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Blindness, Excrement, and Abjection in the Theatre: ASTR Presidential Address, 30 October 2021

Marla Carlson

Caroline Reid Reidlehuber Professor of Theatre Arts, Emerita, University of Georgia, Athens, GA, USA
Email: marlac@uga.edu

As most of my human contact became restricted to the Zoom screen in spring 2020, I discovered a serious limit to my capacity for looking. I also began finding it difficult to read. A ten-month headache taught me to stop taking ibuprofen and learn to manage tensions around my eyes and head as well as to shift roughly half of my reading to screenreaders and audio books. The need to restructure my own practices of seeing refocused my interest in theatre's engagement of the senses at the same time as the COVID-19 pandemic destroyed people's ability to smell, prompted them to hoard toilet paper, and created a U.S. boom in bidet purchases. These personal and cultural developments coincided with revived metaphors of blindness on the pandemic stage. This article begins with a brief discussion of *The Blind*, an “immersive audio/visual meditation journey” that Here Arts Center produced in 2021, and then centers on *Blindness*, the “socially distanced sound installation” produced by the Donmar Warehouse in 2020 followed by an international tour. I wonder at the reiteration of blindness as a tragic trope, seemingly unaffected by progress in disability rights, equity, and inclusion. I wonder at the appeal of wielding any contagious illness as metaphor during a global pandemic. My analysis turns particularly upon the relation between blindness and excrement in José Saramago's novel *Blindness* and the effect of cleansing the theatrical installation of any shit as well as the even more surprising choice to eliminate the voices of the blind characters. A detour through medieval French farces that link blindness and excrement reveals submerged tropes at play in these performative responses to fear of diminished capacity and diminished control—everything that individuals and societies cast out in order to maintain what we call health, whether literal or metaphorical.

Disability studies generally binds disability to modernity with an origin story in the Enlightenment categorization of things and people, compounded in the

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nineteenth century by industrial capitalism's demand for docile and reliable worker bodies and the development from evolutionary theory to eugenic thinking, all of this underlain by a paradigm shift from the premodern dichotomy ideal–monstrous to the modern normal–abnormal.¹ Medieval cultures offer a different perspective, one never fully eradicated from our postmodern experience but suppressed from the mainstream. The same historical trajectory that organized disability as a category and a negative phenomenon to be eliminated through scientific advances also smudged and distorted the medieval. As Susan Signe Morrison puts it, “we postmoderns set ourselves up against an ‘excremental’ period in order to negate our material selves.” In order to maintain the fantasy of our clean wholeness, she explains, we project our excrement and our frailty onto the medieval,² a period with no internal coherence aside from persistently disrupting history's linear narratives and rational categories.

As modern norms jettisoned our bodily detritus and our debility, the medieval acquired attributes that for Julia Kristeva characterize the abject: “The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite.”³ Linking cultural and psychological development, Kristeva argues that the self takes shape through a process of casting out (abjection), and the amorphous abject serves as a border between the self and the world. As she puts it, “To each ego its object. To each superego its abject.”⁴ The abject remains a phantasm even when it takes on the quality of an object. Feces, corpses, or wounds, for example, may stand in its place, but the abject always overflows the borders of its representation. Kristeva thinks of this in theatrical terms: “[A]s in true theater, without makeup or masks, refuse and corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live.”⁵ As frightened and frustrated theatre makers turned to blindness as an emblem for lost bodily capacities during the COVID-19 pandemic, they thrust aside other losses of bodily control in order to live with their anxiety. My analysis both returns to the medieval abject and digs through the shit. I will identify blind and low-vision authors and artists with whom I engage and will sometimes refer to others as sighted, reminding us of the imbalance in voices.

Blindness during COVID

During the winter of 2020–1, Here Arts Center streamed an adaptation of sighted poet Maurice Maeterlinck's *The Blind* (*Les Aveugles*, 1890) that its sighted creators characterized as an “immersive audio/visual meditation journey.”⁶ They had explored the play ten years earlier and decided to revisit it during the pandemic because it seemed prescient, as a play about disenfranchised people abandoned in the woods by their leader. This symbolist play ends with a dog leading the dozen blind characters, who have not dared move from their logs and rocks, to the corpse of the priest who brought them into the forest. The contemporary resonance was clear enough, the Trump administration having denied the seriousness of the pandemic and refused to develop any coherent public health policy. Actors recorded their vocal tracks separately, and the audio accompanied images shot in the woods or indoors after dark. Because viewers were instructed to watch on computer screens in a darkened room, which according to scientific studies destroys cells in the retina, this virtual performance brought to the forefront my own

anxieties about loss of vision and initiated a process of reframing my relation to and thinking about sight.

I'm surprised at the play's recent popularity, apparently without any awareness of critical disability studies even as productions reiterate a presentation of blindness as metaphor unchanged in 130 years. Vortex Theatre's 2005 adaptation on an old ship put its sighted cast in opaque contact lenses.⁷ The Living Theatre did it in 2017.⁸ The Capitol Fringe Festival that year included the Wheel Theatre's version, staged in a theatre at Gallaudet University and captioned for deaf/Deaf and hard of hearing audiences but seemingly insensitive to *visual* disabilities.⁹ Although as Naomi Schor puts it, all metaphors of disability "void words of their charge of pain and sorrow, dread and death, and invest them with the language of stigma and shame and burden them with negativity," blindness constitutes a particularly troublesome "necessary trope," so pervasive in language as to seem ineradicable.¹⁰ Blind writer and professor Georgina Kleege provides a list of figurative expressions:

blind faith, blind devotion, blind luck, blind lust, blind trust, blind chance, blind rage, blind alley, blind curve, blind-nail flooring, blind date (more dangerous than you think), duck blind, window blind, micro-mini blind (when open, they're hard to see), blind taste test, double-blind study, flying blind, following blind, blind leading the blind, blind landing, color blind (in the racial sense, a good thing), blind submission, blind side, blind spot, blindfold, blindman's bluff, three blind mice (have you ever seen such a sight in your life?)¹¹

Enumerating the persistent focus on seeing in utterances by Maeterlinck's blind characters, David Bolt argues that the play reinforces the equation of vision with knowledge and the "assumption that reality is a visual experience."¹² He notes that both *The Blind* and sighted author José Saramago's novel *Blindness* "bring together a group of characters whose lack of sight equates with a lack of history and results in despair."¹³

London's Donmar Warehouse turned to this second text during the pandemic, reconfiguring the adaptation they had commissioned from playwright Simon Stephens in order to provide a safe in-person theatrical experience. Stephens identifies as "partially sighted" and says he has been thinking about blindness for years, yet not until the creative team approached partially blind academic Hannah Thompson about creating visual aids for this production did he become aware, to his "immense embarrassment . . . that Saramago's book . . . had caused great anger and great unhappiness in the blind community."¹⁴ Thompson came on board as a consultant to help the creative team understand why the novel was offensive, hoping that the immersive binaural technology could "deliver[] important messages about the value of the non-visual senses, the creative and aesthetic benefits of blindness and the ways that the concept of 'blindness gain' might encourage non-blind people to reconsider their own misconceptions of blindness."¹⁵ She says: "Blindness gain is the idea that rather than thinking of blindness as a problem to be solved, we think of blindness as a benefit. Blind and partially blind people benefit from access to a multisensory way of being which celebrates inventiveness, imagination and creativity. Non-visual living is an art. But blindness gain is also about how blindness can benefit non-blind people."¹⁶

I planned a trip to attend *Blindness* at the Daryl Roth Theatre in New York during June 2021, my first visit to a physical theatre during the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁷ I prepared by listening to Saramago's novel read by Jonathan Davis, its ready availability on my phone ironically the result of technologies developed to serve blind and low-vision readers. The flowing jumble of voices, the all-pervasive excrement, and the horrifying sexual violence dominated my listening experience. The novel traces a city's epidemic of blindness from the first man who suddenly loses his sight, through forced quarantine in a disused mental asylum followed by a search for food and shelter in the derelict city after blindness has infected its entire population, and finally to the equally sudden restoration of sight as experienced by the central characters. Only one character remains immune to the epidemic of blindness: an ophthalmologist's wife feigns blindness in order to accompany her husband into quarantine, where she looks after him and the group of patients who were present in his clinic on the day the epidemic began. Within the asylum, she ends the reign of terror by a group of blind hoodlums when she slits the throat of their leader. A short time later, the woman who was being sexually abused at that moment starts a fire in the hoodlums' wing of the facility. The doctor's wife leads her companions out into the streets, finds food in the basement storeroom of an otherwise empty supermarket, leads them to their former lodgings, and finally installs everyone in her apartment. She offers one articulation of the novel's central metaphor in its penultimate paragraph: "I don't think we did go blind, I think we are blind, Blind but seeing, Blind people who can see, but do not see."¹⁸ Liat Ben-Moshe interprets the message: "as a society, we cannot deal with our post/modern state of affairs with its rampant violence, oppression, and lack of empathy."¹⁹ She also notes that blindness functions as a narrative prosthesis, "conveniently used the way Saramago assumes most people conceive of it," yet remaining invisible.²⁰ As David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder explain, disability commonly serves a prosthetic function in narrative structures: stories center on a deviance that they identify, explain, and either purge or remedy and thus normalize.²¹

George Snedeker's early review of the English translation expresses dissatisfaction with the novel and its floating signifier (blindness), which nevertheless has a real referent that renders the novel capable of damage.²² Deborah Gallagher observes, "blindness cannot be used as a signifier or metaphor without ultimately saying something about blindness itself."²³ As widely noted, this structuring metaphor reiterates the trope epitomized by the seemingly clear-sighted Oedipus, who takes pride in his ability to discern and solve the problems facing Thebes but lacks insight into his own identity, the actual source of those problems. Sophocles contrasts him with the blind seer, Tiresias, and of course Oedipus destroys his physical sight when he gains tragic insight. Gallagher asks, "Is it possible Saramago is intentionally mocking this obtuse stereotype by assigning the 'sixth sense' to the only sighted character in the novel?"²⁴ The narrative refers explicitly to the sixth sense at a point of crisis: "fortunately the doctor's wife was there to come to the rescue, it was incredible how this woman managed to notice everything that was happening, she must be endowed with a sixth sense, some sort of vision without eyes" (200). But Saramago's writing slips easily between narration and character voice without using quotation marks, often giving no indication who

is speaking. (According to Linda Ware, critics assert that the writing style “simulates the assumed confusion and chaos blind people experience in social situations.”²⁵) Because the narrator consistently presents as both neutral and reliable, I understand this passage to be voicing the thoughts of one or more unidentified blind characters. Although the irony is clear, attributing the thought to a clueless and powerless blind character compromises any mockery of the sight-versus-insight trope.

As Gallagher points out, none of the novel’s blind characters have any of the special compensatory powers often attributed to blind people.²⁶ The accountant, already blind prior to this epidemic, compensates in small and mundane ways, and he is one of the evil characters. The novel makes no comparison between the sighted and the blind, who are portrayed as existing at all levels of moral and ethical understanding and behavior. The sighted soldiers guarding the asylum personify violence born of fear before they too become blind and desert their posts. The hoodlums who victimize the other inmates are blind, as are the girl with dark glasses, the old man with an eye patch, and the young boy quarantined alone and calling for his mother. The sighted doctor’s wife seems to preclude these central characters from adapting to their predicament. They never develop secure knowledge of the route to the bathrooms, for example, and rely upon her to lead them first through the asylum where they’re incarcerated and later through the city streets and buildings. Blind author and performer Leona Godin observes the “implausible and obnoxious removal of blind ingenuity” in the failure of any character to reach for a stick.²⁷ As she points out, scientific evidence contravenes the assumption that the sudden onset of blindness would preclude compensating. With congenital or early blindness, the portions of the brain comprising the visual cortex in nonblind people instead processes other sensory data. A degree of plasticity remains even after the critical period for visual development, which ends at age sixteen.²⁸ Wearing a blindfold for five days gave sighted experimental subjects an advantage in learning Braille over nonblindfolded controls, and during the experiment their visual cortexes began responding to tactile stimuli.²⁹

The novel invokes the parable in Matthew 15:14 about the blind leading the blind: “It was clear that these blind people, however caring a father, mother or child they might be, could not take care of each other, otherwise they would meet the same fate as the blind people in the painting [by Hieronymus Bosch], walking together, falling together and dying together” (123). Yet the experience of actual blind people contradicts this assumption of mutually exacerbated helplessness. If a blind guide leads another blind person, not only will they avoid pits and ditches, but the guide will share all sorts of useful techniques to help the other person navigate more easily; for example, Godin describes the active and passive echolocation practices such as cane taps and vocal clicks that blind people use to locate themselves within their physical environment.³⁰ Brenda Brueggeman suggests that the oft-repeated parable shows “the fear that when the blind do lead the blind, they begin to learn from each other; they begin to collaborate, to gain from their shared knowledge, to grow in and from their widening sense of community.”³¹ In all fairness, Saramago’s central characters do cooperate and develop community, exemplified by the narrative thread that centers on the girl with dark glasses, a prostitute who becomes blind during orgasm. Shared blindness moves her from the social

periphery to the center. First she cares for the young boy with the squint. Her close and trusting relationship with the doctor's wife develops to such an extent that the doctor himself largely fades from the story. By the novel's end, she and the old man with the eye patch commit to a loving partnership. The theatrical adaptation barely mentions her.

I attended a matinee of *Blindness* on a beautiful June day, waiting for my companion in Union Square Park and then lining up on the sidewalk six feet distant from other audience members. Ushers checked our temperature and vaccination cards, let us into the theatre lobby at safe intervals to maintain separation, told us that we would find sanitized headphones in a baggy at our seats safely set apart from other audience pairs, and said that we should raise a hand if we needed to leave the theatre and would be guided out but could not return. We tested out the headphones and prepared for immersion in an auditory experience that made use of binaural recording technology, giving the sound a rich spatial dimension. Indeed, the doctor's wife, voiced by sighted actor Juliet Stevenson, seemed to move around us, sometimes speaking intimately and at other times shouting and rushing through the auditory space as events unfolded. We heard many loud alarms and startling noises. The headphones seemed to offer no volume control and were set louder than my comfort level, which meant that I worried about my hearing just as I had worried about my vision six months earlier while watching *The Blind*. This distracted me from full immersion in the piece, but not nearly as much as the adaptation's central choice to eliminate all voices of the novel's blind characters. We heard only the doctor's wife. When she had a conversation with another character, we heard only her utterances. For all the focus on sound, visual elements were crucial to the event's theatrical impact. Even the darkness of the theatre remained visually oriented, with bars of neon lowered, raised, and periodically reconfigured. Laura Collins-Hughes describes the moment that she found most moving, and it was visual:

There came a point in "Blindness" when the lighting designer, Jessica Hung Han Yun, broke the pitch-blackness with a soft and gorgeous beam of illumination angling through the air. As I gazed at it, I realized that the theater had been filling with haze while we were submerged in darkness, that through our masks we'd already been breathing it.

And so I sat there, headphones clapped to my ears, and felt tears trickle down my cheeks—because it hadn't unsettled me, because it felt safe and because, wow, had I missed great lighting design.³²

So much for the understanding of blindness gain that Thompson hoped for.

Along with the voices of the blind characters, the adaptation also eliminates most of the filth and violence, presumably because Donmar Warehouse wanted an uplifting spectacle to welcome people back into the theatre. The script's structure supports this uplift, orienting plot and action toward the quarantine, the alarms, announcements, and guards, the emergence to freedom, and finally a washing away of the horrors that have ended. Stephens strategically alters the narrative flow to craft this ending. Up to that point, he follows the linear timeline of Saramago's novel. But after marking the restoration of sight with which the

novel ends, the script returns to an earlier event. The doctor's wife has settled her blind companions in her apartment, dressing them in clean clothes. She wakes in the night to a heavy rain and goes outside to the balcony where she has placed their filthy clothing and shoes, strips off her dressing gown and is washed clean. The two women in the group join her. They complete their purification by scrubbing the shoes and clothing clean. As Stevenson's voice narrates this action, lights gradually illuminate the theatre. The metal roll-up door opens, revealing passersby on the New York sidewalk. The audience goes out through that door directly into their midst rather than passing through the lobby. How bright the afternoon sunlight was. How bright the future seemed in June after vaccination and before the Delta variant. Thompson says of the earlier production in London, "I expect most people were relieved at this return of daylight. I felt oddly disappointed as I was forced back into the sighted world I have such a problematic relationship with."³³

The erasure of the blind characters' voices and the choice not to even report their utterances shocked me, and the radical cleanup of the novel's excremental excess puzzled me. Saramago gives us a world covered in shit. Without sighted workers to maintain the city's utility systems, the plumbing has ceased to function—but Saramago also creates the impression that the blind produce so much body waste that it overwhelms all sanitation systems, and they also defecate everywhere. Saramago's novel presents touch, smell, and hearing as entirely debased and unpleasant, with repeated focus on both smelling and stepping in shit and sexual touch often violent, as in the horrific rapes to which the band of hoodlums who have seized the food supply subject the women. Unattributed dialogue initially describes as a sign of degradation the nonviolent and consensual sex that presumably comforts those engaging in it ["Someone protested at the end of the ward. Pigs, they're like pigs. They were not pigs, only a blind man and a blind woman who probably knew nothing more about each other than this" (93)] but then gradually mention sex with no such judgment. The same is true for the descriptions of shit, which remain insistent but become rather mundane. The first excursus on excrement occurs when the asylum reaches full occupancy: "It is not just the state to which the lavatories were soon reduced, fetid caverns such as the gutters in hell full of condemned souls must be, but also the lack of respect shown by some of the inmates or the sudden urgency of others that turned the corridors and other passageways into latrines, at first only occasionally but now as a matter of habit. The careless or impatient thought, It doesn't matter, no one can see me, and they went no further" (131). A few pages later, the doctor's wife wakes in the morning and observes first the sights in her ward and then the smells: "the accumulated body odour of two hundred and fifty people, whose bodies were steeped in their own sweat, who were neither able nor knew how to wash themselves, who wore clothes that got filthier by the day, who slept in beds where they had frequently defecated" (133–4). Going out to reconnoiter in the night, "her bare feet came into contact with the slimy excrement on the floor, but she knew that out there in the corridors it would be much worse" (152). Things are no better outside the asylum: "Softened by the rain, the excrement, here and there, was spread all over the pavement" (224). The audio installation entirely eliminates the feces. The script that Stephens kindly shared with me had just one reference to being filthy during the

time in quarantine and two sentences describing the city as the doctor's wife brings bags of food to her companions, four pages from the end: "There was human excrement. There was animal excrement." These sentences are struck through. Only a reference to "rotting litter in the streets" remains.³⁴

Blindness in Farce

The linkage between blindness and body waste in late medieval French farce helps to explain the pervasive excrement in Saramago's novel and what the theatrical adaptation loses by cleaning up the shit. The novel's onslaught of bad smells calls to mind the predicament represented in the *Farce nouvelle des cinq sens de l'homme* (New farce of man's five senses), printed in 1545. The titular Man (*L'Homme*) gathers his personified senses for a banquet, seating Hearing (*L'Ouye*) by his side and Hands (*Les Mains*) directly opposite him. Mouth (*La Bouche*) is free to sit wherever she likes, with Eyes (*Les Yeulx*) at the head of the table and Feet (*Les Piedz*), the lowest part of the body, unhappily thrown beneath it. As Julie Singer observes, the seating arrangements materialize a hierarchy of senses with vision paramount.³⁵ To call these attributes "senses" is rather imprecise, since all except Hearing are actually sense organs—again with the exception of Feet, whose inclusion is difficult to rationalize. Describing the play in 1886, Petit de Julleville questions the choice to include feet but not a nose and cannot bring himself to mention explicitly the last character to enter, the Asshole (*Le Cul*), simply referring to it as the sixth character (*le sixième personnage*).³⁶ Among other interpretations, Singer suggests that the Asshole usurps the olfactory domain and renders the nose unnecessary. She proposes that the absence of a nose among the dramatis personae aligns the audience, who can smell, with the disruptive Asshole as opposed to aligning them with the Man, who has no sense of smell: "as the Cul disables the Man by challenging his sovereignty over his senses, the spectators' 'normal' embodiment highlights, through contrast, the Man's disabling lack of a Nose." The Man cannot smell the Asshole but only hear him.³⁷ Like the Feet, Asshole objects to his position under the banquet table and argues for his rightful place as one of the five senses or, failing that, as a sixth sense. In particular, Asshole seeks to dislodge the Eyes from their privileged position through references to them as impaired. First he "raises the specter of figurative blindness: 'N'y voit-on goutte,' ['one can't see at all,' that is, it makes no sense]." He then "address[es] the Eyes as 'borgnibus' ['squinty']."³⁸ Argument and insults unavailing, Asshole finally locks himself in the latrine just as Man discovers an urgent need for elimination after his feast. As the characters all lay siege to the latrine, Eyes loses his previous capacity for articulate speech; exclaims three times, in tears, that he has pissed his pants ["j'ay pissé en ma braye"]; and then disappears from the scene.³⁹ Man and the remaining senses must acknowledge the Asshole's dominance in this reconfigured hierarchy.⁴⁰

As Singer notes, the Eyes end up relegated to the social margins just as actual blind people were in medieval France and nearby areas. Edward Wheatley identifies several factors contributing to this particular disdain for blind people. First, the French used blinding as a punishment, whereas the English (for example) did not. Second, Louis IX established the first supportive institution for the blind

around 1265, and “the presence of royally protected blind people in Paris improved the lives of [the hospice] residents but also created a higher public profile for them, leading to envy and contempt.” Although literature from this period in England features blindness as divine punishment for sexual transgression, French literature does not; rather, adhering to the medieval religious model of disability that precedes the later medical model, French literature positions blind beggars as an opportunity to exercise Christian compassion even while prominently aligning blindness with Jewishness. As Wheatley notes, late medieval farces from northern France and surrounding regions stereotype the blind, like the Jews, as greedy, lazy, and hypersexual.⁴¹ *Le Garçon et l’aveugle* (The boy and the blind man) in manuscript around 1270 and the *Farce of Goguelu* printed around 1515 represent early and late examples of a popular trope. These farces create humor through inversion, as servants trick and physically abuse wealthy blind masters. In the *Garçon*, both characters inhabit the social margins, and the boy quickly establishes (for himself and the audience) the concealed wealth of the blind beggar whom he offers to guide and assist. In *Goguelu*, the blind man is openly wealthy or at least of the class to employ servants. He begins the play at odds with his chambermaid and soon takes on a valet as well. These plays begin with an inverted sensory hierarchy, the man without sight inappropriately seeking to control the sensorily normate and clever subordinate.

In both plays, urine and excrement feature in righting the social order onstage. In *Le Garçon et l’aveugle*, the boy pretends to leave the immediate scene to have a piss but instead of leaving impersonates a respectable man taking offense at the blind man’s indecent propositions (ll. 147–9) and beats him severely. Dropping the vocal disguise, he “returns” as himself and describes the remedy he might offer for the injuries (ll. 166–76)—a prescription primarily composed of excrement.⁴² In the *Farce of Goguelu*, the chambermaid pisses in a teacup (onstage) and serves it to her blind master, getting a beating in return.⁴³ Later the play’s three characters go to the woods for a game of “broche en cul” or stick in the ass—a game that occurs in other plays as well.⁴⁴ The chambermaid ties the blind man’s wrists and ankles together and gives him a stick with which to hit her. He expects her to also bind herself, but of course she doesn’t. After he attempts a blow, she pretends to see a sergeant approaching and to flee. Impersonating this sergeant, the valet then beats the blind man until he shits himself. In both farces, the servants’ supposed or actual urination exercises power over the master, specifically because he can’t see what they’re doing. The trickster servant’s piss sets in motion a rapid downhill trajectory for the blind man. The shit poultice that the *Garçon* offers (but does not actually provide) verbally degrades the blind beggar, and the old man tricked and beaten in the woods loses control of his bowels, deepening his degradation. Valerie Allen points out that “it is not simply that bodily waste is unpleasant to the nose; ‘having to go’ represents necessity at its most fundamental, and being unable to dissociate from one’s own detritus spells total servitude and ultimately death itself.”⁴⁵ These farces’ already lowly blind characters are brought even further down by servants who are beneath them in status but wield the power of excrement to raise themselves up. Shit does its job whether it’s one’s own, as with *Goguelu*’s blind master and the banqueting Man overcome by his Asshole, or merely presented in dialogue, as with *Le Garçon*.

To understand more fully the connection between blindness and excrement in medieval cultural products, I turn to two farces that Andrieu de la Vigne wrote for his 1496 *Mystère de saint Martin* (The mystery of Saint Martin). One features a blind beggar; the other, salvific excrement. He initially wrote *The Farce of the Miller* for the last afternoon of this three-day spectacle.⁴⁶ When heavy rains delayed the mystery play's start, this piece was performed on its own to keep the audience engaged, and La Vigne quickly wrote *L'Aveugle et le boiteux* (The blind man and the lame man) to take its place on day three.⁴⁷ The titular characters are beggars who decide to collaborate, the blind man carrying the other on his back, with the lame man guiding him. The blind man exclaims at the other man's great weight (ll. 81–2), surmising that he has not shit for three months (l. 96). The lame man farts loudly, admits it has been six days (ll. 98–9), and the blind man tells him to get down and go produce a turd (ll. 100–4). The lame man's exit serves to shift focus back to the saint play, where two religious communities are competing for Saint Martin's corpse, and one group steals it from the other. As the alternating narratives continue, the two disabled beggars attempt to flee the funeral procession's miraculous cures (ll. 114–65). They fail. The formerly blind man welcomes sight and praises Saint Martin, whereas the formerly lame man bewails his altered state, dirties his face, and plans to fake a different disability (ll. 198–259). The action does not humiliate this blind man but, instead, brings him a happy outcome, reserving the relatively mild fecal degradation for his miracle-refusing companion. Notably, no inverted hierarchy requires righting, because neither disabled beggar oversteps his expected social role. Fourteenth-century preachers treated the lame-blind pair allegorically, with the disempowered poor carried on the back of the spiritually blind wealthy and directing their path toward the salvation that they cannot themselves see.⁴⁸ Writing at the end of the fifteenth century, La Vigne avoids casting any such moral aspersions upon the wealthy Burgundians who commissioned the *Mystère de saint Martin*. Indeed, mapping the rich-poor relation onto these characters implies that only the city's elite can welcome the miracles that come their way, whereas the poor not only retain their feces but also remain willfully begrimed.

Excrement plays a much more central role in *The Farce of the Miller*, which features a Wife who beats and berates her ailing husband, a Miller, and the Priest with whom she'll jump into the bed as soon as the Miller vacates it by dying. On top of spousal abuse, the Miller suffers intestinal distress that worsens as the play progresses. An inexperienced devil waits under his bed with a bag, because he has been informed that the soul will exit through the anus. After domestic hijinks, the Miller defecates over the side of the bed, and the devil happily rushes off to Lucifer with his prize. The smell is so horrible that the gates of hell must be thrown open for fresh air, and henceforth no souls of millers will be admitted. Noah Guynn points out that the Miller dies but doesn't go to hell in spite of his highly irregular deathbed confession, mishandled by the lecherous priest. Reading the Miller's shit as penance, Guynn observes that "the stench even mimics the triumph of the resurrected Christ, who . . . forces hell to put its gates asunder and liberate the just."⁴⁹ La Vigne took this narrative thread from Rutebeuf's fabliau *Le Pet au vilain*, and Valerie Allen explains its central premises: first, peasants fart a lot and their attention fixates on physical necessity; second, both heaven and hell reject their souls,

which according to Rutebeuf “must go and sing with the frogs”; and third, devils are too stupid to distinguish a soul from a fart.⁵⁰ Dante as well as other medieval and Renaissance artists fills hell with both shit and noise, and Allen likens Satan to a load of excrement discharged from heaven, his ever-flapping wings sending his perpetual flatulence up through hell’s inverted funnel from the base, where he remains immobile, head down in the ice.⁵¹ Artists imagine sinners likewise falling, received by the gaping mouth of hell, boiled in cauldrons, eaten and shat out by the devil.

A full engagement with this farce exceeds the scope of my argument. Suffice it to observe that the Miller’s intestinal distress somatically intensifies his domestic torment, and his copious excrement saves him from the shit of hell. La Vigne intended *The Farce of the Miller* to be performed right after the saint announces that he is about to die and just before his death scene. As such, it would inversely mirror the mystery play’s action, briefly suspended as both the audience and the represented occupants of heaven watch the Miller’s smelly demise, the noisy fracas in hell succeeded by heaven’s harmonious welcome for Saint Martin’s soul. As it was played, everyone processed from the farce to the church, where they prayed for better weather.⁵² Within its complex performance context, the Miller’s excrement reminded its audience in Seurre of all that they thrust aside to live: doctrinal controversy, clerical corruption, a century of war, calamitous weather, increasingly predatory economic practices.⁵³ The character evaporates once his bowels are emptied, the script never entirely clarifying whether he does in fact die or, if so, what happens to his soul.⁵⁴ Interest coheres in his shit but then easily moves on to theatrical spectacle as the soul of the city’s patron saint ascends to heaven (as scripted) or to prayers for the Virgin’s meteorological intercession (as played).

Valuing the insistent object

Blindness refracts certain features of these five farces in particular ways, beginning with the opposition between sight and excrement. In the novel, the void left by loss of vision is soon filled with shit, whereas in the *Farce nouvelle des cinq sens de l’homme* the Asshole overwhelms the five senses and sends the previously dominant Eyes off the scene in tears. The loss of bowel control that produces the novel’s omnipresent feces resembles the blind man’s loss of mastery in *Goguelu*, with shadows of this fecal degradation falling upon the blind beggar in *Le Garçon et l’aveugle* and the lame companion beggar in *L’Aveugle et le boiteux*. Much as the blind beggar in the latter farce moves beyond degradation to welcome the miracle of restored eyesight, the novel’s central characters slog through the shit without becoming morally debased. Scrubbing away the excrement from *Blindness* neutralizes the immersion in hell so vividly pictured in medieval art and in the novel. Granted, the Miller avoids hell but only through the agency of his prodigious shit. Excrement also has positive effects for Saramago’s main characters, representing a bit of blindness gain as they learn to care for one another. After spending the night in an apartment belonging to the parents of the girl with dark glasses, they all go downstairs and shit in the garden together (253). Like the Miller’s shit, their communal defecation points toward redemption as they explore the ways of living possible in the now entirely blind city.

Along with the excrement, the adaptation lost the conversations among these characters and their cooperative effort, and a bit of concomitant self-sacrifice was lost as well: in the theatre, the doctor's wife starts the fire in the hoodlums' wing of the asylum; in the novel, it's a different woman, and she's immolated. Without the complexity of multiple voices and the hellish landscape, only the rather heroic adventure of a sighted person remains. Furthermore, the aural focus does not overwrite the negative stereotype of blindness as total tragedy. One wonders why Saramago and, after him, the Donmar Warehouse creative team, didn't at least bother to learn anything about blind experience. Descriptions are quite easy to find. Helen Keller saw a fuzzy whiteness, whereas Georgina Kleege can see shape, color, and light, and Leona Godin sees a "constant, hallucinogenic, pulsating pixelated snow-fuzz."⁵⁵ Both novel and script assume that "normal" blind experience is utter darkness and describe the epidemic as a "white" exception. The Storyteller (that is, the doctor's wife) reports the words of the first man to go blind: "I can't see anything. Everything has turned white. Like I've fallen into a milky sea."⁵⁶

Theatre scholars have exercised critical generosity in reviewing *Blindness*. Theresa Smalec says that "the play's multisensory plunge into the plight of a sightless nation challenged privileged audiences (tickets were \$116 per pair) to recognize our complicity in the Trump administration's blinkered, inequitable nonresponse to COVID-19." Extrapolating from the doctor's wife masquerading as blind in order to care for her husband (and others), Smalec wonders whether the "two other women" who help her during the cleansing rainstorm likewise "feigned blindness." The question is reasonable given the adaptation's single-character focus, and Smalec connects the gendered inequity in caregiving to the pandemic's disproportionate toll on women of color.⁵⁷ Recognizing the piece's problems "from a disability studies perspective," Jennifer Parker Starbuck and Josh Abrams observe that "the Western theatre has always, as Sophocles and Artaud remind us despite being separated by 2,500 years, sat in the midst of the plague, astride a grave. And, etymologically, the theatre [*theatron*] is after all the place of 'seeing.' The pandemic here becomes symptom, and the fiction challenges us, perhaps, to step back from both notions of sight's clarity and the ever-present metaphors of seeing that dominate language." They go on to ask, "How might such a moment imagine transformative change? How might this moment refresh both personal and societal notions of care?"⁵⁸ I like these questions and wish that the adaptation of *Blindness* had asked them of itself.

The reference to Artaud gestures toward another problem with this production: as Kimberly Jannarone so persuasively argues, Artaud idealizes theatre as plague-level contagion that sweeps away all social structures without imagining what will replace them.⁵⁹ She painstakingly connects his drive to invade, immerse, and control the audience with the contemporaneous counter-Enlightenment thought that gave rise to fascism. We have seen the revival of this particular sort of populism in post-Tea Party US politics, white supremacism, xenophobia, and the very science denial that keeps COVID-19 circulating. Abrams and Parker-Starbuck's reference to Beckett ("they give birth astride a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more," says the now-blind Pozzo in *Waiting for Godot*) likewise takes us back to the twentieth-century theatrical avant garde and an ambivalent relation to sight that does not, however, entail any appreciation of blindness gain.

Just as I question the choice to use blindness as a metaphor, regardless of intention, because it plays upon stereotypes of this sensory disability without examining them, I question the repurposing of *this* text to carry audiences back into theatres during the COVID-19 pandemic. To take *Blindness* as a text about public health suggests alignment with the antimask side of the political divide (if perhaps not on the antivaccination side). The fictional quarantine does not prevent the spread of blindness but instead subjects the narrative's personae to absolute horrors, degradation, and suffering. These are the product of fear rather than a necessary effect of the blindness, which would have been much better handled through compassion, a message explicitly articulated during the characters' time in quarantine: "Fear can cause blindness, said the girl with dark glasses, Never a truer word, that could not be truer, we were already blind the moment we turned blind, fear struck us blind, fear will keep us blind" (129). Proposing that we consider the text "an indictment of the cultural imperialism of sightedness," Gallagher observes that the most horrifying aspects of the blind characters' experience are caused by the fears of those who still have their sight.⁶⁰ That the novel was written at the time of the AIDS epidemic helps to explain its Nobel Prize. In the present context, though, *Blindness* suggests that we should have conquered our fears of contagion and kept going about our business as normal in order to preserve a healthy capitalist economy.

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As I revise this text for publication, we seem to be responding in just this fashion, caution exhausted after more than two years of a pandemic that continues to evolve and to kill. Mask and vaccine mandates have expired even in many places where people were previously happy to comply. The COVID abject nags at me, flickering images of all that we thrust aside in order to live in this space-time: corpses piling up, people gasping for breath, dying in isolation touched only by exhausted medical professionals through their improvised personal protective equipment. Instead of casting out those infected with the virus, denizens of our pandemic hell obscured the reality of the illness, the validity of medical science, and the necessity of public health measures. As it turns out, the flood of actual excrement comes later in association with post-COVID gastrointestinal disturbances.⁶¹ Like the medieval figure *L'Homme* sitting down to dine with his senses, I appear to have misdirected my anxieties while watching *The Blind* and listening to *Blindness*. My vision and hearing function well enough, and working through this material for the past eighteen months has helped me to conceive of changes that may come as simply that: changes, not catastrophe. I am now learning to conceptualize differently my GI tract, seriously disturbed after mild COVID in early 2022. The jokes had less personal resonance when I gave this talk the previous October. Perhaps some readers would prefer a more sanitized discourse, but I consider it essential to write from my embodied experience and to own my debilities without shame. As I find so often, abject medieval culture provides the postmodern insights that I need.

The novel's restoration of sight to its characters and the theatrical event's restoration of visual spectacle suggest that we will come through this pandemic and begin again on the other side, with the implicit assumption that things will be better because the hardship has made us better, as it did the doctor's wife: she has become a leader, and she has learned both compassion and respect for those she would have previously scorned. But I want to underline the urgency of *not* returning to what

was normal, and also of not assuming that we have been changed for the better. I return to Kristeva: theatre at its best shows us our abject. Let's stop using disability as a metaphor. Let's devise true alternatives to ocularcentric theatre. Let's make use of what we've learned about eye contact from Zoom—blind phenomenology was already telling us that blind people have to learn to fake it so that the sighted feel seen. Let's stop casting nondisabled actors in disabled roles. Let's find ways within our institutions and conferences to provide the necessary affordances for full participation by disabled scholars. We have so far to go. One of my goals as ASTR's president was to raise the profile of disability studies within the organization. The series of crises we navigated over my three-year term not only distracted from these goals but also highlighted their importance, and I sincerely hope that ASTR will move as quickly as possible toward achieving them.

Endnotes

- 1 See, e.g., Rosemarie Garland Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); Lennard J. Davis, "Introduction: Disability, Normality, and Power," *The Disability Studies Reader*, ed. Lennard J. Davis, 4th ed. (New York and London: Routledge, 2013), 1–14; Sharon L. Snyder and David T. Mitchell, *Cultural Locations of Disability* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2006); Susan M. Schweik, *The Ugly Laws: Disability in Public* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2009).
- 2 Susan Signe Morrison, *Excrement in the Late Middle Ages: Sacred Filth and Chaucer's Fecopoeitics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 135–7.
- 3 Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 4.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 2.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 3; italics original.
- 6 *The Blind*, by Maurice Maeterlinck, conceived and cocreated by Mia Rovegno & Jeanette Oi-Suk Yew, HERE Arts Center #stillHERE: ONLINE, <https://here.org/shows/the-blind/>, streamed 7 January 2021.
- 7 David Kornhaber, "The Blind" (review), *Disability Studies Quarterly* 25.3 (2005): <https://dsq-sds.org/article/view/598/775>, accessed 11 September 2022.
- 8 Ran Xia, "Blind" (Review), *Theatre Is Easy*, 14 April 2017, www.theasy.com/Reviews/2017/B/blind.php, accessed 11 September 2022.
- 9 See the show's website at www.thewheeltheatre.org/theblind.html, accessed 11 September 2022.
- 10 Naomi Schor, "Blindness as Metaphor," *differences* 11.2 (1999): 76–105, at 77.
- 11 Georgina Kleege, *Sight Unseen* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), 21.
- 12 David Bolt, "Aesthetic Blindness: Symbolism, Realism, and Reality," *Mosaic* 46.3 (2013): 93–108, at 98.
- 13 *Ibid.*, 105.
- 14 Donmar Warehouse, "Reclaiming *Blindness*" (podcast), *SoundCloud*, August 2020, <https://soundcloud.com/donmarwarehouse/reclaiming-blindness>, 4:05–17, 1:26–51; accessed 11 September 2022.
- 15 Hannah Thompson, "Blindness at the Donmar Warehouse," *Blind Spot*, 8 August 2020, <http://hannah-thompson.blogspot.com/2020/08/blindness-at-donmar-warehouse.html>, accessed 11 September 2022.
- 16 Hannah Thompson, "Blindness Gain and the Art of Non-Visual Reading," *Blind Spot*, 5 October 2108, <http://hannah-thompson.blogspot.com/search?q=blindness+gain>, accessed 11 September 2022.
- 17 *Blindness*, adapted by Simon Stephens from the novel by José Saramago, directed by Walter Meierjohann, Donmar Warehouse, at Daryl Roth Theatre, New York, 15 June 2021.
- 18 José Saramago, *Blindness*, trans. Giovanni Pontiero and Juan Sager (San Diego, New York, and London: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1998), 326. Further references to this source are included parenthetically within the text.
- 19 Liat Ben-Moshe, "Infusing Disability in the Curriculum: The Case of Saramago's *Blindness*," *Disability Studies Quarterly* 26.2 (2006), <https://dsq-sds.org/article/view/688/865>. § "Are we all blind?" ¶1; accessed 11 September 2022.

- 20 Ben-Moshe, "Infusing Disability," § "Othering blindness through the novel," ¶3.
- 21 David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 53–4.
- 22 George Snedeker, "Blindness. Jose Saramago" (book review), *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness* 93.6 (1999): 382–4, at 384.
- 23 Deborah J. Gallagher, "On Using Blindness as Metaphor and Difficult Questions: A Response to Ben-Moshe," *Disability Studies Quarterly* 26.2 (2006), <https://dsq-sds.org/article/view/690/867>, ¶2; accessed 11 September 2022.
- 24 Gallagher, "Blindness as Metaphor," ¶7.
- 25 Linda Ware, "The Again Familiar Trope: A Response to 'Infusing Disability in the Curriculum: The Case of Saramago's *Blindness*,'" *Disability Studies Quarterly* 26.2 (2006), <https://dsq-sds.org/article/view/689/866>, ¶1; accessed 11 September 2022; citing George Snedeker, *Politics and Culture*, 1997, <http://aspen.conncoll.edu/politicsandculture> (link is defunct).
- 26 Gallagher, "Blindness as Metaphor," ¶7.
- 27 M. Leona Godin, *There Plant Eyes: A Personal and Cultural History of Blindness* (New York: Pantheon, 2021), 254.
- 28 See Ione Fine and Ji-Min Park, "Blindness and Human Brain Plasticity," *Annual Review of Vision Science* 4 (2018): 337–56, doi:10.1146/annurev-vision-102016-061241; Laura Baroncelli and Claudia Lunghi, "Neuroplasticity of the Visual Cortex: In Sickness and in Health," *Experimental Neurology* 335 (2021), doi:10.1016/j.expneurol.2020.113515.
- 29 Godin, *There Plant Eyes*, 254–5, citing Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, "How the Brain Compensates for Vision Loss Shows Much More Versatility than Previously Recognized," *ScienceDaily*, 27 August 2008, www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2008/08/080827002719.htm; accessed 11 September 2022. The advantage disappeared even more quickly, though, within twenty-four hours of the blindfold's removal. See also Cheryl Kamei Hannan, "Review of Research: Neuroscience and the Impact of Brain Plasticity on Braille Reading," *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness* 100.7 (2006): 397–413.
- 30 Godin, *There Plant Eyes*, 158–64; see also Lore Thaler and Melvyn A. Goodale, "Echolocation in Humans: An Overview," *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews [WIREs]: Cognitive Science* 7.6 (2016): 382–93; doi:10.1002/wcs.1408. Thaler and Goodale point out that echolocation has clear practical advantages over assistive devices in that it "does not need batteries, it is cheap, it cannot be forgotten at home, it does not break . . . , it can be learned by children, . . . [and] making mouth clicks does not interfere with other activities" (390). On sensory substitution technology, which so far has little practical application, see Malika Auvray, Andrea Antal, and Bernhard Sabel, "Multisensory and Spatial Processes in Sensory Substitution," *Restorative Neurology & Neuroscience* 37.6 (2019): 609–19, doi:10.3233/RNN-190950; Daniel-Robert Chebat, Fabien C. Schneider, and Maurice Ptito, "Spatial Competence and Brain Plasticity in Congenital Blindness via Sensory Substitution Devices," *Frontiers in Neuroscience* 14 (2020), doi:10.3389/fnins.2020.00815.
- 31 Brenda Jo Brueggemann, "An Enabling Pedagogy: Meditations on Writing and Disability," *JAC* 21.4 (2001): 791–820, at 798. Also see Amy Vidali, "Seeing What We Know: Disability and Theories of Metaphor," *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies* 4.1 (2010): 33–54, at 48–9.
- 32 Laura Collins-Hughes, "Shows You Can Touch and Feel," *New York Times*, 6 June 2021.
- 33 Thompson, "Blindness at the Donmar Warehouse."
- 34 Simon Stephens, "Blindness: Donmar Warehouse Sound Installation Script," unpublished performance draft (9 August 2020), 21, 27.
- 35 Julie Singer, "Revoluting Anatomy in the *Farce nouvelle des cinq sens de l'homme*," *Postmedieval* 3.4 (2012): 436–49, at 439 n. 4. The playtext is available online at <http://visualiseur.bnf.fr/CadresFenetre?O=NUMM-27668&I=300&M=tdm>, 300–24; accessed 11 September 2022.
- 36 Petit de Julleville, *Histoire du théâtre en France: Répertoire du théâtre comique en France au Moyen Âge* [1886] (Geneva: Slatkine, 1967), 121, cited by Singer, "Revoluting Anatomy," 437 n. 2.
- 37 Singer, "Revoluting Anatomy," 440–1.
- 38 *Ibid.*, 445–6, quoting *Des cinq sens de l'homme*, 307.
- 39 *Ibid.*, 443, quoting *Des cinq sens de l'homme*, 317.
- 40 *Ibid.*, 437.
- 41 Edward Wheatley, *Stumbling Blocks before the Blind: Medieval Constructions of a Disability* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014 [2010]), x–xi. Also see Zina Weygand, *The Blind in French*

Society from the Middle Ages to the Century of Louis Braille (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009); Marla Carlson, "Marginal Performances by Late-Medieval Pigs and Blind Men," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 51.3 (2021): 397–429.

42 *Le Garçon et l'aveugle: Jeu du XIII^e siècle*, trans. and annot. Jean Dufournet, ed. Mario Roques (Paris: Librairie H. Champion, 1982 [1911]), 12–13. On the manuscript, see Carol Symes, "The Boy and the Blind Man: A Medieval Play Script and Its Editors," in *The Book Unbound: Editing and Reading Medieval Manuscripts and Texts*, ed. Siân Echard and Stephen Partridge (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 105–45.

43 Goguelu, in *Le Recueil de Florence: 53 farces imprimées à Paris vers 1515*, ed. Jelle Koopmans (Orléans: Paradigme, 2011), 629–46; also see Jody Enders, ed. and trans., *Blind Man's Buff; or, The Farce of "The Chokester": Farce du Goguelu*, in *"The Farce of the Fart" and Other Ribaldries: Twelve Medieval French Plays in Modern English* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 159–93.

44 See Edward Wheatley, "Voices of Violence: Medieval French Farce and the Dover Cliff Scene in *King Lear*," *Comparative Drama* 43.4 (2009): 455–71, at 460–3. In addition to discussing the two farces under consideration here, Wheatley (459) identifies episodes in *Le Mystère de la Résurrection* from Angers that feature a boy guiding and tricking a blind man. Wheatley was working with the Cohen edition of *Goguelu*, which suggested composition in the 1390s and printing sometime prior to 1540. Koopmans's dating of the farce establishes that the mystery (with versions from 1456, 1491, and 1492) came before *Goguelu* but after *Le Garçon et l'aveugle*.

45 Valerie Allen, *On Farting: Language and Laughter in the Middle Ages* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 84.

46 Andrieu de la Vigne, *The Farce of the Miller*, in *Six Medieval French Farces*, trans. Thierry Boucquey (Lewiston, NY: E. Mellen, 1999), 17–18. See *Farce du Munyer de qui le Deable Emport l'Ame en Enffer*, in *Recueil des farces (1450–1550)*, ed. André Tissier, vol. 4 (Geneva: Droz, 1989), 193–243.

47 Andrieu de la Vigne, *L'Aveugle et le boiteux*, in *Recueil des farces (1450–1550)*, ed. Tissier, vol. 11 (Geneva: Droz, 1997), 316–42. Citations to this source are given parenthetically in the text by line number. For both plays, also see Ronald Vince, "Two Short Plays by André de la Vigne," *Humanities Commons*, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.17613/s81v-3m92>; accessed 11 September 2022. Vince's English translations are based on the versions included in *Le théâtre Français avant la Renaissance 1450–1550, mystères, moralités et farces*, ed. Edouard Fournier (Paris: Laplace, Sanchez & Cie., 1872).

48 Irina Metzler, *A Social History of Disability in the Middle Ages: Cultural Considerations of Physical Impairment* (New York and London: Routledge, 2013), 162.

49 Noah D. Guynn, *Pure Filth: Ethics, Politics, and Religion in Early French Farce* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020), 129, citing Véronique Dominguez, *La Scène et la Croix: Le Jeu de l'acteur dans les Passions dramatiques Françaises (XIV^e–XVII^e siècles)* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), 153–6. The death is rather ambiguous, marked by the Miller saying that death has overtaken him (l. 439)—but obviously still alive to make this utterance. The hapless devil Berith says that the Miller's body is cold (l. 461). Both the Miller and his Wife refer to the soul exiting through his anus (ll. 440–5). Should we rely upon the judgment of any of these characters?

50 Allen, *On Farting*, 89.

51 *Ibid.*, 81–6.

52 Thierry Boucquey, introduction to *The Farce of the Miller*, 17–18; Guynn, *Pure Filth*, 125. Also see Vincent Corrigan and Vicki Hamblin, "Music and Performance in Three French Hagiographic Mystery Plays," *Medieval English Theatre* 35 (2013): 95–139.

53 Along with Guynn's analysis of the farces' doctrinal implications, see Martin W. Walsh's discussion of what he characterizes as the mystery's two courtroom dramas. "The Claude La Gente Episode in *La Vigne's Mystère de saint Martin: The Law Perverted, a Bourgeois Heroine, and Testimony from Beyond the Grave*," *Essays in Medieval Studies* 30.1 (2015): 193–203.

54 Guynn, *Pure Filth*, 117–19.

55 Georgina Kleege, *Blind Rage: Letters to Helen Keller* (Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press, 2006), 31; Godin, *There Plant Eyes*, xvii.

56 Stephens, "Blindness," 4.

57 Theresa Smalec, "Blindness" (review), *Theatre Journal* 73.4 (2021): 551–3.

58 Joshua Abrams and Jennifer Parker-Starbuck, "On 'Seeing' Theatre in 2020," *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 43.1 (2021): 78–82, at 81.

59 Kimberly Jannarone, *Artaud and His Doubles* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012), 26.

60 Gallagher, "Blindness as Metaphor," abstract.

61 Kewin Tien Ho Siah and Sanjiv Mahadeva, "Post-COVID-19 Functional Gastrointestinal Disorders: Prepare for a GI Aftershock," *Journal of Gastroenterology and Hepatology* 37.3 (2022): 413–14, doi:10.1111/jgh.15776; additional literature is plentiful but perhaps of little interest to my readers.

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