9. Orthodoxy and the Game of Knowledge: Deguileville in Fifteenth-Century England

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Chapter Nine
Orthodoxy and the Game of Knowledge: Deguileville in Fifteenth-Century England

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Among the discursive modes of late-medieval English religious writing, “exploratory intellation” of the conceptual density and originality so abundantly exhibited in the writings of Julian of Norwich is a rare phenomenon. But despite this challenge from the primary sources, better justice could still be done to the full range of cognitive and experiential modes of which English writers in this period appear to have been aware. This essay is accordingly concerned with varieties of intellectual experience—thinking, knowing, the generation of insight, argument and judgment, and even the explicit enjoyment of such mental activities—that persisted in literature produced in England in the aftermath of the Wycliffite controversies. English intellectual life during this period can seem many things to the modern scholar: diffuse, diverse, intriguing, and difficult to bring into focus. But one of the most obvious ways in which Europe made its presence felt in English religious and intellectual culture after Wyclif was through the medium of translation. Even if the sometimes controversial histories of their sources may not always have been known to English translators or readers, translations provided routes whereby a rich archive of intellectually engaged texts, comparable in density and ambition to Julian’s writings, might be given expression in English.

A group of texts that exemplify this process, the English translations of Guillaume de Deguileville’s Pèlerinage de l’âme (1355; hereafter PA) and of both recensions of his Pèlerinage de la vie humaine (hereafter PVH1 [1331] and PVH2 [1350s]), appeared during a period of “curiously intimate as well as adversarial contact” between England and France. The Pilgrimage of the Sowle (hereafter Sowle), an anonymous prose translation of PA, was made in 1413. The Pilgrimage of the Lyfe of the Manhode (hereafter Manhode), an
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anonymous prose translation of PVH1, was in circulation by the mid-fifteenth century, and a verse translation of PVH2, commonly attributed to John Lydgate, appeared in 1426. William Calin’s observation that “Guillaume’s posterity proved to be richer in England than on the Continent” suggests the persistence of shrewd, focused, literary and spiritual connoisseurship among some groups of late medieval English readers. Versions of Deguileville in English have already received attention from literary scholars interested in the way in which the Roman de la Rose and its literary progeny affected conceptions of authorship, authority, and allegory, and from others interested in his influence on particular English authors, from Geoffrey Chaucer and William Langland to John Lydgate and Thomas Hoccleve. The straightforward comparison and contrast of these translations with Deguileville’s originals is another productive and far from exhausted line of inquiry. Much closer to the concerns of the present volume, however, Rosemarie Potz McGerr has pointed out how much of the subject matter of Sowle may well have proved particularly congenial in an anti-Wycliffite climate. Clearly, therefore, one way of contributing to the discussion that this volume is attempting to foster might be to speculate about the kind of impact these texts may have had purely as vessels of orthodox content. But that, in my view, would be to miss what is most valuable about them. During a period of heightened awareness about the risks of religious controversy, these translations provided opportunities, however discrete and localized, for fresh sources of intellectual nourishment. They released into new interpretative communities intellectually uninhibited narratives rich in theological argumentation, nourished by Cistercian learning that drew on the exegetical and argumentative creativity of Augustine and on the scholastic efflorescence of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. I have chosen, therefore, to consider those narrative qualities that may have enabled these translations to preserve a place for imaginative speculation within the capacious realm of orthodox discourse in the wake of the Wycliffite controversies.

Critics from Rosemond Tuve to Sarah Kay have borne witness to the complexity of Deguileville’s original allegories, in which the mode of narration repeatedly challenges readers to experience different levels of engagement: intuitive and emotional, yet also ratiocinative and intellectual. It is, in my view, a provocative experience for any scholar of the Wycliffite controversies and their intellectual legacies to encounter those same quali-
ties, reproduced faithfully in these translations, in an English setting, and thereby rendered susceptible of comparison with other vernacular voices from the early fifteenth century, whether avowedly orthodox or self-consciously heterodox. They continuously invite their readers to ruminate, to far less obvious ends than those of religious pedagogy, on a range of advanced theological topics that were potentially or actually controversial, including the mystery of transubstantiation, the relations between the persons of the Trinity and the nature of the soul. Here, therefore, I concentrate on suggesting several of the ways in which they offer a distinctive and self-consciously speculative experience to their English readers, one characterized by repeated patterns of arousal and containment that in turn invite different kinds of engagement—intuitive, emotional, and intellectual—with the narrative. I focus on the two prose translations, Sowle and Manhode, not only because they are less well known than the verse translation (to date, Sowle lacks a complete modern edition) but also because keeping the focus on prose enables cogent comparison and contrast, later in the essay, between the handling of theological topics, and the Eucharist in particular, in these texts and the treatment of similar materials in prose works by Nicholas Love and an anonymous Wycliffite preacher. After undertaking a sequence of close readings of the prose translations, therefore, I put all of these disparate texts in conversation with one another, in order to suggest what the translations might have had to offer in terms of enriching the polyvocality and multimodality of vernacular religious discourse and experience in England during this period.

PLAY AND PROCESS

The verba translatoris that appear in several manuscripts of Sowle provide the raw elements of a critical language that does justice to the ways in which the structural workings of Deguileville’s imagination were both preserved and, at times, subtly reshaped in the English translation. The translator justifies his mode of procedure on the grounds that he found some aspects of PA—“diffuse and . . . ouerderk. Wherfore I haue in dyuers places added and withdrawe litel, what as me semed needful: no thing changing of the pro cesse, ne substaunce of the matiere, but as might be most lusti to the reder or herer of the matiere,”14 Of particular significance here is the distinction between “processe” and “substaunce,” a distinction that reflects
Deguileville’s own self-consciousness about the relationship between rhetorical *dispositio* and the ruminative engagement that his allegories are designed to provoke. It is particularly rewarding in this context to recover the semantic richness that the term *process* enjoyed in Middle English. The senses listed under *MED* (3) are of particular importance here, denoting different types of narrative discourse: sense (c) denotes “an expository or descriptive discourse”; sense (d), “an argumentative discourse, an argument; a plea, an appeal, or exhortation; a statement in a debate”; sense (e), “a speech of praise, blame, or well-wishing”; and sense (f), “a play, pageant, or performance.” All of these are more than apt descriptions of the various kinds of narrative rhetoric, from epideixis and complaint to dialogue and dispute, that can be found throughout *Sowle* and *Manhode*.

The *Sowle* translator intends “processe” to indicate “argument” or “arrangement”: the means by which content, or *substaunce*, has been presented to the reader, as for example in debate, dialogue, complaint or description. But it is also rewarding to test the critical consequences of allowing a deeper layer of signification, one enriched by the combination of some of these medieval and modern senses, to suffuse what is, in relation to these translations, nothing less than a keyword. For in these texts, “process” occurs not simply through stylistic choices regarding *ordo*, or sequence, the various surface structures of rhetorical arrangement, but also through the various means by which the reader experiences *substaunce*, or content. In order to refine our understanding of this amplified sense of “process” more fully, it is necessary to consider briefly the *OED* entry, which includes, under sense (1c), the term’s use in philosophical discourse to indicate “the course of becoming as opposed to static being.” This also connects with *OED* (1b): “the fact of going on or being carried on, as an action or series of actions.” The near-synonymy between the phrases “in process” and “in progress,” a fact also acknowledged under (1b), cements the connection between modern English “process” and the concepts of movement, forward motion, or becoming—which are all essentially incomplete states.

In this section, I will argue that in relation to the narrative textures of *Manhode* and *Sowle*, the term *process*, in an enriched sense that combines both its medieval senses of “discourse” or “argument” and its modern philosophical sense of “becoming,” succinctly focuses not only a text’s uses of stylistic variation, but more precisely the discursive means whereby it attempts to stimulate intellectual and emotional experiences in its readers,
requiring that they engage in the continuous processing of fluid and metamorphosing images. A good example of writerly vitality soliciting readerly engagement in this way occurs at the beginning of *Manhode*, in which a conventional image is turned into “a wol gret wunder” that renders the pilgrim-dreamer “gre[tl]iche [greatly] abashed.”17 He sees how, as a result of their having been nourished by St. Augustine and other “grete maistres and doctours,” “many folke bicomen briddes [birds] and after flyen euene [straight] upright . . . [they] gadered hem [for themselves] feþeres [feathers] and maden hem grete wynges and siten bigunnen to fle and for to clymbe hye into þe citee.”18 Avril Henry notes that this is “an image of religious instruction”; but here such instruction undergoes wholesale defamiliarization because of the manner in which it is presented. An opportunity, at the very least, has been provided for the transformation of objective knowledge into subjective experience. The dreamer witnesses the metamorphoses without the intellectual comfort of prior explanation; and the experiential imperatives of the narrative foreground collaboration, by the “folke,” in the physical *process of becoming* birds. It is the strangeness of the physical metamorphosis, rather than its doctrinal significance alone, that is important here. It is left to the informed reader to complete the process, and thereby to finish its “work,” by translating this experience back into the image identified by Henry; but this phase of the process remains unscripted by the text.

A comparable example is provided by the climax of *Sowle*, when the pilgrim-soul, through whose experiential adventures the narrative is focalized, reports a transformation in his understanding. Marveling at the scale of God’s house, which cannot be “comprehended by thought of mannes wit for it is infynyte” (V.ii.221), he reports that he was granted deeper understanding of something that he had previously read: “thane was I entalented [stimulated] to knowe of seynt poule of whom I hadde radde in his own scripture that he was rauished to the thridde heuene, and there he sawgh sightes wher of he wolde not speke” (V.ii.222).19 The distinction between the bare fact of what he had read while embodied, and what he is now *entalented to knowe* as a journeying soul is typical of a narrative in which the narrator’s cognitive development is kept continuously in the foreground. As this example also shows, such development is achieved by *revision*: by reconsidering from different perspectives, and at different levels, what had previously been digested by the mind in another way. The reader has long
been prepared for this development by exchanges such as that between the pilgrim-soul and Doctrine in which she informs him that “knowyng” must be achieved through “labor” and “exercise” (IV.xxx.185). Such labor is characterized by a process of searching into which the soul is provoked by perception: as part of a discourse concerning the differences between human and angelic kinds of knowledge, Doctrine describes “the clere polished myrrour of the diuinite” into which angels had originally gazed and seen “the verrey resemblaunce of alle creatures, and of all that shulde betide to the laste ende” (IV.xxx.184). In every creature, she goes on to explain, there is a beam from this bright mirror that gives to the creature a beauty not of itself. The soul, which is “fourmed lyk an aungel with abilite of knowing, kyndely [naturally] desireth to know and putte this abilite into verrey worchyng; he seketh by discourses of resoun the skiles [rationales] and the causes of the wonderful beauty of thise foreside creatures,” and in this way it learns that “no thyng cometh of nought, that is to say, with oute bygynner” (IV.xxx.185). Philosophers once discovered this, she explains, “with oute mannes techyng, only by shewyng of resoun,” and it was this ability that St. Paul was acknowledging in his Epistle to the Romans, “amonges who as at that tyme was the sotilte [subtlety] of philosophe,” when he asserted that invisible properties of God are seen “by thise visible thynges that ben made faire and agreeable to oure bodily wittes” (IV.xxx.185–186). A great deal more could be said purely about the speculative content of this passage. But for our immediate purposes, it is more important to notice how this sequence signals to its readers the kind of engagement that the text is soliciting. Perception, it argues, is understood to provoke desire, which in turn engenders discourse. This could equally be a reflexive observation about the narrative texture of Sowle itself, and about the notably “busy entendement” (IV.xxxv.174 [my emphasis]) required from the reader, not only at this point in the narrative, but throughout Manhode and Sowle. Play and process are vital discursive means whereby these texts attempt to entalenten, that is, to stimulate such a response.

Processes of inquiry and investigation are repeatedly modelled throughout Manhode, as for example by a “vicarie,” or parish vicar, who asks why he has horns, and thereby learns about his true identity—or perhaps acquires it incrementally, by a process of silent metamorphosis that mirrors the stages by which a mind gradually grasps a concept. First, he is taught by Resoun that his name is Pontifex: that is, a mediator between God and
man. Resoun’s firm assertion that “þis is þi lessoun” seems to crown the vicarie’s learning process with a definite answer, but this is only a short-lived moment of stasis.22 Not long afterward, the vicarie’s identity shifts further: as Avril Henry points out, he is first “like a representative of Aaron or Moses”; subsequently “he is told he ‘would be’ goode Moyses if he used his authority against evil.” Later, “he is Moses, Type of Christ.”23 Has he been this all along, with his true nature veiled from him, or the reader, or both? Or does his nature actually change as the narrative progresses, completing or perfecting itself before the reader’s eyes? Even the reader who comes to this passage familiar with the iconographic tradition of the horned Moses may be left in a state of uncertainty about what he or she has actually experienced here. And the calculated arousal of a spectrum of possible mental states—objective knowledge (for example, about the “horned Moses” tradition) turned into experience (the metamorphosis from “vicarie” to “Moyses”), provoking interpretative questions that in turn lead to rumination on what the “answers” themselves really signified all along—is as characteristic of both Manhode and Sowle as it is of their sources.

A different kind of discursive engagement is set in motion by the confrontation in Manhode between Nature and Grace Dieu concerning the mystery of the Eucharist. The miracle of transubstantiation is abhorrent to Nature because she hates “al mutacioun [transformation] þat is doon in haste.”24 Nevertheless, even though Nature is gradually brought to understand that arguing with Grace is futile, she wishes to press her case, and Grace allows this, “for I holde al þat euere ye mown [must] seyn and arguen today [more] game.”25 I will consider further implications of the translations’ explorations of the Eucharist later, but for now it is sufficient to notice what is suggested here about the intrinsic productivity of “game.” Grace may use “game” simply to indicate that Nature’s objections are trivial to her, and easily refuted. But there is a separate dividend for the reader who might experience this kind of “game” in an altogether less trivial way: that is, as an intellectual exercise in which the mind is obliged to ruminate on, and evaluate, both Nature’s objections and Grace’s responses. The translation, therefore, faithfully renders something characteristic of the original texts: a sequence of significant narrative pauses that arrest the “pilgrim’s progress,” so that ideas and arguments might become subject to serious play in which both the reader and the allegorical figures may participate.26
Such a technique is deployed at greater length, and depth, in the “apple tree” sequence from *Sowle*, IV. In the first chapter, the soul experiences that “helle went a fer [far] fro me and . . . I also wente a fer fro it contynuely” (IV.i.141). It encounters a wondrous enigma (“a thing wher of I mervailed”): “a multitude of pilgrims pleyne with an appil by twen [between] two grete trees of whiche oon was faire and grene . . . & that other was drye” (141). The significance of what the pilgrim-soul is seeing is psychological as well as theological, his angelic guide emphasizing the emotional necessity of this play. There is no pilgrim so wise or so holy, she declares, “that somtyme he ne shal fynden heuynes [heaviness] and sorwe [sorrow] at his herte, wherfore hym nedeth som solace & disporte wher with to appesen [bring peace to] his herte” (141). The reader whose mind is well stocked with religious doctrine will be unsurprised at the simple doctrinal content perceptible beneath the allegorical layer in what follows: the pilgrims are playing with the apple that “for cause of Adam & hys lynage was honged upon this drye tree . . . and fro on [one] tree to a nother thus was he translated & born” (142). But at this particular moment in the narrative, Christ’s function is purely emotional and consolatory. Moreover, the significance of this particular apple can be grasped intuitively long before the intellect is satisfied by the full explanation of its *raison d’être*. The apple that Christ has become is tossed about between the pilgrims to comfort them “as ofte tymes as they ben annoyed” (142). This play, then, is a figuration of the relationship with Christ to which all Christians, both within the narrative and beyond it, must return in a process of continuous reengagement, as well as a figuration in which the constant threat of abjection is both acknowledged and contained: “This fruyt is the appil with tho which men musten pleyen hem [play] for to avoydon [relieve] her heuynesse” (IV. ii.145). Thus, playing with the apple in *Sowle*, like the game between Grace and Nature in *Manhode*, is utterly serious without being remotely solemn. The exigencies of play and game enfranchise narrative modes through which doctrine can be made to serve a number of possible human needs, such as the intellectual stimulus achieved through disputation, or the containment of powerful emotions provided through consolation.

Having considered some of the functions of playful narrative space in these texts, we can return to the apple tree/incarnation sequence in *Sowle* in order to discover the significance of “process” to the English translations. Another opening-up of narrative space for discursive exploration
occurs when Virginity asks Justice to make a dry and a green tree debate the matter of restitution for Adam’s sin (IV.v.148). The ingenuity of the debate that results is derived from the fact that the reader knows its outcome—that Christ will become “mene and mediatour by twene sinful men and [God]” (IV.xviii.157)—but not the particular argumentative route by which that outcome will be reached in this particular text. And this, in turn, opens up a further forum for debate between the persons of the Trinity, which is concluded by the agreement that Christ will become the sacrificed apple. Throughout the latter debate, balance is carefully maintained between emotion and logic, complaint and disputation: just as IV.vi was taken up with the prose complaint of the dry tree for Adam’s transgression, so IV.xxi contains the lengthy poetic lamentation of the green tree for the loss of its precious apple. In IV.xxii, the dry tree offers the green tree tender consolation in a register removed from the skilful language of debate: “[F]or in this wide worlde is ther no iuel [jewel] so faire ne so precious wher with for to pleyen and take desport” (IV.xxii.169). Psalm 33:9 (“O taste and see that the Lord is sweet”), an unquoted but powerful intertextual presence, generates the dry tree’s narrative: “The swot [moisture] and the sauour ther of shal glade euery wyght that wel is disposed. And that [for one who] oft en tasteth of the swetnes ther of and goodly can kepen it . . . it shal make hym to forȝete al maner greaunce [grievance], and it shal destroy and utterly awoydon it [render it void]” (IV.xxii.169–170). It is for this reason, the angel finally explains, that the pilgrims “maken hem so besy with this appil” (IV.xxiii.170). And it is for the same reason that the green tree “endeth this processe,” as the rubric in New York, Public Library, MS Spencer 19 (fol. 82v) has it, by resolving to “ploy and desporte, that I may forȝete al myn heuynesse” (IV.xxiii.170). This “process” thus ends where it began, with the playing pilgrims, returning the pilgrim-soul, and the reader, to the onward journey of pilgrimage. But their journeys to this point have been anything but linear.

This lack of linearity, signaled in the chronology-defying tableau that contains both the dry and green trees and pilgrims who could only have benefited many years later from Christ’s sacrifice, prioritizes not the slow working-out of salvation history, but the ways in which knowledge of that history and its theological implications might be configured synchronically, rather than diachronically, in a reader’s mind, as for instance by associative and imagistic shortcuts that enable the idea of “Christ-as-apple”
both to be grasped immediately at an intuitive level and to require further rational explanation. The periodic use of synchronic tableaux is, therefore, simply one of several related ways in which a scholastic imagination, committed to the fostering of a distinctly dianoetic experience in the reader, is at work in these texts. Argument and dialogue in both translations also further the means whereby the reader is continuously involved in questioning and self-questioning. Sarah Kay has argued that Deguileville’s principal theme in the *Pèlerinage de la vie humaine* had been “the imperative that one should know oneself.”

The interactive techniques carried over into the translations—conversations, dialogues, and even imagistic sequences in which curiosity is both aroused and “assoiled”—ceaselessly provoke the reader toward self-understanding even as they emphasize the inevitable incompleteness, the continuous becoming, of such understanding *in via*, in this life. The interactive, and consequently dramatic, potential of *Sowle* seems to have been amply recognized by the London Carthusian readers whose discriminating use of the text, and particular focus on its “series of conversations” and dialogues, has recently been explored by Jessica Brantley.

Julian of Norwich was, it seems, far from being the only late-medieval English writer for whom the work of the text was “nott yett performyd.”

**THE EUCHARIST IN THE ENGLISH THEOLOGICAL IMAGINATION**

In this section, I enlarge the perspective on dianoetic experience established in the previous section by placing these translations in conversation with other vernacular voices from this period. The intellectually capacious and emotionally nondefensive qualities of the translations may be more sharply appreciated when they are read alongside texts generated more immediately by the exigencies of theological controversy. But it is equally important to acknowledge that these very different kinds of writing could nevertheless achieve similar kinds and levels of dianoetic vitality.

Shannon Gayk has recently drawn attention to the fact that literary form, and the implications of stylistic variety, were as important to Wycliffite writers as to their contemporaries. Among such writers, an early fifteenth-century anonymous Wycliffite preacher is among the most intellectually and stylistically resourceful. The preacher’s works provide an opportunity for comparison with the Deguileville translations in that both are engaged
in developing the vernacular for the expression and exploration of theological ideas, images, and arguments. In order to appraise this preacher’s scholastic imagination, I concentrate here on his *Tractatus de oblacione iugis sacrificii* (also known as the “Titus tract” and henceforth referred to as such for convenience). Like those of the Deguileville translations, many of this writer’s propositions can be readily grasped in outline; but what gives this tract its exceptionally challenging density, and thereby its most immediate point of comparison with the allegories, is its author’s commitment to the pragmatic elaboration of those propositions: in short, to *processe* as the translator of *Sowle* might also have understood that term.

One of the preacher’s contentions is that the institutional church has impeded the dissemination of Christ’s teachings in the scriptures. This is argued through an extremely elaborate allegorical narrative. Taking as his text for this phase of the argument Job’s complaint in Job 19:17 (“Mi wiif ha agrisid [abhorred] my breþe [breath]”), he develops his argument by postulating an antagonism between Christ’s spouse, the church, and Christ’s breath, which is “his lawe þat come þout of his mouthe.” Moreover, this mouth should also be understood as his “manheed,” through which he pronounced his law; and in a final development of the same image, this “manheid” should be understood not only as his mouth, but also as “alle trewe prestis and prophetis” of the old and new laws, and other “trewe feiþful men.”32 The preacher maintains that both while he was alive and after his ascension, Christ “putt þis breþe of þe gospel vppon þe peple wiche schuld be his spouse.”33 The preacher then elaborates this image, and argument, further into a narrative that requires quotation in full in order that the richness of its allegorical potential may be adequately appreciated:

Naþeles, sum tyme þis breþe was blowe ful besili vpon Cristis spouse, and it was ful swete and ful saueri to hir into þe tyme þat sche wax so frike [eager] and lusti þour [through] grete plente [abundance] of provendur [nourishment] þat prekid [stimulated] hir; and namely in þat partie of þis spouse þat is called þe clerge, þat schuld haue be most sibbe [amicable] and chast [chaste], þis spouse specially in þis parte began to lophe [loathe] þe breþe of hir uerri [true] spouse Crist. And þan, riȝt [just] as vnclene and a schrewid [scolding] calat [harlot] þat is weri of hir trewe wedded housbond first turne þir from her housbonde and lophe his breþe, and aﬅ ur makiþ open playnt [public complaint] upon his breþe
seching [seeking] a deuors [divorce], and at þe last [in the end] mariþ hir [gets married] [t]o housbonde wiþ a newe breþ, so stondþ it of þe clergy þat schuld be streitli [strictly] weddid to Iesu Crist.\textsuperscript{34}

The preacher’s understanding of what a reader’s mind requires in order to immerse itself in the persuasiveness of an argument was evidently much more sophisticated than his conventionally Wycliffite rhetoric, replete with its inevitable hostility toward “glosers” (unreliable interpreters) and a concomitant, dogged commitment to what he calls “Cristis logic,” might at first suggest.\textsuperscript{35} The imperatives of Christ’s logic do not, for this writer, prevent metaphorical elaboration, which often takes the reader sufficiently deeply into the inner world of the image that it constitutes a mini-allegory at some distance from the main thrust of the polemic. One possible effect for the reader may be compared with the experience of wandering through a well-stocked garden in a direction that is anything but linear; or of tracing each ramification of an argument that is as branched and spreading as an abundant tree. It is a short distance from this phase of the writer’s argument to a full-blown complaint against spiritual adultery on the part of the clergy. The exceptional commitment of this preacher to developing the allegory from the argument, and \textit{vice versa}, obliges the reader not simply to decode such imagery, separating the notional chaff from the wheat, but rather to approach the polemic more patiently and experientially, hearing, understanding and pondering its literal and allegorical levels simultaneously. Indeed, to use an image that the preacher might have found congenial, elaborate vehicle and simple tenor are allowed to coexist in this text like the parabolic wheat and tares, growing together until the harvest time of interpretation.

Later in the tract, there is an even closer convergence between the imagistic mentality at work here and that exhibited in the Deguileville translations when the preacher addresses the mystery of the Eucharist, his theology obliging him to describe what he understands by the “mystik bodi of Crist.” He imagines this as having been “muntepliid of þe whete [wheat] corne þat Crist spekiþ of”: “þe wiche fel into þe erthe and was dede, and so multiplied into meche [much] frute onydyd [united] in Iesu Crist, rote [root] and heed [head] þerof. And it is betokened into þe sacrid oost [sacred host] þat is many whete cornys onydyd togedre bi craft of man, and ureli is þe bodi of Crist bi uertu and wirching of his worde; and so it is boþe figurre and
Translating St. Augustine, an authority who nourishes this writer’s sensibility as surely as he had that of Deguileville, the preacher turns to a Pentecost sermon for the image of many grains making up the sacred bread. These grains are ordinary Christians, for, according to the preacher’s translation of Augustine, “[w]hen ye were exorcised, ye were in a manner grounde [ground up in a way]. Whan ye were christened, ye were sprengid [mixed, i.e. with water]; and so in a manner made into past [paste], and afterword ibake [baked] and isaddid [made resolute] bi hote loue [devotion].” He elaborates on this further by turning this image into one linking penance, baptism, and devotion (“hote loue”). The preacher seeks to show that Augustine might be quoted in support of a Eucharistic theology that seeks to preserve the substance of the bread and wine after consecration: for the sacred host “is Cristis mystik bodi figurali and uerreli [truly], þe wiche þe peple is þe same bodi reali and uerreli.” Objecting to the orthodox doctrine that transubstantiation was to be understood as the annihilation of the physical properties of the sacraments, the writer maintains that “a sacrament is propurli a uisible forme or kynde of an vnvisible grace, and in antecristis sacrament is no uisible forme or kinde.”

As we will see, the preacher’s openness to the argumentative viability of the image of many fragments making up a whole, and to a patristic discourse in which the faithful for a moment become that which they ingest in the Mass, is on a continuum with some of the narrative processes in the Deguileville translations. However, in order to situate the translations in relation to another avowedly orthodox treatment of the Eucharist during this period, it is instructive to turn briefly to Nicholas Love’s De sacramento (Treatise on the Sacrament), which was disseminated with his better-known translation, The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ, in many manuscripts. In a text to which belief in miracles (“merueiles”) is fundamental, Love argues that in order to grasp the miracle of transubstantiation, it is necessary that we “leuyn [abandon] oure kyndely [natural] reson” (226/6–7) in stark contrast to the “heritykes” who “falsly trowene [believe] & obstinately seyne þat it is brede in his kynde [in its nature] as it was before þe consecration, so þat þe substance of brede is not turnede in to þe substance of goddes body, bot dueleþ [remains] stille brede as it was before” (225/26–30). For Love, “ymaginacion of reson” cannot account for the “merueiles [miracles] of þis worthi sacrament” (227/27–28). He repeatedly castigates “manye grete clerkes, þe which leuen [rely] so miche vpon his
owne kyndely reson, & þe principales of philosophy, þat is mannus wsidame gronsete [grounded] onely in kyndely reson of man” (235/13–16). For Love, this mentality is exemplified by Aristotle, who “techeþ as kyndely reson acordéþ [confirms] þat þe accidents of brede or wyne,” such as color and taste, “mowe not be bot [must only be] in [þe] substance of brede or wyne after hir kynde [in accordance with their nature].” This contradicts the “doctrine of holy chirch” that teaches that after consecration, “accidents” such as color and taste “bene þere [there] with out hir kyndely [natural] subiecte” (236/30–37). Nevertheless, distaste for logical argument concerning the mystery does not preclude an imagistic explanation of the miracle whereby Christ’s body is fully in each separate fragment of the host, as well as in the whole. He does this by drawing an analogy with the way in which “þe ymage of a mannus [man’s] grete face, & of a grete body is seene in a litel Mirrour, & if it be broken & departede [shattered]. þit in euery parte it seme þe hole ymage, & not in partye after þe partes of þe glasse so broken” (227/18–21).

Returning to the Deguileville translations, we can see that several aspects of the transubstantiation sequence in Manhode—the routing of Aristotle (functioning there as Nature’s emissary) and the image of the shattered mirror—make contact with some of the elements of Love’s argument in the Treatise. Manhode is doctrinally uncontroversial: as Grace assures the pilgrim, “Flesh and blood it is in sooth, but bred and wyn it is figured. And sooth it is þat sumtime it was bred and wyn, but . . . into flesh and into blood it was remeoved [removed] bi Moyses.” And on hearing the words of consecration, the pilgrim must believe that “it is no more neiþer wyne ne bred, but it is þe flesh þat was spred on the cros for þe and hanged, and þat it is þe blood with which þilke [the same] cros was bide-wed [moistened] and spreynt [sprinkled].” However, the differences between these two avowedly orthodox treatments of this complex topic are as striking as their incidental similarities. In order to demonstrate this, rather than reprising the whole of the transubstantiation sequence in Manhode, I will focus on two of its most distinctive aspects, before briefly discussing the representation of the Eucharist in Sowle. The first aspect to note about the Manhode version is the fact that the argument between Nature and Grace, briefly discussed earlier in the context of “game,” takes place at the same time that Moses, the priest, is dining (that is, celebrating the Eucharist). The simultaneity of these two events brings about a rhe-
historical effect similar to that of a cinematic split screen, as the Mass is celebrated in the background even as a lengthy and vehement debate about its metaphysical underpinnings is staged. The narrative’s doctrinal content is, again, uncontroversial: Grace will inevitably triumph in this debate. And a more conservative way of arranging the allegory might have been to grant Grace victory over Nature’s “rude understandinge” before Moses’s meal had commenced. But this particular dispositio keeps the meal in the background throughout; rather than entirely displacing the debate, the mystery coexists with it, in a manner possibly suggestive of the way in which the intellectuality appropriate to scholastic disputation and the multimodal experience—including the imaginative, the sensory and the emotional—involves in the celebration of the Mass somehow had to coexist in the minds, souls, and lives of medieval theologians.

The discussion of the Eucharist in Manhode moves into a different phase with the argument between Aristotle and Sapience, and this brings me to the second of the aspects to be discussed here. The second significant aspect of this allegory is its discursive density: it demonstrates to an extremely elaborate degree a feature discussed above, namely the opening up of narrative space for discourse and exploration. The heart of this process is the discussion of “measure,” which focuses on the paradox that the Eucharist obliges God, an immeasurable and infinite entity, to be contained in something finite. It is Sapience’s task to ensure that each fragment of the Eucharistic host is as big as the whole loaf from which it comes. The “process” with which Sapience confounds Aristotle revolves around the fact that God is great and yet needs to fill a little human heart. And the remarkable aspect of this phase of their disputation is the imagistic and conceptual density with which Sapience dilates her subject matter. Memory, she argues, contains vast things, but is enclosed in a tiny space, just as Aristotle can contain in his mind the images of populous places that he has visited. The pupil of the eye is tiny, she points out, when compared with the size of the people whose faces it can see. And she too uses the image of the shattered mirror that contains a perfect image in each of its fragments. This image recurs in Sowle when the figure of Doctrine argues that each soul is made in God’s image and thus can contain him, just as a shattered mirror can contain “the same figure hool” (IV.xxviii.176). And it is this aspect of the translation that makes contact, however briefly, with that of the Wycliffite preacher beguiled by Augustine’s image of Christians as the
grains of wheat that make up the whole of the Eucharistic host. Continuity between these kinds of imagination subsists, despite their contrasting attitudes toward the authority of the institutional church.

The representation of the Eucharist in Sowle is far less elaborate than its disputatious treatment in Manhode, but it is notable that this brief sequence, in which St. Peter invites Adam and Eve to see whether the “mete” that he has brought them “be better than the appil which ye eeten and wheyther [which] is more delicious, the olde fruyt or the newe,” is a dramatic tableau in which the redemption of mankind is represented through synchronic compression (V.xx.252). It differs only slightly in content, therefore, from the tableau of the playing pilgrims discussed earlier, and it completes the argument that the first tableau initiated. It skilfully sidesteps the inflamed metaphysical terminology used in theological controversy by looking outward, to Christian history and the consolations of typology, the apple tasting staged by St. Peter providing another example of the profound playfulness that we have encountered elsewhere in these translations. This completes my appraisal of the various experiential and discursive perspectives on the Eucharistic mystery that the Deguileville translations unleash in English. But what emerges most forcefully from the final phase of this discussion, which builds in turn on the earlier analyses of play and process, is the spectacle of philosophical arguments being deployed with such relish, discrimination, and lack of inhibition in these translations, even in contexts in which Nature and Reason are so readily and inevitably confounded. This playful orthodoxy contrasts dramatically with Love’s suspicion of “kyndely reson.” as voiced with anxiety, or possibly irritation, at several points in the Treatise, determined as its rhetorical options are by the narrower exigencies of controversy. Even the Wycliffite preacher’s tract provides more in the way of allegorical openings and nonlinear ruminations.

In concentrating so firmly on these translations in themselves, rather than comparing and contrasting them with their originals, I have sought to invite further reflection on their possible impact at a particularly complex moment in English religious and literary history. That impact cannot be known absolutely, but even the very selective material that I have presented here precludes the drawing of overly firm conclusions about the discursive and imaginative adventurousness of English texts and readers in the aftermath of the Wycliffite controversies. It might once have been thought
an indictment of late-medieval English intellectual life that even as Deguileville’s allegories were being translated, *Piers Plowman* was gradually becoming, in James Simpson’s words, “effectively unreachable.” After all, when differentiating *Piers Plowman* from other allegories of its time, David Aers once counselled: “[L]et us not impatiently turn the kind of process Langland seems to be creating, into that of the exegetes, homilists and normal medieval allegorical poets.” Aers positioned Deguileville as a representative of the “normal,” an embodiment of the mediocrity transcended by Langland’s poetic intuition. But as these translations remind us, Langland clearly learned a great deal about “process” from his French predecessor. The English versions remain as hospitable as their sources to enterprising fusions between theological matter and imaginative experience, engaging their readers in a simultaneously poetic and ratiocinative process closely analogous to the “jeu du savoir,” the “game of knowledge,” to which, it has been argued, some late fourteenth-century French translators of Aristotle had invited their readers. They bring to their respective interpretative communities an armature derived partly from having originated in a different place and time; exhibit a challenging insistence on viewing the interior life as an experiential adventure in which objective knowledge is ceaselessly subjected to the unpredictable forces of process, play and game; and refresh the resources of allegory as a genre that suggests, invites and solicits, but cannot absolutely predict or control its readers’ interpretative and experiential ruminations. Where original texts rather than translations are concerned, *Piers Plowman* might be regarded as the work that displays the most highly developed understanding of how a poetic “jeu du savoir” might be played in English, but in light of the narrative ingenuity preserved in these translations, let alone that of their sources, it might be time to reconsider the claim that it was also Langland who invented “experience as a literary category.” The material considered here suggests a different conclusion.

NOTES

2. An outstanding recent example of what can be achieved in this respect with apparently well-known texts is the revisionist essay by Valerie Allen, “Belief and Knowledge in Love’s Mirror,” in *Devotional Culture in Late Medieval England and Europe*. *Diverse Imaginations of Christ’s Life*, eds. Stephen Kelly and Ryan Perry, Medieval Church Studies 31 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2014), 553–572.


10. *The Pèlerinage Allegories of Guillaume de Déguleville: Tradition, Authority*
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12. On the complex religious, intellectual and literary cultures of England during this period, see Gillespie and Ghosh.
14. The facsimile of the Barry edition, which reproduces New York, Public Library, MS Spencer 19, fols. 133r–v (265) is faint at this point, but the verba translatoris are also printed (and hence quoted here) from London, British Library, MS. Egerton 615 (fol. 106r) in the very selective edition of The Booke of the Pylgremage of the Sowle, ed. Katherine Isabella Cust (London: Basil Montagu Pickering, 1859), 82.
15. MED, “proces” (n.).
16. OED, “proces” (n.).
22. Ibid., 1:10/381.
23. Ibid., 2:374–375, referring to lines 278, 430 and 434 respectively (my emphasis).
26. Sarah Kay explores Deguileville’s sensitivities to the possibilities of spatial and temporal configurations in The Place of Thought, 70–94.
27. Kay, 71.


41. Ibid., 1:37/1519–1522.
42. Ibid., 1:19–26.
43. Ibid., 1:26/1043.

44. Kay’s discussion of this sequence in the original text is pertinent here (*The Place of Thought*, 76–81).


