the whyche blysse He bryng us,
Whoys name ys callyd Jhesus.
And in wyrshyppe of thys name gloryows,
To syng to Hys honore, _Te Deum laudamus._°

_Finis._°

_Thus endyth the Play of the Blyssyd Sacrament whyche myracle was don in the forest of Aragon, in the famous cité Eraclea, the yere of owr Lord God 1461, to whom be honowr. Amen._
Endnotes

1 The text below was compiled by Cameron Hunt McNabb, in consultation with the play’s manuscript Trinity College MS F.4.20, the facsimile edition of the play in Non-Cycle Plays and the Winchester Dialogues: Facsimiles of Plays and Fragments in Various Manuscripts and the Dialogues in Winchester College MS 39, edited by Norman Davis, Medieval Drama Facsimiles 5 University of Leeds, School of English, 1979, pp. 95–131, and The Croxton Play of the Sacrament, ed. John Sebastian, TEAMS Middle English Texts Series (Medieval Institute Publications, 2012). Glosses and endnotes have been provided by Cameron Hunt McNabb as well.

2 My analysis here draws on McNabb, “Staging Disability in Medieval Drama,” Ashgate Research Companion to Medieval Disability Studies, Routledge, forthcoming, where the Croxton Play of the Sacrament is used as a case study.

3 A letter has been canceled between “woo” and “me,” leaving space that the word might have originally been “wood.” Indeed “wood” makes more sense than “woo” in this context.