

MIT OpenCourseWare
<http://ocw.mit.edu>

21L.703 Studies in Drama: Too Hot to Handle: Forbidden Plays in Modern America
Fall 2008

For information about citing these materials or our Terms of Use, visit: <http://ocw.mit.edu/terms>.

Reactions to *Corpus Christi* as a Barometer of Predispositions and Internalization

Corpus Christi strikes a chord (or, perhaps a nerve) with a wide audience because it deals with a very personal issue. An issue that, even if one doesn't have strong personal convictions pertaining to it, is generally regarded as a "hot topic". *Corpus Christi* asks a hypothetical question that most people- Christians or not- see as outrageous: What if Jesus Christ was gay? Then instead of giving an absurd answer to an absurd question, *Corpus Christi* gives a plausible answer. The play doesn't suggest a gay Jesus would birth a morally bankrupt world, nor a more tolerant one. Rather, it implies that whether Jesus Christ was homo- or hetero-sexual makes *no difference at all* to his fate. He is still betrayed by Judas and crucified for all to witness. *Corpus Christi* is, at its heart, a message of equality. This message is largely ignored, however, as those viewing the play appear to focus most of their attention on the play's particulars, on the means as opposed to the end. Therein lies the controversy. The religious community has qualms with the very foundation on which *Corpus Christi* rests- Jesus as a homosexual- and thus has a negative reaction to every block of stone lain atop it. Literary scholars tend to find the play's idea interesting, but its execution sub par, and general audiences, looking for a night of entertaining wickedness, are largely left mumbling, "That's it?"

These diverse and sometimes contradictory reactions are most likely a product of the mindset in which viewers go to see the play. This mindset, in turn, is a reflection of their internal ideals and predispositions, the heart of which can be ascertained by determining which part of *Corpus Christi*'s alleged debauchery is perceived as the most offensive. Is it that McNally dared

doubt Jesus's sexual orientation, and took this doubt so far as to base an entire play upon it? Or does the problem lie in the play's execution, in what comes after the premise of a gay Jesus has been set? That even if we could believe, if only for an hour, that Jesus were gay He would not act in the way Joshua is being portrayed in *Corpus Christi*. That even if Jesus were gay, He would not be promiscuous, nor would He disrespect His father. The play is only 80 pages long; how do we go so swiftly and seamlessly from watching or reading a fictional play to taking the play so seriously as to call it blasphemy worthy of censorship? When two such volatile topics as Religion and Sexuality combine, there is bound to be an explosion, but why one of such vehemence? What makes it so personal?

The play begins this personalization by employing the process of internalization. This process is started by trimming everything down- from the costumes to the stage. The set is sparse and there is nothing to distract our attention. This lack of extraneous objects causes the details that are present- the hammering of the cross and the cross itself, the pool of water, the perpetual fire- to take on even greater meaning. We can't preoccupy ourselves with trivialities like whether or not Judas would wear that particular shirt, because all of the actors don the same attire: a "plain white shirt and crisp pair of khakis" (pg 2). In this way, even from the play's outset, *Corpus Christi* invites viewers to take an active role in analyzing the play. It is not overtly coercive, but effortless. If we see over a dozen men change into the same outfit, it is instinctual to wonder why those two particular items? White is traditionally associated with purity, so having these people wear white emphasizes their good nature. It also suggests that they are blank slates, ready to receive and be influenced by the gospel. That Judas too wears this outfit- and not one of black or red- implies that he is not any different from the other disciples. He is not singled out as being particularly evil or malicious.

In light of this, that khaki pants are chosen over white ones is a bit concerning. It could be that an all white ensemble would have been too angelic, an especially appropriate concern given the play's subject matter. Alternatively, consider that the crisp khaki pants cover the disciples' genitalia. While their hearts are pure, as reflected by their white shirts, from a traditional perspective, their sexuality is decidedly unpure, requiring a less holy colored covering: khaki, the color something lightly soiled, of dirt. This could be considered reading too deeply into the details for any other play, but because there is nothing else on which to focus, our minds are allowed- perhaps even encouraged by the playwright- to go that far. After internally fleshing out the issue of their clothing, we might then focus our attention back on the external world, only to be overwhelmed by the reality of actually seeing these 13 some odd men all dressed the same. My first reaction was to think of an oppressive military regime a la Hitler's Nazis, before finally settling on the image of a cult a la Jim Jones. These are not the type of images one wants their audience to have in mind when retelling the passion of Christ. Or are they?

And so *Corpus Christi* initially situates itself in the front of our minds, not via some complex psychological mechanism, but by virtue of the fact that it leaves gaps that we have to fill on our own. There's no bread at the Last Supper? We have to decide whether it was wheat or rye. There are no nails being driven into Joshua's hands? We have to imagine the shape, the size, the rust. Thus we become a part of the play, deciding either to focus on the meaning of the play, which to many is disturbing at best, or allow our minds to wander, which can be downright terrifying, leading to bizarre realizations about oneself. For example, what is it that caused me to link these disciples with cult members, with Nazis! If I were highly religious, I would initially be terrified that I had just linked religion and genocide, and would most likely immediately translate

this terror into a disdain for the playwright, for the actors, for anything else that was outside of myself.

Yet the personalization is still not complete. In addition to using internalization, *Corpus Christi* moves its audience to feel that the play is real: the disciples are not merely actors, but people. We are not viewing a re-enactment of events that transpired some 2000 years ago, but witnessing events that are happening presently, in the here and now. This is suggestive of the second coming of Christ. How daring to say that Christ would be reborn as a homosexual and yet, how fitting! He was an outsider when he first came, there is no convincing reason why he wouldn't be an outsider when he returns. Depending again on the prejudices and predispositions one harbors when viewing the play, this could be disconcerting for a reason far more substantial than a basic aversion to homosexuality. It might suggest to a religious viewer that they do not accept Christ fully and completely, but only if there are certain strings attached, only if He fits certain criteria that they have imposed upon Him. It suggests that if Christ came today, they might not even be able to recognize Him, let alone accept Him.

Interestingly, it is the converse of this idea that McNally hoped to address with *Corpus Christi*. Namely that if Jesus Christ were to return, he might not recognize us, His supposedly loyal followers. In the foreword on page vi, McNally writes that “the purpose of the play is that we begin again the familiar dialogue with ourselves: Do I love my neighbor? ... Christ died for all of our sins because He loved each and every one of us. When we do not remember His great sacrifice, we condemn ourselves to repeating its terrible consequences.” To urge us to think both of Christ's death and His second coming, he tells the former in terms of the latter. That is, McNally tells of the passion in modern times. At the beginning of the play, the actors are baptized

as their characters right in front of the audience, by who other than John the Baptist. All of the baptisms follow the same format as when James is baptized:

John I bless you, (full name of the actor playing JAMES). I baptize you and recognize your divinity as a human being. I adore you, (first name of the actor). I christen you James. (page 2)

The effect is twofold. This technique first suggests that these men actually lived and were human. They were not (with the exception of Jesus/Joshua) endowed with any special powers, they were not extraordinary in any particular way. They can be faulted for their actions only inasmuch as they made mistakes- as we all do- that happened to have terrible consequences. This leads to the second effect of the on-stage baptism: these men could have been anyone. This combines with the lack of props to emphasize that particulars do not matter here. The story has been told ad infinitum, ad nauseam even, but the reason the original story of Jesus retains its power is because of the feeling it evokes within those who hear it, because of the emotion it stirs. As Judas says, it's not the story that matters, it's the feeling. McNally recognizes this to the point that he opens his play by preemptively addressing this issue, admitting that he is telling "an old and familiar story. ... There's no suspense and fewer surprises. You all know how it turns out" (page 1). And this is true. We know how this story ends so we are free to focus more on the details. But this is a Catch-22 because there are no details to consider, so once again we are lead down the path of introspection.

Despite the lack of tangibles with which to take offense, the religious community had a veritable field day with *Corpus Christi*, spawning outrage so pervasive that it refused to stay within the confines of one religion. The Christian Voice sought to prosecute *Corpus Christi's* director and cast under a blasphemy law last used in Scotland in 1843, the British premiere of the play received a fatwa, and Dr. Morton Pomerantz, a Rabbi on the board of directors for Morality

in Media, described the play as “blasphemous and deliberately so.” That people of different faiths object to *Corpus Christi* on religious grounds speaks to a shaking of the core of the religious foundation, something McNally is able to accomplish precisely because this play favors broad themes over particulars. The idea put forth by Dr. Pomerantz, that *Coprus Christi* needlessly attacks religion, is what seems to bother Christians the most. Consider the following excerpt from the beginning of the play, after the actors have been baptized but before the nativity:

Judas Everybody is going to tell the truth about himself this time! Even Joshua.

Joshua Especially Joshua.

James Get on with it, Judas.

Judas No one has ever told this story right. Even when they get the facts right, the feeling is wrong. One and one are two. So what? What does that tell you about anything. This is what matters.

JUDAS hits his right hand to his chest.

The only thing. Nothing else.

More razzes. JUDAS continues over them.

People can't stand the truth. They want their Joshua, seen through their eyes, told through their lies. Truth is brutal. It scalds. It stings.

It is this type of dialogue, interpreted as general disdain for the religious establishment, that has evoked responses from Muslims, Jews, and Christians alike. Judas asserts that “no one has ever told this story right,” so it is not possible, for example, for Jews to say “Oh this is referring to Christians, not us” or vice versa. What’s more, this claim of inaccurate storytelling seems to be focused on the lies that purportedly surround Joshua/Jesus, suggesting that his is the story most often done an injustice. This is reflected in the way in which the characters, once baptized, give a short summary of who they are. Simon states that he is a teacher, Peter says he’s a fisherman, and Judas matter of factly mentions that he’s “got a big dick.” Each man reveals something about himself. Joshua is the only one who does not give such a speech. This suggests both that He is too complicated to be summed up in a few declaratives, and also that he resists the idea of it.

The other disciples seem to share this view, as they all give Judas grief for demanding that the whole truth be told.

The very fact that Judas seems to be on a moral soap box adds insult to injury. Judas is the one who eventually betrays Jesus, yet here he is standing for truth. It is particularly interesting that he should say that the truth scalds and stings. When John baptizes the characters, he sprinkles water over their heads with little flourish and to no outwardly effect. But when Joshua is baptized, “the ACTOR [playing Joshua] howls as if scalded as the water is poured over him.” When Judas is baptized, “the ACTOR shudders as the water is poured over him” (pages 7-8). This suggests that Joshua is the truth, or perhaps that he now knows the truth, and finds it brutal and painful. Judas does not howl, but he shudders, now aware of what he must do and terrified of it. This further underscores the inevitability of the actions that follow. Joshua and Judas, Judas and truth, these are the types of unconscious associations that link good with evil that make the play so dangerous to the religiously inclined. Indeed, the associations needn't be strictly between good and evil to prompt an uproar. The baptisms reveal another association that is apparently controversial: that of Jesus' divinity and his humanity.

When the actors are baptized as their characters, the line between fact and fiction is blurred. For all we know (and we don't), the man playing John the Baptist could actually be a priest and thus these rituals performed in a fictional setting could be fact. Indeed, McNally asserts that this “play is more a religious ritual than a play.” (page vii) One might imagine that there is no harm in blurring said line, that it could even aid in creating a better theatrical environment, in a way similar to how shooting on location in the Alps enhances is preferable to using a cardboard backdrop. This may well be the case, but the problem occurs when this line is not just blurred, but crossed. By baptizing a man as Jesus, *Corpus Christi* is not just saying that

Jesus was human, but it is emphasizing this humanity, a theme that recurs throughout the play. Normally, Jesus' humanity is largely though not completely ignored and is certainly downplayed, hence the large span of his young adulthood that is scarcely seen in the Bible. It says that Jesus is divine, not because he is human, but in spite of it; He is not a divine human, but rather divine and human. It was His selfless sacrifice that joined the two characteristics, bestowing upon mankind whatever amount of divinity we possess today. So when John says to each actor as he baptizes him, "I recognize your divinity as a human being", this tenet is doubly violated. It not only suggests that Jesus' divinity was rooted in His humanity, but also that this link was not unique to Jesus. Everyone possessed it.

The remainder of the play brings to the forefront several other "hot button" religious issues, making *Corpus Christi* a prime candidate for a type of proliferation of discourse. Homosexuality is an issue that is often kept hidden away in the closet in Christianity, along with sexuality in general, as leaders desperately try to keep the sacred and profane separate. But since McNally puts both of these things and then some into a succinct 80 page play, the Church is able to keep their ideals completely separate from all of the dirtiness. That is, the Church itself did not bring the topics of Jesus' sexuality and young adulthood into discussion, this was done by the play. The Church is able to keep its hands clean while still having something to rally against. They are able to point to *Corpus Christi* and say, *this* is what is evil, this is what we preach against. Now that the ideas are out in the open, they can talk about them and eventually protest them. When the thoughts and questions about Jesus' personal life were just in people's heads, the Church might have felt inclined to shy away from addressing them because to do so it would first have to dig up the smut, and who knows if it's better to just let well enough alone. Here, someone (McNally) has planted the seed, or rather exposed the fruit, for them, so all the Church

had to do was swoop in with their protests and denunciations and save the day. As it stands, the religious community perhaps should thank McNally for doing its dirty work.

Of course, one could say that it is only the extremely religious that view the play as offensive, and this is due to their extreme fervor. But what about those without such ties? The response of the public, as seen through newspaper reviews, has been extremely diverse. Some, like Kuchwara of the Chicago Sun Times, feel somewhat similar to the religious community in that it is unnecessarily controversial. Others seem to find it not shocking enough, and still others find the play to just be poorly written. As Terry Byrne wrote in a review for the Boston Herald, “*Corpus Christi* is a passion play, which is not the same as a passionate play.” He asserts that the second act of the play is the problem: “At this point, McNally abandons the compelling and creative *Corpus Christi* and reverts to an unsurprising retelling of the Passion of Jesus Christ.” The play becomes, for lack of a better word, preachy. Innuendo and metaphors are done away with. Tenets of Christianity are either presented factually, or twisted in a way that seems unnecessary the plot.

While Byrne at least commends the first act, the New York Times’ Ben Brantley says “the excitement stops right after the metal detectors,” calling it a “lazy” piece that “piggy-backs on the mighty resonances guaranteed by the story that inspired it.” Given the play’s history- all of the rigmarole leading up to its opening and McNally’s critically acclaimed play *Love! Valour! Compassion!*- Brantley, and many others like him, were expecting more. More excitement, more passion. Something bold, something, as Thomas said, you can get your teeth into. And this is exactly what *Corpus Christi* set out not to do. The actors said there would be no tricks, no surprises. And so for the mass of theatre goers who went for the tricks and surprises, the show was over before it even began. Not much can be done to fix a play that fails from the very outset,

and in the case of *Corpus Christi*, sets itself up for failure by acknowledging that it does not offer cheap tricks and surprises. Those looking for such things are out of luck. But what is it that made the play fall from the good graces of those, like Byrne, who appreciated the first act but were disenchanted by the second?

It may be that, by disparaging McNally's second act by saying it is a poor telling of the passion, the truly interesting part lies in what is not being said. The Bible omits a large chunk of Jesus' adult life. It is potentially because nothing spiritually relevant occurred during this time, but possibly because the actions that transpired can be inferred from context clues: Jesus was a young man in his prime, apparently a pretty good orator, a carpenter good with his hands... put two and two together. Similarly, people who saw a debacherous young Joshua in the first act were expecting a debacherous adult Joshua in the second, and thus were sorely displeased when they were presented with a Joshua that was startlingly similar to the Biblical Jesus, if a bit more lax on adhering to social mores. What these reviewers are not saying, or saying by omission, is that they *want* to see the image of Jesus defiled, brought down to their level, not entirely dissimilar from the mob that brings Jesus to his death. While they may not have gone so far as to want to see him crucified, they almost certainly wanted him humanized.

Alternatively, what is being said could be the opposite of what is really meant, a type of Freudian negation. The disdain for the second act could stem from the entirely opposite sentiment as that proposed above. It could be that these reviewers, mildly religious church on Easter Sunday types, or not religious at all but respectful of the establishment, harbor some type of reverence toward the idea of Jesus. They are able to enjoy the play when Joshua does not conflict with the image they have of Jesus, as is the case in the first act. Who's really to say that Jesus wasn't gay, that he didn't have letters in Speech and Drama, that he didn't try to take a

girl's virginity on prom night? Whether he did or he didn't has little influence on his ability to be the Savior, they reason. He died to save us from all of our sins, there's no reason that He didn't wash away a few of his own as well. The second act, however, tampers with the Jesus they know. His miracles don't work properly, he becomes angry and strikes a priest. The second act is disliked, not because it's simply retelling of the last days of Jesus' life, but because it's not retelling them faithfully.

While the reviewers may try to find their Jesus in Joshua, another demographic appears to try and find themselves in Joshua. *Corpus Christi* has been performed numerous times on college campuses. The allure of the play could come from several areas. Maybe they like the idea of putting on an edgy play, something that provokes. After all, they're college students. But this explanation, I think, underestimates both the play and my peers. Mightn't the real reason be that these students identify with Joshua? Even though He's divine, He is still at heart a conflicted youth. He struggles with His burgeoning sexuality, disagrees with the life His parents have chosen for him, and hides a dreamy picture of James Dean under his bed. He falls in love. Joshua is imperfect, and yet he is able to save all of mankind. The same things that religious activists found blasphemous may easily appear inspirational to college students. This is not to say that college students are a homogenous group. The idea of performing *Corpus Christi* was not necessarily greeted by a throng of open, eager arms- far from it. Certain administrators had serious qualms with having the play performed at all, particularly on a school campus. A subset of university students, particularly those who were deeply religious, protested the play and often picketed outside of auditoriums and performances. The reactions of the remaining students were split in much the same way as the general public's was. Those students involved with the play,

and the more tolerant portion of the student population, were either excited, or largely ambivalent about the show's production.

This same dichotomy is present at the level of administration. To start with, the administration must approve all college plays before they are funded and performed, so the mere fact that the play is being staged is a testament to the administration's tolerance. Indeed, I was unable to find any instance of a university theatre group wanting to perform *Corpus Christi* but being shut down by the administration. In March of 2001, for example, Florida Atlantic University provided its student theatre group with \$600 to perform *Corpus Christi*, a reasonable sum given the sparseness of the play. The play premiered on March 28th to a sold out house. Senator Debby Sanderson, whose district includes FAU, said the play was "in terrible taste and poor judgment." In response, Lyn Lorenti, spokesperson for FAU, said the play would not be canceled because "it's a matter of academic freedom." When outside pressure was put on the administration to cancel the play, they would not. Governor Jeb Bush went so far as to say that, "we should have diverse views on our campus, and they should be protected." He was quick to note, however, that this does not constitute an endorsement of the play- and hardly an endorsement of the play's ideas- but rather an instance of the "free speech rights of faculty and students." Again, this shows tolerance, but not acceptance.

And yet even this small bit of tolerance should not be taken for granted. Charlie Crist, at the time Florida's Education Commissioner, called "the sponsorship by government of this enormously disrespectful act [*Corpus Christi*] should appall any thinking person who honors the religious beliefs of others." The biggest problem seemed to be the kisses that occur between Joshua and Judas on pages 35, 38, and 72. No one has said outright why they find these scenes so explicit, but the kisses are almost always short listed for their indecency. It could be that the

problem is too obvious to warrant an explanation, but the putridity of the hotel sex scene is often expounded upon. I think there's something deeper at work here. If we look at the three kisses in sequence, a definite pattern emerges:

He [Judas] kisses JOSHUA on the lips. ...

Joshua We shouldn't have done that.

Judas Who says? Open your mouth next time somebody kisses You. (page 35)

JUDAS kisses JOSHUA. This time JOSHUA responds. (page 38)

JUDAS kisses JOSHUA. JOSHUA kisses him back, hard. (page 72)

Perhaps the first things we notice are that Judas initiates all three kisses and that with each passing kiss, Joshua becomes a more and more active participant. What is the significance of these two facts, and how might they contribute to the feeling of uneasiness surrounding *Corpus Christi*? Judas is generally associated with things that are negative because he betrays Christ in the Bible, and Jesus, the Savior, is positive. It seems here that Joshua is following Judas's lead. Instead of converting the sinner, Joshua is being converted by the sinner. Joshua also seems to like it. He goes from being unresponsive and expressing remorse to being very passionate. It is important to note, however, that Joshua is never the one to begin the kiss; he only follows Judas's lead. This suggests that Joshua knows what he is doing is wrong, but cannot resist temptation.

The problem is not the kiss itself. Same sex kisses on the cheek are acceptable and perhaps even encouraged, as are those to the hands and feet. Even some kisses to the mouth can be a tolerable sign of affection and closeness. The problem may be, as discussed above, the meaning of kiss, but there is something more. A second problem lies in the fact that it's not just a kiss. They are not kissing each other to say hello, or goodbye. They are not showing respect when they kiss. They are expressing physical passion between two men. This is something that

many people, religious or not, self-proclaimed tolerants of homosexuals or not, have trouble viewing. They might be okay with the *idea* of gay men, but not the actual, physical manifestation of their affection. For some, there is a feeling evoked when actually seeing two men's lips intertwined- as opposed to supposing that two gay men would kiss in theory- that conjures an unfamiliar and uncomfortable gut feeling. It's perhaps that they view homosexuality as a mental or intellectual attraction between men, and as long as it remains there in the mind, and not out in the open, it is acceptable. But as soon as it is out in the open, the sight of physical closeness between two men becomes unpalatable. They think, men desiring and loving another man's personality is one thing, desiring and making love to another man's body is quite another.

And so in addition to viewing *Corpus Christi* as purely a re-imagining of Jesus' life, one might also read the play as a cautionary tale, or at least an indictment against homosexuality. Interestingly enough, the religious community has failed to notice or exploit this possibility. While Christians seem to feel that turning Jesus gay is a negative portrayal of Jesus, it is also possible to take the opposing position. That is, to view *Corpus Christi's* Jesus as a negative portrayal of gays. For one, even if Joshua were a regular man, he is promiscuous, sleeping with several men nonchalantly and no one seriously, and is unable to refrain from mixing business with pleasure. If we add the second layer of Joshua as a Christ figure, then Joshua becomes a pretty pathetic excuse for a Lord and Savior. Not all of his miracles are successful: Joshua tries to heal the sick wife of the centurion, who in the Bible lives when Jesus gives His word, but in the play she dies anyway. Even His grade school teachers don't recall him as particularly memorable, just "one of many, many hundred" (page 39). It almost seems as if *Corpus Christi* links homosexuality with a baseline level of incompetence. And if not incompetence, at least mediocrity and certainly not greatness. Joshua's disciples do not respect Him. When the

archetypal “This bread is My body” line is delivered on page 70, Jesus’ disciples make fun of Him, with Peter joking that everyone should “Eat this knife. It is my gallbladder.” It seems that even his followers don’t have the faith in him, or at least the reverence that was afforded to the real Jesus Christ. Of course, this lack of reverence could stem from Jesus’ own attitude. He urges His followers to not take everything He says so literally (page 63), suggesting that even He does not does not have complete faith in Himself.

Although there is not a consensus as to the play’s literary merit, *Corpus Christi* has undoubtedly opened up a certain avenue of discourse. Each of the communities discussed above has been forced to confront the issue of Jesus as related to our society. Obviously but not only in relation to his sexuality, but also in his purpose to humanity as a whole. This would be a phenomenal achievement, if only the discourse crossed those community boundaries. Instead, each community seems to come to a consensus, or at least discuss the play within the confines of its own people, only venturing outward to announce the consensus, unready and unwilling to receive feedback on their ideas. So instead of the sharing of ideas and a discussion that flows back and forth between people, we reach a stalemate in which the various ideas float in the air, not mingling, but menacingly staring each other down. The only time the ideas seem to contact each other is for the sole purpose of refuting the opposing stance. For example, the organization The Christian Voice sent specific people to see the play “So no-one could ever say to [them] again: “You haven't even seen it.” So [they] would know. So [they] could file a complaint for blasphemy.” Armed with a preconceived notion of *Corpus Christi*, they watch the play only to confirm that notion, uninterested in considering an alternate point of view.

But are all of these seemingly conflicting viewpoints actually at an ideological impasse, or are they just the many sides of one die? The latter possibility gains support from the

comments made by the administrators of Indiana University. When allowing their students to perform *Corpus Christi*, they issued a statement saying that it was not endorsing the play, but rather protecting freedom of speech. That the university was hesitant to endorse the play acknowledges the presence of something controversial. Indeed, most newspaper reviewers did recognize the play as containing a fair amount of anti-Christian sentiment, they just did not ascribe as much gravity to it as the religious did. More than showing respect for Jesus, these critics valued freedom of speech. Interestingly, the First Amendment protects freedom of speech up until the point where it encroaches on the rights of others. The Christians' call for the banning of this play could reflect their feeling that the play simply goes too far and does encroach on their religious beliefs.

Indeed, how does one know where to draw the line? How can one tell if the potential damage is worth the amount of good that comes from the play? In sum, is the blasphemy worth it? To begin with, we need to determine if the play even fits the definition of blasphemy. The OED defines blasphemy as “profane speaking of God or sacred things” or “impious irreverence.” *Corpus Christi* falls under this heading in several respects, initially because Jesus is gay. Indeed, the mere speculation about His sexual orientation and certainly the implication that He had multiple sexual partners goes against part of the foundation on which respect for Jesus Christ rests. Born of an immaculate conception, it should follow that He led an immaculate life. Even if the homosexual theme is extracted from the play, there are still distinct characteristics that show “impious irreverence”. For instance, God Himself denies being omnipotent and omnipresent and Jesus, as stated before, does not follow the instructions of His father immediately and without question. Indeed, right before His crucifixion, He calls on His Father for guidance and courage and gets nothing. In Jesus' time of deepest need, God is not there. This is a far cry from God

being a compassionate Heavenly father. Even though there are several reasons the play can be seen as blasphemous, people appear to harp on homosexuality because it is one, the most readily apparent “vice” and two, a torch that can be easily carried by Christians and pro-gay supporters alike.

References

- Brantley, Ben. "Nice Young Man and Disciples Appeal for Tolerance." Rev. of *Corpus Christi* by Terrence McNally. *New York Times* 14 Oct. 1998: E1.
- Byrne, Terry. "Second Act of 'Corpus Christi' is Unforgivable." Rev. of *Corpus Christi* by Terrence McNally. *Boston Herald* 1 Oct. 1998: 45.
- "Corpus Christi (play)." *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. 17 Sep 2008. 9 Nov 2008
<[http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Corpus_Christi_\(play\)&oldid=238972062](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Corpus_Christi_(play)&oldid=238972062)>.
- Crist, Charlie. "Crist Responds to FAU play." Letter. *St. Petersburg Times*. 14 April 2001.
- Cunneen, Joseph. "'Corpus Christi': why it irks us." Rev. of *Corpus Christi* by Terrence McNally. *National Catholic Reporter* 30 Oct 1998:
- Donovan, Gill. "Catholic League, university oppose lawsuit over play- 'Corpus Christi'." *National Catholic Reporter* 27 July 2001:
- Frontain, Raymond-Jean. "McNally After the 'Gay Jesus' Play." *The Gay & Lesbian Review Worldwide* March 2007: 21-24. Rpt. in *Contemporary Literary Criticism*.
- Green, Stephen. Christian Voice – Corpus Christi. 15 Dec. 2004. The Christian Voice. 31 Oct. 2008 < http://www.christianvoice.org.uk/corpus_christi1.html>
- Greene-Eads, Martha. "Conversion Tactics in Terrence McNally's and Paul Rudnick's Gay Gospels." *Modern Drama* Spring 2005: 163-85. Rpt. in *Contemporary Literary Criticism*.
- Jenkins, Jeffrey. "'Corpus Christi': A Different but Not Shocking Story." Rev. of *Corpus Christi* by Terrence McNally. *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* 14 Oct 1998:
- Kuchwara, Michael. "'Corpus Christi', the gospel according to Terrence McNally." Rev. of *Corpus Christi* by Terrence McNally. Associated Press Online. 13 Oct 1998.

Leightty, Paul. "Controversial Play Opens, Is Greeted by Protestors." *The Cincinnati Post* 13

June 2003:

McNally, Terrence. *Corpus Christi*. New York: Grove P, 1998.

Medrek, T.J. "The reviews are in (and they're mostly scathing) for McNally's 'Christi'." Rev. of

Corpus Christi, by Terrence McNally. *Boston Herald* 15 Oct. 1998: 56.

Nuechterlein, James. "The Gayest Story Ever Told." *First Things* Dec. 1998: 9-10. Rpt. in

Contemporary Literary Criticism.

"Rabbi Says 'Corpus Christi' Demonstrates Contempt for Believers." US Newswire. 7 Oct 1998

Span, Paula. "Play with Gay Christ Figure Sparks Protest in New York—Catholic Groups

Denounce 'Corpus Christi'." *The Washington Post* 23, 1998:

Stein, Jerry. "The Message of Love Upstages 'Corpus Christi' Controversy." Rev. of *Corpus*

Christi by Terrence McNally. *The Cincinnati Post* 13 June 2003:

Zelaya, Kevin. "Protestors bring attention to 'Corpus Christi' at U. Nebraska." *Daily Nebraskan*

2 Dec. 2005: