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Play Texts and Public Practice in the Chester Cycle, 1422-1607

By

Matthew John Sergi

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

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in

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of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Maura Nolan, Chair

Professor Jennifer Miller

Professor Carol Clover

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Abstract

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Play Texts and Public Practice in the Chester Cycle, 1422-1607 investigates how the Chester cycle's scripted action engages playfully with the unscripted practices that surrounded it, especially on the feast days that occasioned its fifteenth- and sixteenth-century civic performances. From the dissertation's series of close readings emerges a new vision of cycle drama, in which the revelers who perform and watch the cycle actively exert developmental influences on the form and content of the texts. I show that the extant texts are mirrors of Cestrian public recreation and festivity, enacting feasts, games, intercultural commerce, and civic ceremonies with surprising frequency. Not only do the plays reflect public practice, I argue, but they constitute it: the texts inscribe real guild ceremonies and celebrations into a repeatable dramatic tradition.

The Chester plays are inextricable from the holiday festivals that occasioned them, so a close literary analysis of the extant play texts requires an understanding of the circumstances within which the live performances developed. Those circumstances are only fully visible when the *mises-en-scène* imagined by the extant texts are taken into account as meaningful symbols inseparable from the poetic lines. Throughout *Play Texts and Public Practice*, I not only combine new readings of archival data with on-site research into Chester's live performances and urban topography, but I also treat the play texts themselves as accretive records of performance, allowing me to excavate from them previously unnoticed vestiges of performance cues and circumstances. In turn, I incorporate those cues and circumstances back into my formal analysis, to comprehend the open-ended space and time of street theater as medieval Cestrians played it and understood it.

A rigorous performance-based approach allows me to read the extant texts as indices of ongoing community-based practice—a set of local festivities in which the literary subtleties and embellishments of Chester's texts play a crucial role. The form and content of the cycle, integrating real festivities with the symbolic representation of those festivities, create a complex conceptual space within which the relationships between secular and religious practice can be negotiated and explored. The fifteenth- and sixteenth-century performance conditions make their real environment radically visible, rather than trying to darken it; the local spectators and architecture that crowded in on the plays' productions were absorbed into their texts—so that the extant texts, having developed during that immersive and collaborative performance process, resonate aesthetically and symbolically with the Cestrian community and its city.

For Ara Glenn-Johanson
on our tenth anniversary

and for every other theater-maker who remembers
why we call these things *plays*.

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Seeing the Cestrian revival of the Chester cycle, and hearing the participants' thoughts on their own plays, was easily the most inspiring part of my process in developing this dissertation. I offer sincere and humble thanks especially to Cestrian performers Ronno Griffiths, Brian Pearson, and Ieuan Griffiths Pearson, who in 2008 and 2011 generously took an exhausted American postgraduate under their wing and gave up their time, their stories, their powerful and honest performances, their impromptu tours, their delicious food, and the use of their spare room.

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I am also grateful to my family for innumerable reasons. When I found myself stranded at the Manchester International Airport at the end of my research trip in 2008, it was my mother, Adrienne Hernandez, who kindly provided my plane ticket home—in so doing, she became an accidental provider, in a way, of another of the travel grants that made this dissertation possible. My mother accompanied my sister, Marissa Hernandez, to *Chester 2010* in Toronto, where I had taken ill; if they hadn't cared for me there, I would never have been able to stay for the performances and symposium. Back home in New York, meanwhile, my mother-in-law Bette Glenn allowed me to take a much-needed dissertation-writing retreat at her house.

I close by offering special thanks to the performance-makers in the San Francisco Bay Area with whom I have been collaborating through the past four years, exploring artistic work that has deeply nourished my scholarly writing. Berkeley's Impact Theater helped produce a couple of my Chester play translations in a way that, a bit irreverently, did real justice to their convivial context (see Chapter Three)—by plying the Shepherds and Herod with real beer and wine. Meanwhile, my collaborators, friends, and muses in the Bay Area's queer and DIY performance communities have provided the perfect intellectual incubator in which my assumptions about performance are continually challenged, and in which I am made continually more able to challenge the assumptions of others. Most of all, I owe so much to my three fellow members of Front Line Theater, the independent production company that my collaborators and I formed during the writing of this dissertation. They have reminded me that, in performance, medieval texts become newly evocative, moving, important. Together, we have created a process that is neighborly, fraternal, spiritual, industrious, festive, and immersive—it is hard not to see the influence of Front Line on the vision of public drama I put forward in this dissertation.

One of those Front Line co-founders is Ara Glenn-Johanson, an immensely talented theater-maker. Ara followed me to California when I began graduate school; she became my fiancée after I had submitted my prospectus; she married me somewhere between Chapter Two and Chapter Three. As I file this dissertation, she and I will celebrate our ten-year anniversary. Ara has read nearly as much of this text as my dissertation chair has, providing witty insight and deep support. Together, we have worked hard at all this festive play. And I couldn't be happier.

MMS
Berkeley, California

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List of Abbreviations

EEBO	<i>Early English Books Online</i> (online at eebo.chadwyck.com)
EETS	Early English Text Society
OED	<i>Oxford English Dictionary/OED Online</i> (online at oed.com)
MED	<i>Middle English Dictionary</i> (online at quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med)
REED	<i>Records of Early English Drama</i>
VCH	<i>The Victoria History of the Counties of England</i>

A Note on the EETS Edition of the Plays

All of the recent studies of the Chester cycle that I cite in this dissertation, unless they have gone directly to the manuscript sources, have used R.M. Lumiansky and David Mills' comprehensive Early English Text Society edition of the *Chester Mystery Cycle* (R.M. Lumiansky and David Mills, eds., *The Chester Mystery Cycle*, Vol. 1, London: Oxford University Press/Early English Text Society, 1974). After thirty-seven years, the Lumiansky-Mills edition remains unsurpassed. Unless otherwise noted below, I draw all my Chester cycle quotations from that edition, using its line numbers.

Following Lumiansky and Mills, I add "+SD" to the line number to refer to a *stage direction* immediately following the numbered line, while I "+SH" to the line number to refer to a *speech heading* immediately preceding the numbered line.

In some cases, I have lengthened or modified Lumiansky and Mills' shorthand titles for the plays (for instance, what they call the *Nativity* play, I call the *Annunciation/Nativity* play), to clarify my terms and keep them consistent, making it easier for me to address the plays' uneasy splicing together of separate stories.

Introduction: Theater of Darkness, Theater of Daylight

The guilds of Chester first produced and performed in their set of biblical plays sometime before 1422, to celebrate the Feast of Corpus Christi.¹ By the early sixteenth century, the plays had moved from Corpus Christi Day to Whitsun week, allowing them to extend across three days of performance on mobile pageant wagons, playing simultaneously at four or five stations in Chester's main streets. That extended three-day festival accumulated progressively more plays until it formed a full cycle of biblical history; between 1500 and 1532, that cycle had grown to include all twenty-five of the Chester plays now known to modern readers.² Sixteenth-century Cestrians continued to perform the Chester cycle every few years at Whitsun week, up until their final performance was moved to Midsummer in 1575, after which the Archbishop of York's official "inhibition" of the plays took effect and silenced a local dramatic tradition that had gone on for nearly two centuries.³

Five extant manuscripts, inscribed between 1591 and 1607, contain the full cycle's dialogue as it was then known.⁴ Three manuscripts also remain that contain only one play from the cycle. Of these three, two date from the late fifteenth century: a fragment of the *Resurrection* play and a full script of the *Antichrist* play, the only extant records of dialogue that were inscribed while the Chester plays were actively in performance.⁵ The late full-cycle manuscripts, meanwhile, appear to be antiquarian projects by scribes Edward Gregorie, George Bellin, William Bedford, and James Miller, all residents of Chester (or nearby areas of Cheshire) attempting to preserve records of the local cycle performances, including stage directions, musical notation, and other cues, before they passed out of living memory.⁶

The biblical plays performed in Chester at the beginning of the fifteenth century probably looked different, perhaps very different, from the cycle that Gregorie, Bellin, Bedford, and Miller may have seen—which itself may have differed in important ways from the version that they wrote down. The obscurity of the cycle's development over time creates a series of textual cruces that frustrate any attempt to assign a date to the extant poetry of the cycle, and thus to attach it to any of the performance records that survive from fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Chester, or to any historical context at all. For instance, Peter Happé prefaces his discussion of the cycle by asking his readers

to recollect that the surviving texts of the full cycle are all later than 1591... it now seems that the common ancestor of these late manuscripts, usually known as the "Regynall," was actually evolved at some point after 1521. There is little doubt that some form of the cycle goes back at least as far as 1422, but in the absence of convincing textual evidence, its nature remains very shadowy and we can only be sure from records of the existence of a few individual episodes in the fifteenth century.⁷

The "Regynall" of which Happé writes seems to have been a master copy of the cycle text owned by the mayor's office, but it is a little misleading to anchor it in place as a "common ancestor" of the surviving texts, because the "Regynall" itself was subject to an unusually fragmentary process of ongoing revision.⁸ While the mayor's office did have final say about any adjustments to the cycle, each guild was individually responsible for directing, casting, and funding its play, and during that process each guild had individual jurisdiction over the maintenance of its rehearsal script, a manuscript most likely originally copied from the "Regynall."⁹ During any given year of performance, at least twenty-five such versions of the plays had to circulate freely—at least one for each of the twenty-five guild alliances responsible for producing a play. National Library of Wales

MS Peniarth 399, a stand-alone copy of the Fishmongers' *Antichrist* play inscribed during the plays' active years of performance, was probably one of those rehearsal manuscripts.¹⁰

Rehearsal and production processes inevitably bring about revisions to the working script. The guildsmen had many opportunities to insert their working revisions back into the "Regynall" from which their text was originally copied, so that the master texts and satellite texts continually influenced each other over two centuries of cycle performance.¹¹ As I discuss at more length below, the textual seams between some of those on-the-spot revisions are still visible in the extant full-cycle manuscripts. Rather than being a singular point of origin, then, the lost "Regynall" is best imagined as a time-release record of an ongoing process, bearing the marks and traces of many performances by many Cestrians across many years.

Nor can the ancestry of the extant full-cycle manuscripts be traced directly to the "Regynall" without accounting for the influence of an unknown number of fragmentary guild-owned copies that remained in circulation after the plays' last performance. Scribe George Bellin, who acted as clerk to many of the city's guilds, inscribed the Coopers' guild-owned copy of their *Trial* play even as he put together his three full-cycle manuscripts.¹² In other words, the antiquarian scribes of the full-cycle manuscripts had the guild-owned rehearsal scripts to hand, not to mention living memory of the performances, all of which developed alongside the "Regynall." Those lost sources of the extant cycle, each of them potentially dating from any time during the cycle's two-century period of performance, could easily have reciprocally influenced each other's development. The variance across the five full-cycle texts, which are in nearly perfect agreement in some places and very different in others, is a testament to how many Cestrian hands may have been involved in that fragmentary process of ongoing revision.

What results is a cycle with countless layers of development, none of which can possibly be isolated as an originary moment, especially because different layers may have mutually influenced each other. Since no part of it may be assigned to any singular moment in time, the cycle demands a diachronic reading, not locating any particular line of dialogue that might resonate with the circumstances of any specific year, but looking instead for the elements of the cycle text that signify across the recurring temporality of local festival. I read the Chester cycle more as a time-release photograph than as a snapshot. In contrast to other scholars' historicist attempts to estimate the dates at which part or all of "the cycle as we know it" emerged as a final product, in this project I approach the cycle texts as a record of a performance process spanning the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, during which the cycle text accumulated innumerable additions, revisions, and deletions for the purposes of performance.¹³ In so doing, this dissertation sheds some light on what Happé calls the "shadowy" period of the cycle's development, between the earliest record of it in 1422 and Miller's final inscription of his manuscript in 1607.¹⁴ The dissertation looks to the data embedded in the play texts for the marks and traces of the public practice that filled the streets on Corpus Christi and Whitsuntide, leaving imprints on a cycle that was continually under development. The cycle emerges as a fossilization of recurring Cestrian festivals, not belonging to any specific year, but rather generated by an era, during which generations of playful Cestrian collaborators used public drama as the centerpiece of their holiday practices.

While I do employ external documentary evidence in my readings, my focus is on the poetry and stage directions in the play scripts themselves, and on the performance data embedded in those scripts. I defer to the lines on the page of the play texts far more often than I do to any archival record. It is close literary analysis of the play-scripts that bears out my argument that the cycle's aesthetic and its symbolic power create, and communicate through, a system of festive, cyclic temporality—which emphasizes the familiarity and sameness of local practices across generations of recurring holidays, sometimes while resisting change in national religion or politics.

David Mills and Richard Emmerson have both published hypotheses on the Chester cycle's public reception across its two-century-long production period.¹⁵ I do not aim in this project to create a reception history, which necessarily segments the cycle's performance into a series of synchronic moments based on historical events. Rather, I am suspicious of the degree to which players and festival-goers would have manifested in their recreational dramatics the high-level theological issues or national politics discussed by Mills and Emmerson, contexts which seem to suggest that all Englishmen were equally well-informed and generally in agreement at any given moment in time. The relentless visibility of comparatively informal local practices in the extant texts of the cycle testifies to the fact that the festive streets and population of Chester did more than frame the play texts with socio-political context.

I propose that it was the local streets and population of Chester itself that were incorporated into the fabric of the show, providing significant aspects of its production values, and continually shaping the performances from year to year. The poetic design preserved in the play texts was and is acutely in tune with the incessantly unquiet festival within which it took form: both the everyday activity and the festivity particular to holidays, in the markets and gathering places in Chester's four main streets.

I use the term *festival* here and throughout the project to refer to all of the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century holiday revels of which the cycle was a central component, especially the extended three-day version after the performances moved to Whitsun week. Scholars like Lawrence Clopper have made clear that modern terms like *theater* or *drama* are often inadequate descriptors for medieval performance.¹⁶ I have chosen *festival* with both its modern and medieval valences in mind: the Cestrian celebration that occasioned the plays commemorated a "feast-day" with a "feast" (*OED* A.1) and other "merry-making" (*OED* B.1.a); it functioned as a "fair" (*OED* 3); it featured a "series of performances at recurring periods" (*OED* B.1.b).¹⁷ Cycle plays were a recreational activity for Cestrians, one among many forms of "merry-making" that medieval writers would characterize as kinds of *game*, a subject that I take up in Chapter One. Corpus Christi and Whitsun were holy "feast-days," and the plays were part of how Chester marked those days; Chapter Two discusses the cycle's role in commemorating the community's sense of recurring time. A public "feast"—the festive consumption of food and drink—was a constant presence on these holidays, as I discuss at more length in Chapter Three. As for the "fair," Chester held its official fairs on Michaelmas and Midsummer (not Corpus Christi Day or Whitsun), marking the only days on which foreigners were permitted to trade within the city walls.¹⁸ However, as I show in Chapter Four, the broader modern definition of *fair*—that is, "a periodical gathering of buyers and sellers often with shows and entertainments, in a place and at a time ordained by charter or statute or by ancient custom"—was underway in Chester's markets throughout the weeks leading up to Midsummer, at the sites and on the days that occasioned the Chester plays. The guilds' "shows and entertainments" at the market included the Chester cycle, among other spectacles. Finally, the modern definition for *festival* as a "series of performances at recurring periods" is most useful here. It is certain that the responsibility for the Chester plays' production fell on the various guilds of the city, each of which could independently shift or change its performance, though larger changes had to earn approval from the mayor. It is helpful to think of the cycle—at once commercial and community-based, at once unified and collaborative—as the equivalent of a modern theater festival, in which thematically related projects, often staged by separate production companies, are drawn loosely together by centralized artistic direction.

In the chapters below, I present a series of readings that uncover various aspects of urban public practice—that is, recreation, ceremony, festivity, and commerce—in Chester's extant cycle texts. Before I do so, however, I must establish in this Introduction some of the foundations on

which those readings are based: two brief critical histories, followed by observations about the plays' textual history, performance conditions, and clues for practical staging. In the section on textual history, I argue that the plays must be approached as works that underwent collaborative development across their centuries-long performance process, rather than as the products of any specific moments of composition or revision, moments that have been sought, but never really found, throughout the plays' critical history. To treat the plays as a community-based collaboration allows me to read them diachronically, which is necessary to subsequent readings. It also reveals that the community of Chester and its public practices are crucial signifiers in the Chester cycle, signifiers that were, as my section on staging conditions shows, radically visible during performances. Finally, I close my Introduction with a description of the methodology I use, based in part on archival information about Cestrian staging conditions, to draw new performance data out of the play texts' practical requirements for staging.

Critical Trends to 1998: Form and History

An opposition between performance contexts and poetic close reading defined the field of medieval drama in the twentieth century, particularly around Chester—largely because of the thirteen-year gap that separates the final performance of the *Shepherds* pageant in 1578 from the inscription of the earliest full-cycle manuscript in 1591, straddling conventional historical and disciplinary divides. Because of the apparent distance between form (in the written dialogue) and history (in performance, as recorded in the archives) for the Chester plays, it is no surprise that the two most important twentieth-century books on medieval Cestrian performance fall on either side of the history-form agon that has so often characterized twentieth-century literary studies.¹⁹

David Mills, co-editor of the authoritative modern edition of the cycle and archivist for the *Cheshire Records of Early English Drama (REED)*, is easily the most prolific writer on medieval Cestrian cultural productions.²⁰ His 1998 *Recycling the Cycle: The City of Chester and Its Whitsun Plays* made an invaluable historicist contribution to the field.²¹ In it, Mills draws on his *REED* research to locate the Chester plays in a vivid context, forcing modern readers to reevaluate ideas of how and why the plays might have been performed. However, only a single chapter in *Recycling the Cycle* considers the written dialogue of the plays, paying little close attention to the poetic lines, only a minor facet of Mills's broader archival study. Mills cites the dialogue only to further sharpen his picture of late medieval Chester. His book is after all a study of "the city of Chester," as its title makes clear; the scope of its chapters extends from the twelfth to the seventeenth century and covers Cestrian historiography, local and national politics, religion, economics, manuscript provenances, revivals, staging and effects, and all forms of local performance, including music, sporting events, processions, royal entries, and acrobatic stunts.²²

Peter Travis, introducing his 1982 *Dramatic Design in the Chester Cycle*, writes with anxiety about an imbalance between dramatic texts and "nondramatic" records in the study of medieval English drama. "This book does not intend," he writes, "to apply a wealth of newly discovered nondramatic 'primary' texts to the Chester cycle. Medieval drama scholarship does not suffer from a paucity of such texts."²³ Here, Travis makes a less-than-subtle reference to the then-new *REED* archival transcription project. A study of the Chester cycle that overtly claims its critical lineage from the formalist models of V.A. Kolve and Rosemary Woolf's analyses of English cycle drama, *Dramatic Design* is Travis's attempt to halt the new archival trend and to draw attention back to the words on the page.²⁴ Travis does have some use for historical work on the plays: he uses it to establish a best text of the cycle and to briefly survey Corpus Christi traditions, so that he can devote the bulk of his book to an "extended close reading" that draws on those traditions.²⁵ To revert to

“[t]he pageant’s only proper version,” he also chooses to “excise” certain scenes entirely, performing what he euphemistically calls “minor textual surgery.”²⁶ (Both sites of “surgery” depict festive scenes; they receive a good deal of attention in my third chapter, which proves how essential they are to the cycle’s design.) Travis systematically establishes aesthetically unified structures in the cycle—a project that Martin Stevens would take up in 1989 with his essay “The Chester Cycle: The Sense of an Ending,” but a project that now, especially next to *Recycling the Cycle* and the now-massive *REED*, looks positively New Critical.²⁷ Though Travis’s methodology is now dated, it allows him to deal with the cycle as a coherent subject unto itself rather than as an example of broader Cestrian culture, or of medieval drama in general. This approach makes *Dramatic Design* the only book-length study ever published that focuses entirely on the Chester play cycle.²⁸ Notably, when Mills traces a full critical trajectory for Chester performance, *Dramatic Design*, though cited elsewhere in the book, is nowhere to be found.²⁹

By 1990, in her critique of *REED*’s effect on early English drama studies at large, Theresa Coletti confirms the validity of Travis’s anxiety about the critical use of non-dramatic texts:

I am motivated here by a desire to account for the present state of medieval drama studies, which in the last decade have *increasingly turned away from considerations of dramatic texts and moved instead toward elaborating, explaining, or deploying various sorts of documentary evidence*. To a field in which speculation and hypothesis have inspired both creative insights and misleading formulations, *REED* has brought the putative stability of verifiable data. My tacit agenda here is to suggest that this *turn toward scientism* has not had the most beneficent effects on early English drama studies. Apart from *REED* and its satellite enterprises, the field seems caught in a methodological vacuum: although it is no longer possible to speak about dramatic texts as we once did, alternative ways of shaping our discourse on those texts have only haltingly emerged.³⁰

This dissertation, in short, is an exploration of one type of alternative discourse about the Chester plays and about early drama in general. To medieval drama scholars, Coletti poses the question of what to do with all of the archival information to which we now have access. In reply, my dissertation digests the Chester records, and the vivid contexts that experts like Mills have drawn from them, in order to infuse close readings of the extant cycle manuscripts with a sense of Cestrian performance as an aesthetic object. I draw the material for my close readings not only from the play manuscripts but also from the staging evidence available in the records, establishing an appropriately broad and inclusive sense of Cestrian festival in order to subject its totality to formal analysis.

Critical Trends after 1998: Periodization

In their 2009 essay on “The Tudor Origins of Medieval Drama,” Theresa Coletti and Gail McMurray Gibson examine the Chester cycle, as well as the Towneley plays, as antiquarian products of late sixteenth-century recusancy. “Biblical history-of-the-world dramas,” as they put it,

confound historical categories of analysis because they achieved the form in which we have come to know them only through active sixteenth-century processes of revision and transmission. Belated recognition of these historical and cultural dislocations now enlivens early English drama studies, and the persistence as well as the transformation of medieval dramatic traditions in the Tudor period invites analysis of these sixteenth-century acts of cultural production.³¹

Coletti and Gibson's focus on the late inscription of the full-cycle texts as an origin of cultural production—though it occurs at the terminus of the cycle's live performance tradition—represents a dominant trend in early English drama studies (Coletti has moved from “haltingly” in 1990 to “enlivened” in 2008), championed by Mills in much of his twenty-first-century work.³²

Lawrence Clopper's 1978 “The History and Development of the Chester Cycle,” drawn from his research for the 1979 *REED: Chester*, but still the accepted theory in the 2007 *REED: Cheshire*, provides the bedrock for the trend that Coletti and Gibson now describe.³³ In it, Clopper uses the Chester records, particularly the Banns, to approximate when certain pageants, or aspects of pageants, would have entered into the cycle. According to Clopper's model,

the sparse evidence of the fifteenth century suggests that the Corpus Christi play was more a Passion play than a cycle; the evidence of the sixteenth century is that the cycle as we know it was largely an invention of Tudor times and the extant texts are versions performed in the final days of the cycle's existence.³⁴

I hypothesize that, just as *REED* itself took form in response to Alan Nelson's challenges to received wisdom about York in 1970, the current turn toward the hard evidence of sixteenth-century revision was catalyzed by Barbara Palmer's game-changing 1988 “‘Towneley Plays’ or ‘Wakefield Cycle’ Revisited.”³⁵ Palmer revealed that the apparent connection between the “cycle” in the Towneley manuscript and a performance tradition at Wakefield had been amplified by a modern scholar's forgery.³⁶ Suddenly, not only were the Towneley plays no longer reliably linked to a live performance tradition, but they also could not be conclusively connected to each other as a cycle, since their cyclic arrangement seemed more likely the work of a late compiler.³⁷ It was inevitable that the aftershock of Palmer's article should be felt in Chester studies, primarily because all five full-cycle manuscripts postdate the performances, but also because there are far more available records of performance for the latest years of the cycle's production than for earlier years.³⁸ After Palmer had showed in 1988 how hollow even the most basic assumptions of early English drama studies could be for Towneley, a conservative approach to development seems to have taken on new urgency for Chester. In Coletti's 2007 “The Chester Cycle in Sixteenth-Century Culture,” in which she draws at length on the historicist work of both Clopper and Mills, Palmer's revelation spreads from Towneley to Chester by association:

Not only has the Chester cycle *turned out to be* two hundred years younger than mid-twentieth-century scholars thought it was; Barbara Palmer has recently established that the Towneley plays comprise a mid-sixteenth-century Lancashire and Yorkshire compilation, probably Marian, made with significant intervention from the “defiantly recusant... family” that lent its name to the manuscript.³⁹

The extant Chester play-texts, here and elsewhere, are no longer the latest *versions* of a long tradition that changed over time, as Clopper had suggested; instead, the Chester cycle *turned out to be* born in the 1530s (two hundred years after the date given by the Banns). This conclusion is unfair. The Chester play tradition, to whatever degree it changed in content or structure over its course of production, was well underway with seasonal guild-produced biblical pageants by 1422 at the latest, and probably much earlier than that.⁴⁰ Medieval and early modern Cestrians, even the most critical reformers, did not conceive of the play tradition as anything but continuous.⁴¹ It is not justifiable to

retroactively sever the post-medieval Cestrian dramatic tradition into a distinct and strictly defined textual unit simply because of a dearth of evidence for what earlier productions looked like.

Clopper's twentieth-century hypotheses for the development of the Chester cycle have ossified into twenty-first century assumptions, anchoring the most recent Chester cycle studies into "the final days of the cycle's existence," outside even the latest estimates of when the medieval period ended in England.⁴² It only follows that recent writing on the Chester plays, like Coletti's, should read the plays almost solely as instruments of recusancy, or of Reform, or of both. Little room is allowed for what must have been a vast distance between the politics of England's most powerful men and the political awareness of the Cestrians who actually staged these plays in the streets. The sketchiness of many of Clopper's approximations for the plays' development has been erased, and the various stages in his model of development are most often compressed.

Edward Gregorie, Christopher Goodman, and Robert and David Rogers, along with other Cestrian antiquarians, scribes, officials, and censors at the turn of the seventeenth century, seem now to be treated as the makers of these texts. And recent work has revealed a great deal about these men and their cultural world that is extremely valuable in our understanding of the Chester plays—contextualizing the final theatrical productions, their prohibition, and especially their preservation in manuscript form. Coletti's call in 1990 to bolster *REED*'s "putative stability of verifiable data" has been answered, partially by Coletti herself, with rigorous historicist work focused on the final decades of the Cestrian cycle tradition. In contrast, it is a primary project of this dissertation to restore the medieval component of Chester's medieval drama tradition, by allowing for a dramatic temporality that relies on the instability of the performance texts.

Attention to the poetic lines on the page, meanwhile, has still not risen to the centrality that Travis sought. I disagree from a literary-historical standpoint with the now-common implication that the cycle was purely a product of the 1530s, if not the 1570s, and with the critical anchoring of the plays to periods defined by English sovereigns (Tudor, Elizabethan), which forces an uneasy connection between Cestrian practice and a culturally distant London. But more importantly, my dissertation asserts that no text, certainly not a medieval dramatic one, is manifestly a phenomenon of any single historical moment. Coletti's call for a turn back toward "considerations of dramatic texts" must necessarily be impeded by any inquiry, including her own, that takes as its premise the assertion that "the scriptural dramas comprising the extant Chester Cycle, in text and performance, are manifestly mid- to late-Tudor phenomena."⁴³ Such an assertion flattens the complex temporal texture of the Chester plays. Paul Strohm's comment on multiple temporalities serves as a useful guide:

No text fails to bear within itself a range of alien temporalities, imported into its bounds as unavoidable part and parcel of the words and images of which it is made. No text, that is, can be temporally self-consistent, for the very reason that it does not own its words and cannot specify their prehistories. By virtue of the different prehistories and associations of the words in which it is written, each text *harbors* different notions of time.⁴⁴

To ignore the "range of temporalities" in the Chester plays erases the very elements that make the cycle an aesthetic text. I follow Maura Nolan's definition of the "aesthetic," here, as "a category of understanding the human in the world that escapes linear causalities... and resists periodization (as 'medieval,' 'early modern,' or the like)."⁴⁵ If it does not free Chester cycle studies from the anxiety of periodization, Nolan's work provides a model within which historicity adds texture to a text, rather than simply delimiting its scope. The Chester cycle, which includes but is not limited to a set of polysemous engagements with the Reformation, is above all an aesthetic history of just the sort

Nolan describes: it is a *cycle* because it reshapes and telescopes biblical history in its entirety.

Textual History and Collective Authorship

After Lumiansky and Mills observe that the Chester cycle texts maintain a consistent meter over 75.7% of the time—a datum that I discuss at more length in Chapter One—they deduce that “[s]uch metrical consistency is not found in the other extant English cycles and might be held to indicate that Chester, in its extant form, was the result of a single revision.”⁴⁶ Current textual criticism of the Chester cycle is the source of much of the anxiety of periodization that I describe above; it is a field of uncertain hypotheses (e.g. “might be held to indicate”), many of them based, like Lumiansky and Mills’ here, on variations in scansion.⁴⁷

In contrast to those hypotheses, this dissertation takes as one of its fundamental premises that the extant texts of the Chester cycle came into being as an accretion across two centuries of collaboration by participants both in the plays’ inscription and in its live production, a process irreducible to any finite set of revisionary moments on the part of individual poets or scribes. That premise, based on a model of collective authorship I draw from contemporary community-based performance studies, allows me to look at the texts diachronically, as the records of a process of ongoing public practice.⁴⁸ Since no prior study of medieval cycle drama has considered collective authorship, I must present some of the evidence that has led me to employ that model. After briefly reviewing the models that have appeared so far in criticism of the cycle, I make a case below that it is most accurate to treat the composition and revision of the cycle as a process of ongoing collaboration, rather than a series of distinct stages of development—because the text’s centuries-long recurring performance provides so many moments of revision that they can neither be distinguished nor counted. Chapter Two explores the ramifications of a collective authorship model on the literary interpretation and analysis of the cycle; for now, I must only give a sense of the multiplicity of ways that the Cestrian community could exert influence over the composition of the play texts.

The “metrical consistency” that Lumiansky and Mills observe is insufficient evidence to support their hypothesis about a “single revision” shaping the extant form of the cycle. The same metrical consistency carries over from the late fifteenth-century MS Peniarth 399 to corresponding passages a century later. Since there is so little metrical variance across the century between the extant fifteenth-century fragments and the late sixteenth-century full texts, it seems unnecessary to explain the internal metrical consistency among those sixteenth-century full texts by implying that the entirety of their extant form came into being as the result of a unilateral revision (“Chester, in its extant form, was the result of a single revision”).⁴⁹

In fact, there was probably very little danger of major metrical corruption in the first place. The Chester stanza, while unique to Chester, is neither complex nor difficult to replicate, especially since so many Cestrians had close ties to the cycle’s performance, and quite a few would have fully internalized the stanza’s singsong repeatability as an aid to line memorization (or just from hearing the lines rehearsed so often). Any number of Cestrian players, composers, or scribes throughout the cycle’s history would have had little trouble adding to or adjusting Chester stanzas as the cycle grew, whether at a scribe’s desk or making a quick change during rehearsal, without at all damaging the consistency of the cycle’s meter.

Peter Travis’s treatment of the composition of the Chester cycle removes even the consideration of a reviser. To mark the transition in his book between historical context and sustained close reading, he provides a disclaimer: “From this point onward, I will accept the Chester cycle as the work of a single playwright—of one who successfully brought to completion the

complete works of a number of playwrights before him.”⁵⁰ Travis’s disclaimer facilitates his close analysis by reasonably reducing the variables for which he must account. Those literary critics who do not, like Coletti, treat the cycle as a confection of late Tudor scribes tend most often refer to an imagined “Chester author” who lived at the origin, rather than the terminus, of the Cestrian performance tradition.⁵¹ In both cases, the text is anchored to a single imaginary moment.

In contrast to Travis’s invention of an author and Lumiansky and Mills’ hypothesis about a single reviser, Lawrence Clopper conceives of the cycle’s development through small compositions and revisions over time. Still, Clopper refers to those collaborators as a finite handful of individual poets or scribes, as if each of them worked independently of each other and of the cycle’s production processes to make his adjustments directly, at a single moment in time, to an otherwise static cycle text.⁵² As a result, Clopper’s primary concern is to divide the cycle’s development into distinct stages, attributing an estimated range of years to each revision; according to that model, the discovery of further evidence would reveal still more distinct and more refined stages of development. Peter Happé, meanwhile, hints at the “many decisions” that “had presumably to be made when each performance was proposed”; as he stages his argument, however, he still examines only one such decision.⁵³

Each of these models assumes that there are a finite number of moments in the cycle’s performance history at which one man entered the process and made a change to a static master text, from which the Cestrian players passively received their lines, a text which remained essentially unchanged until the next redaction. That illusion of textual stability was quickly undermined during my conversations with the production teams of *Chester 2010*, a revival staged at the University of Toronto in which separate theater companies or school groups independently directed their own productions of the plays, as the guilds of Chester would have. Each group was given a base text drawn from a translation by Alexandra Johnston and David Mills; each group made considerable changes, additions, or creative interpretations that deviated from that base text. When I asked the participants about those changes, they often reported that in rehearsal practicalities became clear that could not have been foreseen by Johnston and Mills.

Johnston and Mills gave their blessing to the groups to creative to the collaborators to adjust their scripts, a freedom which the civic authorities were probably less willing to grant. V.A. Kolve hypothesizes that “Regynall” cycle scripts were generally used to enforce the centralized regulation and control of the text, especially at Beverley, where fines were charged to cycle players for *ad libs*.⁵⁴ However, the presence of controls does not necessitate that those controls were effective—it proves only that authorities perceived enough deviance to make those controls necessary. Fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Cestrians did not have the benefit of professional directors or print reproductions, which would make any attempt to control textual change still more difficult. Even with modern resources, rules, and standards, any authority would have difficulty extending much top-down control over twenty-five contributing guilds, from rehearsal to rehearsal, in a busy city center, at periodic festivals over two centuries.

Meanwhile, the guilds had independent jurisdiction over the maintenance of their individually commissioned rehearsal manuscripts.⁵⁵ The fact that so little variance exists between the early MS Peniarth 399 and the late full-cycle manuscripts testifies to the fact that some plays’ content could remain unchanged across many years of performance. However, the fact that there is so much variance among the late full-cycle manuscripts—not in metrical consistency but in content, with deleted or added scenes, altered lines, and most often adjustments to stage directions—strongly suggests that changes made to the rehearsal manuscripts could find their way back into the master copies. External records of the guilds’ interactions with the “Regynall” are sparse, but Clopper suggests that in 1568, when the master copy went missing, a new copy was reconstructed from the

various independent single-play rehearsal scripts.⁵⁶ In 1575, the Smiths generated two draft versions of their cycle play, the *Purification/Doctors*, and performed both before a group of aldermen so that they could choose which would be accepted into the cycle (and thus, assumedly, entered officially into the “Regynall.”)⁵⁷

A multitude of Cestrian players from year to year thus had the ability to influence the development of the cycle, just by participating in rehearsals and performances. The extant Chester cycle exhibits traces of the minor and often accidental changes which happen gradually in the repeated performance of any text—but which, over many years of performance, can accumulate significantly and have a lasting effect on that text. For instance, in a speech that I discuss at more length in Chapter Four, the following lines appear in four of the five manuscript versions of the *Blind Man/Lazarus* play:

For worldes light I am verey,
and whoesoe followeth me, sooth to saye,
hee may goe no Chester waye,
for light in him is dight (lines 353-356).

For Jesus’ followers to “goe no Chester waye” makes little sense; the most careful of the scribes, James Miller, supplies “thester” (dark, without light) for “Chester.” Miller’s variant readings often correct the meter or sense of the other manuscripts, which suggests that they postdate the readings that they correct. Here, as Lumiansky and Mills agree, the line clearly calls for “thester” in both meter and sense, which suggests that the other manuscripts’ “Chester” is corrupt, a late replacement of a familiar word for a rarer word whose meaning had become obscure by the sixteenth century.⁵⁸ However, the other scribes recognize the word when it appears in their copies of the *Adam* play (line 15) and the *Harrowing* play (line 15), so it is unlikely that they consistently miss “thester” in the *Blind Man/Lazarus* play because they do not recognize the word. It seems more likely that the substitution of a familiar word for an obscure homophone occurred during the recurring performance of the cycle, which called for rote repetition without necessarily demanding comprehension, and which unfolded in an informal environment that already emphasized familiarity. It is impossible to determine how many of the other variants among the extant texts were introduced during the performance process; I argue only that all of the extant text was subject to that kind of on-the-spot change, and that each change should, by Clopper’s standards, constitute another moment of revision.

The stage directions throughout the Chester cycle, which are as much a part of the cycle text as the dialogue is, most clearly show the accretion of multiple performance variants over time. These directions, even within the same manuscript, erratically shift their language, tense, person, and mood, giving the strong impression that they were recorded at multiple sittings by multiple hands, particularly the cases in which the Latin stage directions are attached to simplified English glosses. For instance, between line 46 and line 57 of the *Pentecost* play, the manuscripts include the following stage directions:

<i>Huntington MS 2 (MS Hm, 1591)</i>	<i>British Museum MS Additional 10305 (MS A, 1592)</i>	<i>British Museum MS Harley 2013 (MS R, 1600)</i>	<i>Bodleian Library MS Bodley 175 (MS B, 1604)</i>	<i>British Museum MS Harley 2124 (MS H, 1607)</i>
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Tunc respondent omnes (all speake together)	Tunc respondent omnes (all speake together)	Tunc respondent omnes	Tunc respondent omnes apostoli una voce	Tunc omnes una voce respondeant, et sors cadet super Mattheum
Tunc omnes apostoli genuflectent et dicat	Tunc omnes apostoli genuflectent et dicat Petrus	Tunc omnes apostoli genuflecten et dicat Petrus	Tunc omnes populi flecten et dicat	Tunc genua flectent et dicat
Tunc Petrus mittet sortem et sors cadet super Mattheum; et dicat	Tunc Petrus mittet sortem et sors cadet super Mathiam; et dicat	Tunc Petrus mittet sortem et sors cadet super Mathiam; et dicat Petrus	Tunc Petrus mittet sortem et sors cadet super Mathiam; et dicat Petrus	Tunc colliget Petrus sortes et Deus inmittet sortem
Tunc omnes apostoli genuflectentes cantent ‘Veni, creator Spiritus.’ Postea dicat	Tunc apostoli omnes genuflectentes cantet ‘Veni, creator Spiritus.’ Poste	Tunc apostoli omnes genuflectentes cantent ‘Veni, creator Spiritus.’ Postea	Tunc omnes apostoli genuflectentes cantent ‘Veni, creator Spiritus.’ Et postea dicatt	Tunc omnes apostoli genibus flectentibus cantabunt ‘Veni, creator Spiritus.’
Christ must speake in heaven.			Christ must speake in heaven.	Mentes tuorum visita imple superna gratia que to creasti pectora

As is usually the case with variants among the five full-cycle manuscripts, the above cases seem to continually shift their textual allegiances. The presence of the English “(all speake together)” only in MSS Hm and A would suggest a shared *Pentecost* exemplar for those two manuscripts, except that the same logic would apply equally well to “Christ must speake in heaven,” which is left out of MS A but included in MSS Hm and B. MS H, here as elsewhere, offers relatively independent readings, but there are quite a few cases in which it has clearly drawn on the same material as only one other manuscript. The differences in Latin conjugation suggest a variety of sources rather than a change in the scribes’ Latin skill, since MSS A and R were both inscribed by the same man, George Bellin. But most notably, the English-language stage directions in the *Pentecost* provide strong clues to how the texts developed in rehearsal. In MSS Hm and A, the parenthetical “(all speake together)” interrupts an otherwise consistent system of Latin notation with a slightly inaccurate translation. It is unlikely that this addition was made by Gregorie or Bellin, the final scribes of those manuscripts, because their writing long postdated the active performance of the cycle, and were thus meant for readers who would refer to the manuscripts as records. Since the Latin of the direction “Tunc respondent omnes” is less difficult and complex than most of the other directions, there is no reason for the scribes to have glossed only that direction in particular in a reader’s text. What does separate that direction from the others, however, is its utility for a player in the *Pentecost*—specifically for one who had taken on the role of one of the minor apostles. Cues spoken in unison are particularly difficult for actors to time. Unlike “Tunc omnes apostoli genuflectent,” for which a lagging player could easily take a visual cue from one of his fellows, a player who misses “Tunc respondent omnes” will quite likely throw off the rhythm of the dialogue or the cleanness of the recital—this happened repeatedly in rehearsal during the production of the *Pentecost* play at the Chester 2010 performance in Toronto. Especially in a play characterized by long progressions of dialogue, cycling through all twelve apostles before beginning again at the first, it is easy to become caught up in the rhythm and miss the call for a unison response. The addition of “(all speake together)” to certain exempla suggests quite strongly that those exempla were used at some point by one of the minor players in the *Pentecost*, a player whose marginal notation became part of the text

proper after it was next copied. The English “Christ must speake in heaven,” meanwhile, is a sign of another intervention by players from performance to performance. It introduces a six-line speech in an irregular meter that is attributed to “Lyttle God” in MSS Hm and B (in which the English stage direction is added only in the margin), to “God the Sonne” in A, to “Deus” in R (making it continuous with the long “Deus” speech that follows it), and to “Jhesus” in H (as opposed to “Deus Pater” later on). The manuscripts each call for a distinctly different performance; the English stage direction marks not only an interruption in the otherwise coherent project of Latin stage directions, but also an often-revised section of the play that might require a more readable reminder to the players. In all, the variance in *Pentecost* stage directions—only one very typical example of the variance among the five manuscripts—represents the ability of certain players, or certain productions, to significantly rewrite or emend the cycle text.

The final and most important example I discuss in this section appears in the first record of the Chester plays in performance. In it, the community directly intervenes in the composition of the extant cycle text’s structure. The Ironmongers’ guild brought a suit in 1422 against the Wrights’ guild over the fairness of production costs for the *Passion*, the play that the two guilds had shared up to that point. The Cestrian mayor, John Hope, settled the guildsmen’s financial complaints by splitting one play into two, and then assigning the two halves to separate guilds: one containing all the material from Jesus’ flagellation up to his crucifixion and the other beginning with the crucifixion.⁵⁹ Those two pageants—now known as the Chester *Trial* and *Passion*—are now only separated in four of the five extant manuscripts; scribe James Miller, in his 1609 manuscript, presents the *Trial* and *Passion* as a single pageant.⁶⁰ That massive textual variation seems to have occurred, then, in connection with the efforts of those guilds involved in planning and producing the performances. Except in Miller’s version, added to the end of the *Trial* play is a short scene that dramatizes Peter’s denial of Jesus. Its speech headings strongly suggest that it was a late addition to the play, perhaps spliced from a now lost script. The man who prompts Peter’s second and third denials is labeled “The Jewe,” though there are Four Jews—part of a textual stratum already distinct from much of the rest of the extant text, as I argue in Chapter One—that have already been active throughout the *Trial* as the “Primus,” “Secundus,” “Tertius,” and “Quartus” *Judei*. These numbered characters also appear in the *Last Supper* and *Passion*. The manuscripts’ speech heading for “The Jewe” seems unaware of the rest of the play’s Latin numbering of the Jews; its definite article “The” suggests that there are no other Jews in the play. There is no equivalent denial scene in Miller’s manuscript, in which the *Trial* and *Passion* are one play (and so the Four Jews appear to remain on stage through the whole play). It is likely, then, that the denial scene was attached to the *Trial* by another reviser, well after the *Trial* and *Passion* were separated in 1422, because the newly split plays needed a better transition—a testament to the ease with which whole scenes might be added as a result of guild-initiated structural revisions.⁶¹ The *Trial* play extant in all but Miller’s manuscript was shaped, then, by that many Cestrian participants: the initial composers of the Four Jews’ text, the leaders of the Wrights and Ironmongers who demanded a restructuring of whatever text was then extant, Mayor Hope who dictated the terms of that restructuring, the guild players who adjusted verses to rework one play into two (adding an entire scene depicting Peter’s denial), and finally James Miller (or the author of his exemplum), who opted for whatever reason to revert the two plays back into one. None of these participants stands out as the singular “composer” of the extant *Trial* play, whose initial composition was subject to later corruption, or whose final revision was so sweeping (following Travis’s model) that it unified all preceding interventions into a single aesthetic unit. Rather, the primary composition of the *Trial* text—the authorship—is best attributed to the combined efforts of all of the participants.

Clopper's model, which is useful because it sketches an overall narrative of the cycle's development that includes periodic revisions, imposes limits on its scope that seem somewhat arbitrary. In the course of his article on the cycle's origins and revisions, Clopper posits forty-five distinct moments, separated into six periods, at which parts of the cycle seem to have been revised, based on internal and external evidence.⁶² Each of those moments represents a change that someone decisively and purposefully made to a play manuscript, or to the ordering of plays in the cycle, with the intent of adjusting the text thenceforth (rather than for only one performance). Clopper emphasizes external evidence because it is more reliably datable, as compared to the five full-cycle play manuscripts, each of which postdate the final performance of the plays by at least nineteen years. Then again, Clopper emphasizes the Early and Late Banns, and the Late Banns' inscription postdates the final performance by thirty years.

Each variant, particular the major deletions or insertions of half-stanzas that often separate the five manuscripts, may represent another distinct moment of revision; it is only the relative impossibility of dating or counting these moments that keeps them from Clopper's already very tentative list. Unlike, for instance, the complex stemmae of *Piers Plowman* or the *Canterbury Tales*, which must account for distinct moments of authorial revision and of later scribal corruption, an accurate textual history of the Chester cycle must also consider two centuries' worth of Cestrian rehearsal copies, each a potentially authoritative exemplum, subject to emendation by guildsmen who considered themselves active participants in the tradition of the plays. Meanwhile, the Chester cycle lacks any distinct moment of authorship: as Clopper has quite clearly shown, the development of the cycle relied on interlopers' ability to compose new pageants to fit the needs of a growing performance tradition, or to modify them to adjust to changing religious sensitivities.⁶³

Each variant version of the *Pentecost* stage directions above could have been introduced at a different rehearsal, each one a distinct moment of revision, probably driven by a different Cestrian participant each time. To admit the full range of revisions into a discussion of the cycle is to radically increase Clopper's number of revisers and of opportunities for revision, enough so that it reaches a point of critical mass, past which it is most accurate to refer to "the Cestrian community" as a collective author. Jan Cohen-Cruz, who uses models of collective authorship in her work on community-based performance, has not established any numeric criterion for how many community members must be involved in the generation of a text in order for it to be considered to be "by the people."⁶⁴ A performance based on the extant texts of the Chester cycle requires, even by the most conservative reasonable estimate, 353 participants to push a pageant wagon or to perform on one.⁶⁵ Actual performances probably involved many more participants.⁶⁶ Chester's population in the 1520s was around 3,500: at the height of cycle performance, then, at least ten percent of all Cestrians were involved closely enough with performances to have direct physical contact with a wagon.⁶⁷ That percentage would grow much higher if we had clearer records of the lost *Assumption of Mary* play, of players without speaking roles, and of the musicians and choirs that accompanied many, if not all, of the Chester plays—I have counted none of these participants in my estimate.

There probably was a single poet who composed the kernel of the Chester cycle in the early fifteenth century, followed by single poets hired by the guilds to make major changes when necessary, but when these poets entered the process they would have had to work with a Cestrian community that had been sharing the responsibility and authority for staging across generations of guild production. Those revisers' organizational role would thus have been less authoritative than current models suggest. The revisers seem similar to the artists that often act as facilitators for modern community-based performance, except that unlike their modern counterparts, the medieval and early modern revisers—poets, redactors, and finally the four antiquarian scribes, Edward Gregorie, George Bellin, William Bedford, and James Miller—were themselves Cestrian.⁶⁸ In other

words, all of Clopper's distinct moments of revision, along with countless others, were engineered by members of the Cestrian community. When I refer to the Cestrian players as collective or community-based authors, I refer to all of those locals—poets, performers, and scribes—who were responsible for making additions and adjustments directly to one of the exempla, all of whom were likely intimately connected to the performances, if not involved directly as players.

Staging Conditions

Richard Wagner wished, when he opened his Bayreuth Festspielhaus in 1876, to create “a scene removed, as it were, to the unapproachable world of dreams,” to transport the audience and action away from its real environment.⁶⁹ He was the first to demonstrate that, while no performance can remove itself entirely from the environment within which it unfolds, stage designers can modify the conditions surrounding the dramatic action so that the live performance has very little uncontrolled sensory information to absorb. Before the Bayreuth Festspielhaus, no designer had thought to darken the house lights when the action began, to prevent the audience members' view of each other from intruding into the world of the play.⁷⁰ Wagner added a unique second proscenium to the Festspielhaus to doubly frame the action and further remove it from its surroundings.⁷¹ Even the orchestra pit was hidden from view, its music “rising up eerily from the ‘mystic abyss’” with which Wagner wanted to surround his dramatic action.⁷² Elements of Wagner's unusual rigor are now common practice throughout Western theater: most directors and designers carefully sound-proof their spaces, hold latecomers in the lobby, and cover their risers, stagehands, and black-box theaters in black. They know that even if an audience member quickly forgets a ripped curtain, a distant car alarm, or a bit of spilled light, the experience has necessarily colored, however slightly, his or her perception of the entire play.

It is an axiom in modern theater that any event that occurs during a live performance, if it is visible, audible, or otherwise perceivable, becomes part of that performance. A crucifixion staged in a proscenium is thus fundamentally different from a crucifixion staged in the middle of a crowded marketplace. Sarah Beckwith has already argued that the physical location of the wagon stations at York—whether in the fifteenth century or in twentieth-century revivals—heavily influenced the signifying power of the plays; visible crowds of spectators become symbols themselves, whether as the disciples of Jesus or as his persecutors.⁷³

York's multiple performance stations (between ten and sixteen, depending on the year) cut a winding path through the city's topography, at locations with a variety of civic functions and valences, so that the same performance might signify quite differently from one site to the next.⁷⁴ Chester's simpler topography and performance route were far more compact. In his 1609 account of the plays, Cestrian David Rogers is especially impressed by the way that the plays seem to push in on each other, so that no play ends without the next one being visible:

the weare played upon mondaye tuesdaye and wensedaye in whitson weeke and thei firste beganne at the Abbaye gates. and when the firste pagiante was played at the Abbaye gates then it was wheled from thense to pentice at the hyghe crosse. before the maior
and before that was donne the seconde came. and the firste wente into the watergate streete. & from thense unto the Bridgestreete and so one after an other tell all the pagiantes weare played appoynted for the firste daye. and so likewise for the seconde and the thirde daye. these pagiantes or cariage was a highe place made like a howse with 2 rowmes beinge open on the tope. the lower rowme their apparrelled and dressed them selues. and the bigger rowme[s] theie played. and thei stode upon vi wheelles. and when the had donne with one cariage

in one place theie wheled the same from one streete to another. firste from the Abbaye gate. to the pentice. then to the watergate streete. then to the bridge streete. through the lanes & so to the esttgatestreete. And thus the came *from one streete to another. keepinge a diverse order in everye streete for before thei firste Carige was gone from one place the seconde came and so before the seconde was gone the thirde came and so till the laste was donne all in order withoute anye stayeing in any place. forworde being broughte howe everye place was neere doone the came and make noe place to tarye till the laste was played.*⁷⁵

Rogers's near-contemporary report creates a sense of immersive presence that stands in contrast to the otherworldly Wagnerian aesthetic to which modern theater-goers are accustomed. Below, I flesh out that report with a study of Chester's topography and other records of performance. The Chester play texts require a shift on the modern reader's part, breaking any habit that might cause that reader to picture the plays' action taking place independently of its surroundings, as if in Wagner's "mystic abyss." The fifteenth- and sixteenth-century performance conditions make the real environment radically visible, rather than trying to darken it; the local spectators and architecture crowded in on their plays and were absorbed into it—so that the extant texts, having developed during that immersive performance process, resonate aesthetically and symbolically with the Cestrian community and its city. With multiple sounds and sights playing all at once, and with familiar members of the community as spectators and performers at every level, the cycle begins to look and sound less like modern theater and more like a circus or street fair—a setting that, as my chapters below show, suits the plays' form and content very well.

A visit to Chester itself, where the architecture and topography of the twenty-first-century city center have remained unchanged since Chester was under Roman rule, reveals just how immersive such performances must have been.⁷⁶ Three of the four wagon stations occurred in streets that featured Chester's Rows—a series of raised walkways and open corridors above Chester's streets, creating a two-story city center featuring twice as much space for storefronts and shambles.⁷⁷ Those Rows provide a perfect viewing area that still fills up with spectators when local festive performances travel through the main streets.⁷⁸ Projecting above the Rows are private apartments; the fact that well-to-do sixteenth-century Cestrians rented out window seats in those apartments during the Whitsun play performances testifies to how highly locals valued the view of the wagons from above.⁷⁹ Still higher were the roofs and spires of the buildings surrounding the wagon stations: the stage directions at Chester stand out for their frequent use of levels, to create spectacular ascents and descents, and Clifford Davidson has theorized that such effects would have had to make use of nearby high architecture.⁸⁰ All of these viewing and performing areas surrounded the wagons, which were themselves two stories high. Rogers describes "2 rowmes beinge open on the tope," raised "highe" enough off the ground to accommodate a lower closed level for the actors' costume changes.⁸¹ All of these levels for performers and spectators rose up vertically from an area that was relatively confined horizontally: in the areas beneath the Rows, Watergate Street and Bridge Street (the sites of the third and fourth stations) are only 32 and 50 feet wide at their widest points, respectively.⁸² To be a street-level spectator during the Chester plays, crowded into a narrow street with a large pageant wagon taking up much of its space, was to be enclosed in a small horizontal space by multiple vertical levels of activity.

Chester's stations were also far more centralized than those at York. They made use of Chester's four main streets, all of whose primary purpose was the same—to direct traffic through the commercial and civic center of town. As Rogers describes them, the four pageant-wagons played simultaneously. I argue here that because of the proximity of the stations to each other, and because of the simple cruciform structure of Chester's four straight thoroughfares, the simultaneous

performances described by Rogers would likely have been visible to each other from many of the vantage points that the spectators occupied. Rogers specifies that the first wagon station was “at the Abbaye gates,” which still occupy their original location along Northgate Street at Chester. The open forum in front of the gates is 620 feet away from the open space where all four main streets cross, in front of the “pentice at the hyghe crosse”—that is, the second wagon station, according to Rogers. The High Cross also still stands in its original location. The crossing of Chester’s four main streets is asymmetrical, which means that a spectator standing at the High Cross would not be able to see the abbey gates. However, the crowd would have had to gather around the wagon in all directions, including the streets where the wagons passed—the opening and closing to the *Abraham* play, which call for bystanders to “give us waye” for the passing of the wagon (lines 484-91), strongly suggests that this was the case. Assuming that the cycle players faced south (a safe assumption, since the north side of the open space is the only side without Rows), then the spectators standing at downstage left would be able to see two stations playing at once, only 620 feet apart.

Those spectators, if they looked west, would also have a view straight down Watergate Street. All of Chester’s main streets continue in straight lines across flat terrain; those street-level spectators who stood at the High Cross would have been unable to see the abbey gates around the corner of the Pentice, but they could see for an uninterrupted 1,000 feet west along Watergate Street and 1,100 feet south along Bridge Street—in the latter case, they could see almost as far as the city walls. The visibility is mutual: a spectator standing in Watergate or Bridge street could just as easily see the crowd gathered at the High Cross. No record remains of how far down along Watergate or Bridge street the performers might have been stationed, but Rogers reports that these two-story, six-wheel wagons were able to follow almost immediately upon each other.⁸³ In other words, their performance stations could not have been far from each other without adding considerable time to their transitions. It is unlikely, anyway, that they would have strayed much farther than the end of the Rows in any street, since doing so would sacrifice a whole viewing area. Cestrian spectators at street level, then, could usually see two or more plays happening simultaneously. The effect, especially at the second station, is of a narrative that is happening all at once, enveloping and saturating the city—as opposed to York’s cycle, for instance, which cut a winding path through various streets rather than orbiting the center. Certain sound cues must have been mutually audible, as well. The *Shepherds* play and the *Judgment* play each feature a trumpet, for instance (*Shepherds* line 48+SD; *Judgment* line 41+SD); the trumpets’ audibility across all four stations would serve as reminders that dramatic action was underway in all directions from where the spectator stood.

Theorists as far back as Richard Southern have drawn parallels between the staging of early English drama and that of Bertolt Brecht’s epic theater.⁸⁴ However, when twentieth- and twenty-first-century theater artists leave their productions open to extradiegetic influence, they must do so in response to, or in tension with, Wagner’s precedents: darkness and silence have now become universally recognized signs that a theatrical performance is, or is about to be, underway. Premodern performance had no Wagnerian framework within which, or against which, to define itself; it was just there, in the daylight, part of the urban environment. In his study of *The Castle of Perseverance* and other non-cycle plays, Southern points out that extant stage directions frequently refer to a “place” or *platea*, a term for which, through extensive deduction, Southern provides a definition that bridges English and continental play practice:

It was the public place upon which the stage was erected and down to which the actors might descend from that stage (or stages); across which they could walk along lanes cleared

through the crowd of people... the Place (also *platea*, *placea* and plain) is the area on which the audience stood before a raised stage or stages.⁸⁵

In his discussion of the English cycle plays, V.A. Kolve adjusts Southern's model to medieval English street theater: the *locus*, usually a movable pageant wagon, provided a recognizable center point around which the action took place; the *platea*, usually the grounds that surrounded the wagon, was the space that roughly surrounded the *locus*, extending out from it indefinitely, with no set boundary around it.⁸⁶ Based on that model, Kolve has drawn some helpful oppositions between medieval and modern approaches to staging. He writes:

The Corpus Christi drama took place in broad daylight, in the streets and open places of the town. The audience surrounded the playing area, as clearly visible to one another as the players were to them; occasional exits, entrances, and even dramatic action took place on street level in their midst... It was never geographically localized, and there was no pretense that what went on there went on in an imagined locality relevant to the action. Action itself told the story, and it happened *there* in England, in front of and amid the spectators... Furthermore, this drama used actors from the community who were known to the audience in real life... local, familiar faces in biblical roles would have made any fully developed kind of theatrical illusion impossible.⁸⁷

Kolve focuses on daylight and locality, a useful contrast to modern Wagnerian darkness and removal. Erika T. Lin and Cami D. Agan write that “the terms *locus* and *platea* inherently describe presentational dynamics of performance,” creating a space that emphasizes the proximity of the player to the spectator, where players can be aware of and to manipulate that proximity.⁸⁸ As I show at length in Chapter Two, the *platea* at Chester becomes a symbol of the community's role in the cycle, a site at which the community can be written into biblical history.

At Chester in particular, the compact architecture of the *platea* lends itself to an immersive theater that makes the community especially visible. At Chester, the *loci* were mobile and multiple; Cestrians performed throughout the surrounding urban space, with no consistent physical or linguistic conceit that might effectively isolate the active playing area from other public space.⁸⁹ Their *platea* extended from the four *loci*, thus filling the urban space between them, on two stories—the streets and the Rows—as well as the roofs and spires of the buildings surrounding the *platea*, which Cestrian players used for stunts and spectacles.⁹⁰ Players, who were themselves community members, seem to have moved about in that space even when their play was not underway.⁹¹ Since costumes and face paint were ceremoniously donned in the morning and had to be left on until the final performance, it is likely that the players who wandered through the *platea* did so while still partially or fully retaining the appearance of their character, further dissolving any boundary that was perceived between playing areas and viewing areas.⁹² In other words, the *platea* of Cestrian performance extended along multiple levels, where it continually absorbed and manifested the festive noise of Chester's Whitsuntide.

That noise seems to have been difficult to control. William Newhall, Chester's head municipal clerk in 1531-2, promised that Cestrians who heard and saw the plays in “pecible manner” would be eligible for a forty days' papal and episcopal indulgence. At the end of Newhall's proclamation, however, his definition of “pecible” becomes clearer:

Maister mair in the kyngez name straitly chargeth & commaundeth that euery person & [persons] of what esta[te] degre or condicion so euær he [or] they be resorting to the said

plaiez do vse th[eym selff] pecible *witho[ut] [m]akynge eny assault affrey or other disturbans whereby the same [playes] shalbe disturbed & that no manner person or persons who so euex he or they be do vse or [weyre eny] Vnlauffull wepons within the precynct of the said Citie duryng the tyme of the said [playes]*, not only opon payn of cursyng by thauctoritie of the said Pope Clement bulles but also opon payn of enprisonment of their bodiez & makynge fine to the kyng at maister mairis pleasure... god saue the kyng & maister mair &c.⁹³

When he asks the audience in advance for *peace*, Newhall can only hope to minimize activity that might physically prevent the plays from continuing, particularly those involving assault and unlawful weapons. The Newhall Proclamation attempts to control a playing environment in which the possibility of such disturbances must have been real enough to necessitate legal and religious counter-threats. Goobett-on-the-Greene's prologue to the Chester Barbers' *Abraham* play, which the modern reader might interpret as a call for total silence, should be read alongside Newhall's warnings:⁹⁴

All peace, lordinges that bine presente,
and herken mee with good intente,
howe Noe awaye from us hee went
and all his companye;
and Abraham through Godes grace,
he is comen into this place,
and yee will geeve us rowme and space
to tell you this storye (*Abraham* lines 1-8).

In requesting "All peace," Goobett could not possibly have expected a Wagnerian hush, or any real cessation of the urban activity in Chester's main streets. A more realistic plea would be for *peace*, as with Newhall's use of the word, from any physical interruption or violent disturbance (from those spectators with less than *good intente*). In demanding *rowme* and *space*, and ordering that the *lordinges* "give us waye" in his epilogue (lines 484-91), Goobett makes clear that the playing area would otherwise have been blocked by Cestrians, through whom the putters (the men who pushed the wagons) had to steer.

The reader who looks only at the written words of the cycle manuscripts views the plays through an artificial and anachronistic proscenium; like Wagner, such a reader extinguishes incidental light in order to view the dramatic action in controlled isolation. The plays looked and sounded more like a modern circus or street fair than like a Broadway play—they did not exist in isolation from public festivity until after their late sixteenth-century prohibition and preservation in manuscripts. Before that, they were inextricable from the buzzing, multi-leveled and multivocal festival within which their four two-story *loci* played simultaneously, in view of each other, absorbing into their diegesis an unbounded two-story *platea* that extended across the city center.⁹⁵

Play Texts as Performance Records

The visibility of local bodies and public space in the cycle emerges in many ways in the extant texts, but it is impossible to discuss that visibility without bringing up gestures, *mises-en-scène*, or casting choices—the non-verbal ephemera of the live performances. I admit that the reconstruction of performance data is an unsteady pursuit, but I also assert that to avoid it is to ignore a crucial way in which these plays bear meaning, especially in their community-based context. Early Cestrians'

complete array of staging choices can never be fully known, but important details of their staging can be deduced from the extant texts and employed in analysis of the cycle. As it analyzes the aesthetics and symbolism of the Chester cycle, then, this dissertation also takes on a methodological challenge: to provide, in a series of examples, an approach to early English performance that reads non-verbal ephemera as an essential part of the dramatic poetry from which they are derived. Since live performance is precisely what extended the cycle text over centuries of collaborative revision, that approach constitutes the kind of diachronic reading that can regard the extant Chester plays as cumulative records of a recurring premodern tradition rather than as confections by early modern antiquarians.

Before I apply any performance data in my reading, I must clarify and defend the methods by which I obtain that data. Much work has already been done by critics, especially the editors of *REED*, to reconstruct the general conditions for cycle performance based only on medieval Chester's urban layout, guild accounts, and reportage from local historians. What this dissertation contributes is an approach to the play texts themselves as records of live performance, especially of specific gestures, *mises-en-scène*, or casting choices. Chester's extant stage directions vary between description (present and past tense) and prescription (future tense, sometimes imperative mood), but the primary aim of the manuscripts, inscribed well after the Archbishop of York's ban had ended the cycle's live performance, clearly was to record events that had already happened (whether or not the scribes envisioned an eventual revival). It is safe to assume that the prescriptive stage directions, then, are vestiges of rehearsal scripts that the scribes, or the scribes of their exempla, used in compiling the extant texts.

No early text should be read as an impartial record of actual practice; indeed, the late scribes of the full-cycle manuscripts did exercise some creativity in their work, especially James Miller, the scribe of British Library MS Harley 2124.⁹⁶ In these cases, the manuscripts' multiple recordings of the cycle in practice can often serve as correctives to each other. Below, I usually disregard or qualify performance data that is not embedded in at least two manuscripts—however, the vast majority of the available data is present in all of them. I do not mean to suggest that all performances (or that any performances) perfectly followed the mass of performance data included in and implied by the play texts and archival records, nor that any manuscript's data perfectly record the stagings of a given performance. Impossible to include here are the infinite set of staging choices that Cestrian players may have made that ignored (or played against) what has been recorded in the manuscripts and guild records. However, I am not concerned here with any staging choice that might have been made independently of the extant texts, because any performance data developed separately from a dramatic text cannot be relevant to a close analysis of that text—which is the primary project of this study.⁹⁷ There are some rare but important cases in which performance data from different sources disagree (i.e. the play texts versus the archives), but as I discuss in the Introduction to this study, such disagreements are far more likely to be evidence of ongoing changes in collaborative performance practice than of independent invention on the part of scribes.⁹⁸ In what follows, I present an approach to the Chester play texts as records of performance practice, beginning with the first few gestures in the *Shepherds* play, then expanding to a series of gestures and *mises-en-scène* in the *Pentecost* play. (I should note here that throughout my dissertation, I use the term *gesture* in a sense more familiar to theater practitioners than to academic theorists. In the modern rehearsal room, especially with respect to collaboratively devised work, a *gesture* can refer to *any brief, discrete, performed act that is symbolic and repeatable*. The layman's idea of a "gesture"—usually a hand or arm movement that stands in for a verbal message—is usually referred to as a *quotidian gesture*, as opposed to an *abstract* or *expressive gesture*. To the actor, gestures can thus be physical, verbal, spatial, or emotional.)

The most immediately visible performance data included in the extant texts of the Chester cycle are their many stage directions and speech headings; especially where the directions and headings are consistent across all manuscripts, these provide as reliable data as can be expected from any early dramatic text:

Example 1 (All manuscripts except Harley 2124). In the first 110 lines of the *Shepherds* play, there are four stage directions: “Hic potat Primus Pastor” [Here the First Shepherd drinks] at line 44+SD, “Hic flabit Primus Pastor” [Here the First Shepherd will blow (on his horn)] at line 47+SD, “Sitt downe” at line 52+SD, and “Secundus Pastor vocat submissa voce” [The Second Shepherd speaks (the following lines) in a low voice] at line 60+SD. Notice that these four directions are, respectively, in the present indicative, the future indicative, the present imperative, and the present indicative.

Example 1 (Harley 2124). James Miller’s MS Harley 2124 does not include the imperative direction at line 52+SD; it does include more information at line 47+SD: “Tunc flat cum cornu et reddit ‘Aho! Io! O!’ Tunc venit Secundus Pastor gerens plumam cornicis cum vestis parte veteris” [Then (the First Shepherd) blows on the horn and delivers “Aho! Io! O!” Then the Second Shepherd comes, wearing the feather of a crow on part of his old garment.] Miller also includes “Tunc voce vocat canora” [Then he speaks with a sonorous (or melodious) voice] at line 66+SD.⁹⁹ Miller’s exclusion (removal of “Sitt downe”) reasonably takes the dialogue at line 55-56 as a conditional contrafactual (“had we Tudd here by us sett / then might wee sitte and feede us”)—it delays the sitting until the supper begins at line 105. His inclusion of the crow-feather is corroborated by the dialogue at lines 50-52 in all manuscripts (“I was set for to sowe / with the fether of a crowe / a clowte upon my heele”). His inclusion of the sonorous voice makes dramatic sense, since the Second Shepherd is told that his “dym” (low-voiced) call will not succeed (line 62), and then his second call does succeed (line 69). His other unique inclusions are not corroborated in the dialogue, records, or other manuscripts, so they remain conjectural and cannot be included in this study.

Example 1 (Summary). In total, based on information from the stage directions included in the first 110 lines of the *Shepherds* play, the players definitely execute four gestures and may execute three more. Barring any staging choices that ignore or go against the text, it is certain that the First Shepherd drinks at line 44+SD, that he blows his horn at line 47+SD, and that the Second Shepherd lowers his voice at line 60+SD and then raises it (perhaps in song) at line 69. The First Shepherd may also call out “Aho! Io! O!” at line 47+SD, the Second Shepherd may enter with a crow-feather on his garments at line 47+SD, and the Shepherds may sit at line 52+SD. If they do not sit by line 52, they must sit by line 105.

The majority of performance data is not, however, explicitly noted in stage directions. As is the case in most early English dramatic texts, much performance data is implied in spoken dialogue:¹⁰⁰

Example 2. At lines 17-24, the First Shepherd says, “here be my herbes... medled on a rowe. / Here be more herbes... here is tarre in a pott...” naming ten medicinal components that he has brought with him. It is uncertain whether these components are represented by visual props, but for the sense of the line, the Shepherd must gesture as if herbs are “here.” At lines 41-44, the First Shepherd says, “noe fellowshippe

here have I / save myselfe alone, in good faye; / thefore after one faste wyll I crye. / But first will I drinke...” The Shepherd must thus have entered the playing area alone (or in a way that represents considerable distance between him and the other players); his call to the Second Shepherd at line 45, which immediately follows his stage direction to drink, must be delivered in a loud voice (“crye”). At lines 93-94, the Third Shepherd asks the First Shepherd to “hold up thy hand and have mee, / that I were on height there by thee”; the First Shepherd agrees at lines 95-96; the Second Shepherd confirms that all three Shepherds are “gathered... together” at line 97. No direction explicitly instructs the First Shepherd to physically pull the Third Shepherd from a low level to a high level (“on height”), but the dialogue and the ensuing supper scene (during which the Shepherds are sitting, see above) makes clear that he has done so.

Less visible in the text, but still embedded there, are the required conditions necessary to bring about the instructions and implications in the text:

Example 3. In order for the First Shepherd to pull the Third Shepherd up to the other Shepherds’ “height,” the Third Shepherd must enter the scene at a lower level than where the other two Shepherds stand. In order for the Third Shepherd to make that entrance, the other two Shepherds must be standing in a playing area that is above another playing area, but not one that is so high up that the First Shepherd cannot physically pull another player up from below. Furthermore, the Shepherds sit down for their supper, so they must be located on a raised playing space by that point, or else they would not be visible or audible behind the standing audience in the street.

We know from Rogers’ *Breviary* that Cestrian players used pageant wagons large enough to require six wheels and tall enough to feature two-story stages.¹⁰¹ Various plays involve sudden falls (for instance, *Lucifer* line 229+SD), so there may also have been a trap door in the bottom level of the wagon. Extending out in all directions from the wagon was the *platea*, the unbounded space that served both as a viewing area for the audience and as a playing area for the pageants—again on two levels, the street and the Rows. Players also sometimes used nearby roofs or spires for ascents and descents.¹⁰² Thus, there were six possible playing areas in which any staged action might take place: the upper wagon level, the lower wagon level, the trap door area, the street, the Rows (except at the first station, where the Rows did not extend), and the high architecture of nearby buildings. Each new piece of performance data, when considered alongside the rest of the data and the limitations of the six playing areas, yields new information:

Example 4. The First Shepherd must pull the Third Shepherd up from a level lower than himself. The Rows and nearby architecture are far too high, but the upper level of the wagon would only have to be separated from the lower level by six feet in order to allow players room to walk below. Thus, the Third Shepherd must enter through the street or through a trap door. In order to pull him up from those levels, the First and Second Shepherds must be located on the lower level of the wagon; the supper scene, occurring as an immediate result of the Shepherds’ coming together in one place, must thus be located on the lower level of the wagon.

That performance data is part of the dramatic poetry of the Chester cycle: it is embedded in the texts, creating an imagined *mise-en-scène* that the texts often rely upon for their aesthetic and symbolic power. An understanding of that data is essential to the analysis and interpretation of the cycle. In many cases, the performance data can only be narrowed down to a finite range of possibilities (for example, the Third Shepherd may enter from a trap door or through the street), but a finite range of possibilities that can be reduced to the certainty that all possibilities have in common:

Example 5. The Third Shepherd may enter from a trap door or through the street. In either case, he must enter from a lower place than his two companions must. This entrance is appropriate: throughout the scene, the Third Shepherd is uxorious and cowardly in comparison to the other Shepherds, who tend to make him the butt of their jokes.

Huntington 2 is our earliest manuscript of the *Shepherds* play, but, after all, it was inscribed sixteen years after the play's final performance. If we had a time machine, or video footage, we would probably discover that the Third Shepherd did not enter in the same way at the same time at every performance, over the nearly two centuries that these plays were produced. It is just as likely that these local players forgot their lines, ad libbed, or pitched jokes out to their friends in the festive audience. I do not wish to reconstruct a snapshot of any single performance of the Chester plays, mainly because I do not believe that the scribes were trying to do that, either. Their scripts are not snapshots of single performances, but seem more to present time-release photographs of Cestrian performance: a cumulative, imagined performance embedded in the text. We do not know where the Third Shepherd always entered, but we know that all the manuscripts imagine him doing so as I have described it above. Some suspicion of that imagined physical gesture is justified, but there are very good reasons to think that the extant Chester manuscripts do shed light on significant aspects of the plays' performance. There is clearly performance data embedded in the dialogue and stage directions of the manuscripts. The five full manuscripts of the cycle—which certainly are derived from earlier exempla—generally agree on points of staging, which are either explicit in stage directions or implicit to the dialogue. They also tend to agree with the fifteenth-century manuscript fragments of the cycle. Meanwhile, nobody could have lived in Chester without seeing these plays—they were performed right in the middle of the city's main streets—and we know that the four scribes who copied the manuscripts were locals or near-locals. So the performance imagined by the scribes is almost certainly influenced by living memory of the plays, on their own part and on the parts of their neighbors. We cannot trust that data to be perfectly accurate, but we can trust that performance data just as far as we trust that any line of the dramatic poetry was included in performance. I contend that avoiding such data ignores a foundational way in which medieval plays make meaning. To dismiss the clear cues for gestures and movement that are embedded in early dramatic poetry is to distort them irrevocably, in the name of preserving only what can be known certainly. Only when the cues for physical gestures and *mises-en-scène* embedded in the Chester cycle are taken into account as symbols, whose meaning is inseparable from the words that comprise the text of each play, do we begin to understand that those words are arranged as poetry that resonated powerfully with the real physical bodies and environment in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Chester.

With my methodology in place, I can examine the various ways in which the play texts of the Chester cycle engage with the public practice that surrounded them. In my first chapter (“Playing through the Chester Cycle: Recreation and Resistance”), I focus on a coherent comic stratum that runs through three cycle plays, distinguishable from other strata by its unusual meter and content.

In it, Cestrian guildsmen present the biblical artisans and laborers who most closely resemble themselves. These clownish characters, like the guildsmen, are *players*—not only of dramatic plays but also of the pursuits that medieval writers broadly referred to as “pleie,” “ludus,” or “game.” Both the Shepherds’ wrestling and the darkly comic games played by Jesus’ crucifiers preserve metadramatic clues to how Cestrians interpreted and justified the dramatic “game” they played. The Tudors’ aggressive reform of traditional medieval recreation, meanwhile, became a frontier for the North’s resistance to early modernity; the Chester plays, persisting into the 1570s, exemplified that resistance. Representative of a nostalgic local tradition set against a changing England, the clowns who play within the plays are at once associated with guild players and distanced from them, in a way that justifies the guilds’ unfashionable (and potentially blasphemous or illegal) recreation.

Chapter Two (“The Cestrian Community in Time”) is concerned with the ways in which communal investment and collaboration deeply influenced the cycle’s form. Performed across almost two centuries at intervals of four or five years, with each performance featuring a tenth of the population of Chester, the cross-generational cycle involved its community in an ongoing production process that was both massive and personal. As I argue, the extant texts rely for their symbolic and aesthetic power on production values that accentuate the recognizability and familiarity of local players, cast across years of repeated performances. Cestrians embedded themselves in their cycle; in performance, the cycle reflects Cestrians back to each other and endows them with a place in scriptural and secular time. Built to form uninterrupted bonds of community across generations, the cycle resists periodization—not only because of textual accidents, but also because its structure and staging establish a self-contained local temporality. This temporality would have been vividly present to Cestrians, who watched neighbors or family members inhabit different roles as they grew from children into adults. Embedded in the texts are cues that communicate particular meaning only when they recur throughout the lifespan of a Cestrian, across the perceived genealogy of Cestrians, or at a designated point in the Cestrian liturgical year. Many of those cues are non-verbal, relying on gestures or *mises-en-scène* to bear meaning.

Chapter Three (“Festive Piety: Food and Drink in the Chester Plays”) argues that the Cestrian festivals that occasioned the cycle’s performance in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries took shape around ritualized commensality. Sixteenth-century archives overflow with evidence of continuous and often ceremonial bouts of eating and drinking during Whitsun week. The Chester cycle’s conspicuously frequent enactment of eating and drinking provides a subtler record of guild revelry that extends back into the cycle’s fifteenth-century performances on Corpus Christi day. By re-evaluating guild records, I show that comestible props were always quite real—to consume them according to the plays’ cues provided not only for the representation of commensality, but for literal eating and drinking. The symbolic order embedded in the plays’ staged feasts reconciles guild gluttony with lay piety to secure the continuance of both in Chester.

While prior chapters focus on the radically local aspects of the cycle, Chapter Four (“Tourism and Hospitality at Chester’s Port”) demonstrates that the minority of the audience that came from outside the Cestrian community had a significant influence on the development of Cestrian performance, and thus on the way that Cestrians expressed their local identity in their art. The performances occurred in immediate proximity to the Watergate, where a primary harbor of northwest England connected Chester with traders and travelers from Ireland and the Continent. Guildsmen certainly were cosmopolitan enough to engage in commerce with their foreign visitors, consumers whose presence in Chester peaked during festivals. Appropriately, the plays they presented in front of those consumers display a concern with Continental culture and language, particularly French, that is not visible in other English cognates. More surprisingly, the plays also depict a series of episodes in which the comic characters who most closely resemble Cestrians are

incompetent or antagonistic in their interactions with non-natives. I argue in Chapter Four that that any performative construction of local identity—even at a community-based performance—implies the presence of a non-local gaze. That gaze provokes in the cycle an artificial construction of provincial “Cestriana” that disguises an otherwise cosmopolitan culture from medieval tourists and modern readers.

Chapter One
Playing Through the Chester Cycle: Recreation and Resistance

In the Chester Fletchers' *Trial* pageant, four *Judei*, or Jews, playfully torture and humiliate Jesus. Four *Judei* emerge again in the following pageant, the Ironmongers' *Passion*, to crucify Jesus with equally playful glee. The anachronism typical of the cycle plays emphasizes these darkly buffoonish torturers' immediate physical presence in medieval England, particularly when the Fourth Jew mentions London (*Trial* line 321) and refers to a fellow torturer as "Hervye" (*Trial* line 335).¹ Like the four Welsh clowns of the Chester Painters' *Shepherds* pageant—one of whom is also named "Harvye" (line 45)—the Four Jews of the *Trial* and *Passion* are Jewish when the narrative demands that they be so, but otherwise their dialogue marks them as British commoners, specifically opposed to the "bishops," "lordings," and "prelates" of the Sanhedrin.² And those commoners fixate on the craftsmanship of their gory work: they brag about the tested quality of their hammer, nails, and rope (*Passion* lines 154-160, 165-166), or their technical skill at fastening hands and fitting knees (*Passion* lines 177-180, lines 209-210).³ They spend extra time discussing an "iron pynne" (*Passion* lines 192-6, lines 199-200), an overt reminder of the connection between the *Passion* pageant and the craft of its supporting guild. The Four Jews are not just commoners, then—they are craftsmen, members of the same class as the Cestrian guildsmen who produced, performed, and watched the pageants. Sarah Beckwith has observed that the York crucifiers' "almost entirely functional" dialogue, in contrast to a laconic Jesus, "orients itself around the physical action of their job and its technical difficulties," asking the audience to "bear a terrible witness as we ourselves are addressed as participants at the scene of crucifixion."⁴ Chester's work-oriented crucifixion banter, during which Jesus is also entirely silent, similarly implicates all witnesses, especially craftsmen, in the Four Jews' antics.

However, Chester's workmen are far from "entirely functional." Cruder and more flippant than their counterparts at York, they bring to mind Shakespeare's "rude mechanicals," both as rustic craftsmen and as vulgar clowns.⁵ Caiaphas, as their annoyed foreman, must scold them into remembering their task because they have been distracted by a game: "Men, for cockes face / how long shall pewee-ars / stand naked in that place? / Goe naye him on the tree!" (lines 149-52). Nor did Cestrian guildsmen approach their own craftwork with uninterrupted focus: if they had, the Chester plays could never have occurred. The plays themselves are powerful evidence of the guildsmen's emphasis on recreation. As with the clownish Chester Shepherds, who abandon their jobs to hold a raucous wrestling match, the Four Jews' similarity to local guild revelers emerges not only in their descriptions of work, but also, and more forcefully, in their penchant for play.

In their series of distinctively ludic embellishments upon biblical accounts of the crucifixion, which conflate Jesus' Jewish persecutors with his Roman crucifiers, four Cestrian craftsmen act the parts of, or *play*, four Jewish craftsmen—who themselves *play* various games as they crucify Christ. To a late medieval community, as I show below, there must have been a humorous but problematic self-referential connection between the playful Jews depicted in the drama and the playful Cestrians who did the depicting. In the present chapter, I analyze the recreational practices that are dramatized in the *Trial* and *Passion* sequence (as well as in the *Shepherds* pageant), based upon a basic contention: that *in premodern guild performance, the dramatic portrayal of any form of recreation is necessarily metadramatic*. Before I can proceed, I must briefly introduce this chapter by defending that contention, which requires a brief explanation of what it meant to *play* in the sixteenth century. In subsequent sections, I discuss the ways in which, in sixteenth-century performances of the Chester cycle, such metadrama drew its meaning from the persistence of traditional Cestrian recreation in opposition to Henrician power.

Cestrian metadrama is especially evident in the Four Jews' humiliation of Jesus in the *Trial*

pageant, during which the guildsmen make a scriptural role-play the subject of their own theatrical role-play. The torturers' sardonic role-playing in Matthew 27, Mark 15, and John 19 already exhibits some gory theatricality, in that the soldiers costume their victim and take on the roles of his subjects:

*Tunc milites praesidis suscipientes Iesum in praetorio congregaverunt ad eum universam cohortem; Et excuentes eum clamydem coccineam circumdederunt ei. Et plectentes coronam de spinis posuerunt super caput eius et harundinem in dextera eius et genu flexo ante eum includebant dicentes have rex Iudaeorum. Et expuentes in eum acceperunt harundinem et percutiebant caput eius.*⁶

In Chester's extension of the scene, the Four Jews amplify the episode's theatricality, and take it a step farther. They reiterate the scriptural "*have rex Iudaeorum*" four distinct times: "syth hee kinge ys" at line 323, "a kinge for to bee" at line 334, "Hayle, kinge of Jewes" at line 339, and "thou that the kinge mase [make]" at line 348. The Third Jew presents the reed outrightly as a mock-scepter (line 333), though the gospels never actually call it one; the reed is not, as in the gospels, quickly removed from the role-play (it only enters it in Matthew's gospel) to be used as a weapon. When the Chester torturers spit on their victim, they make that part of the role-play too: the Second Jew characterizes the spit as "oyntment" to refresh Jesus (lines 345-6) in a twisted re-imagining of Mary Magdalene's adoration. And in a disturbing addition to scripture, the Third Jew claims "[t]o wryte in [Jesus'] face" by discharging nasal mucus on him, jeering, "[N]owe my nose hase good spice of the newe" (lines 346-50).⁷ Editors of the plays have been duly confused about exactly what the Third Jew means here, but it is certain that the Third Jew is mocking his victim by acting as if something vulgar is something noble, kingly, or divine.⁸ The Cestrian guild players, in their *Passion* theatrics, are quite clearly doing the same: acting as if something vulgar (their comedy, their theatrics, their bodies) is something noble, kingly, or divine (scripture, the Passion, the body of Christ). The *Trial* pageant's extension and embellishment of its source text's capacity for metadrama is one of many cases in which the cycle comments on its own dramatic devices—in this case, a light reminder that the cycle is a form of recreation that came dangerously close to blasphemy.⁹

Were the role-playing scene the only recreational practice portrayed in the *Trial* and *Passion* plays, there would be little else to say about the subject of metadrama that has not already been said. However, elsewhere in the same plays, the same Four Jews turn Jesus' buffeting into a game of hot cockles; they play at dice for Jesus' seamless robe; as I argue below, they frame the crucifixion itself in sporting terms—unsportsmanlike as their conduct may be.¹⁰ Hot cockles, dicing, and sports do not involve role-playing or theatrics, but that does not at all dampen their resonance with the Cestrian guildsmen's theatrical playing, because medieval conceptions of recreation were far more porous than they are in the present day. V.A. Kolve, John Coldewey, and Lawrence Clopper show that the set of practices denoted by Middle English *pleie*, or by *ludus* or *game*, included theatrics, light role-plays and tableaux, structured horseplay, sports, tests of strength or skill, and gambling, often interchangeably.¹¹

Kolve suggests that, during the years of the cycle's performance, "there was little fundamental distinction made between drama and other forms of men's playing."¹² Later in the same book, Kolve enumerates the "series of game substitutions" enacted by the *Passion*'s torturers throughout medieval British drama. He concludes that games' primary purposes in those plays are to provide dialogue that adds depth to the torturers' characters, to allow literal time for the torture to take place, and to allow the torturers to "know not what they do," affirming Jesus' judgment of them.¹³ The missing conclusion here, obvious only when Kolve's earlier point about drama-as-*pleie* is brought into contact with his observation that the cycles relentlessly present examples of *pleie* during the *Trial* and *Passion*, is that the medieval dramatic staging of any form of gameplay constitutes a moment at which *pleie* represents itself—a *pleie*-within-a-*pleie*—representing in miniature the broader

genre that contains it, and thus modeling its own performance and reception. As I demonstrate in what follows, the interrelation between the various examples of *pleie-within-a-pleie* in the Chester cycle constructs a complex system of self-reference. And because the engine of the metadrama relies on a conception of *pleie* that the modern reader does not share with the medieval player, the interpretation and analysis of that metadrama will prove especially helpful to the modern reader in understanding how the medieval player conceived of theatrics, and how he represented that conception in performance.

Christina M. Fitzgerald has already discussed the “self-reflexive quality” of the repetition of words related to *pleie* and *game* throughout the English cycles; it is the business of this chapter to extend the scope of that discussion to the instances of *pleie* and *game* physically performed on Chester’s wagons, through an extended consideration of how those self-referential moments bore meaning in sixteenth-century performance.¹⁴ The Cestrian Four Jews, whose class, clownishness and sense of craftsmanship already correlate them with common guild players, provide an especially strong and sustained example of a *pleie-within-a-pleie*, covering four forms of recreation in only a little dramatic space: horseplay (hot cockles), gambling (dicing), theatrics (as I discuss above), and sport (the crucifixion banter is broadly play-oriented, but I show below that its most specific gestures and puns parody popular wrestling). Kolve, Coldewey, and Clopper have dealt thoroughly with the inclusion of guild dramatics in the broad genre of medieval English *pleie*; conversely, I examine the representation of medieval English *pleie* in guild dramatics, one of the many resonances between staged action and unscripted public practice that appear throughout the cycle. As I argue, the Shepherds’ and Four Jews’ antics do not reflect a consistent image of Cestrian recreation. Rather, the cultural resonances of these episodes rely largely on inconsistencies between the Shepherds’ recreation and the Jews’ recreation, or between the Jews’ recreation and Reformation-era strictures on traditional local recreation.

This chapter connects the recreational practices represented within the Chester cycle dialogue to the controversies over persistent recreational traditions in Chester, among which the Chester cycle itself was prominent. My first section, below, provides a primer on the shifting recreational practices and values that constituted *pleie* in the years leading up to the Chester cycle’s final performance. From there, I analyze scansion and textual history to delimit four *pleie*-episodes in the Chester cycle: the wrestling match in the *Shepherds*, and the Four Jews’ hot cockles, role-play, and dicing-sporting during the *Trial* and *Passion*. The remaining sections combine readings of the Cestrian *pleie*-episodes with further analysis of early English writing on recreation, paying special attention to tracts and proclamations associated with Cheshire. Having explored the ways in which English recreation shifted considerably during the early Reformation, I argue that the meaning of the *pleie*-episodes to the Cestrians that shaped them, particularly in the episodes’ capacity for self-referentiality, necessarily shifted as well. The Jews’ dice game, in asserting divine dominion over earthly chance, would emblemize Cestrian players’ resistance to the earthly dominion of Henrician reform. The Shepherds’ wrestling match would prove acceptable to humanist expectations of recreation, and would outlast the rest of the cycle by three years; the Four Jews’ horseplay would look even darker against the Shepherds’ shining example. Chester’s *pleies-within-pleies* thus situate themselves, and the cycle itself, in relation to the persistence of premodern recreation through the sixteenth century.

Recreation and Reform, Local and Nonlocal

On January 10 in 1540 (or, according to the calendar then in use, 1539), Cestrian Mayor Henry Gee released an ordinance that instituted an official day of new sporting events to be held, with guild sponsorship, on Shrove Tuesday each year.¹⁵ Annual guild-run games and homages were already

being held on that holiday, so Gee's task was to shift standing local traditions to what he considered to be more acceptable forms of recreation. According to Gee, Shrove Tuesday games, particularly football, had been quite disorderly up until then:

[The Chester Shoemakers] Alwayez tyme out of mannz Remembraunc haue geuen and delyuerid yerlye vpon tuesday Commonly caulyd shroft teuesday... vnto the drapars Afore the mayre of the citie at the cros vpon the Rode hee [the Roodee, along the river just west of the city gates] one bale of Lether Caulyd a fout baule of the value of iij s. iiij d. or Aboue to pley at from thens to the Comon haule of the Said Citie [at the center of the city] And further At pleasure of euill Disposed persons // Wherfore hath Ryssyn grete Inconuenyence...¹⁶

David Rogers gives some further detail about the rules and circumstances of the game:

[the] yonge persones. of the same Cittie. while diuars partes weare taken with force and stronge hande to bringe the saide Ball. to one of these three howses. that is to saye to the maiors howse. or to any one of the Sheriffers howses for the tyme beinge. muche harme was donne some in the greate throunge falling into a transe. some haueinge their bodi es brused & crushed, some their, armes, heades. and legges broken and some otherwise mayemed or in perrill of their liffe.¹⁷

The opening ceremonies, the ball, the holiday occasion, the use of urban topography (from the Roodee fields just outside the west gate of Chester to one of three houses within the city), and the mass violence make Chester's sixteenth-century Shrovetide football played strongly resemble the version of the game still being played today in Ashbourne, fifty-five miles from Chester. As documented on film in *The Hardest Goal*, Ashbourne's citizens separate themselves into two teams, who must take possession of the football by any means necessary (excluding only murder); the opposing goalposts are on opposite ends of town, placing the entirety of Ashbourne in-bounds, from its busiest streets to its rivers.¹⁸ What *The Hardest Goal* provides for the modern reader of medieval drama is a representation in real time of the intensity of disorder produced when massive physical *pleie* moves through urban streets and involves a large percentage of the locals. It shows how riotous traditional *pleie*-forms can become—as Rogers puts it, a “greate throunge falling into a transe”—and how such customs tend to unite proud and sentimental locals while they baffle nonlocal observers. “You’d think it was a free-for-all,” as one Ashburnian comments, “but if you’ve been brought up around here, you know exactly what it is.” As *The Hardest Goal* makes clear, a premodern recreational custom can persist at the local level nearly unchanged for centuries, even while the nation proceeds otherwise into modernity.

Like Shrovetide football, the Chester cycle was a massive and highly physical form of civic *pleie*, engaging a large percentage of the population in the busiest streets as players and audience. It also had a considerable capacity to provoke holiday-time disorder and violence, as I explain in my discussion of the Newhall Proclamation in the Introduction to this project.¹⁹ But in the same period during which various other traditional Cestrian *pleie*-forms were prohibited by Gee, the Chester cycle was expanded. Between 1521 and 1539, the entire cycle underwent its last and most comprehensive program of structural revision and extension, as it shifted from its one-day Corpus Christi performance to a three-day festival in Whitsun Week.²⁰ Chester's repression of Shrovetide football, at the height of the English Reformation, is not merely a case of civic authority reducing violence and increasing order: after all, the football game had been going on for many years, and surely would

have provoked the authorities to act against it earlier were violence the only problem it created. Despite his apparent concern over the social disorder caused by traditional recreation, Gee condones the tradition of recreational drinking, ordering that “the said drapers And their successors shall kepe yerly ther recreacyon and Drinking in Lyke maner and forme as the same occupacions and ther predecessors tyme out of mynd haue vsed to do.”²¹ I argue below that Gee’s reform was in fact enacted as the result of profound shifts in English attitudes toward recreation brought about by Henrician social reform imposed at the local level, decades before the Chester plays’ prohibition. In its brief survey of sixteenth-century writing associated with Chester and its region, this section investigates the Reformation-era rationales that governed the reform of recreation, rationales that provided the conceptual frame within which Chester’s depictions of *pleie-within-a-pleie*, in their early sixteenth-century performances, produced meaning. I close this section by considering why the distinctly premodern Chester cycle enacted a type of recreation that was indirectly condoned by Henrician ideals, despite the cycle’s potential for disorder and backward-looking traditionalism.

There is no present-day English term that can accurately encompass the complex of practices that *pleie* signifies in late medieval and early modern writing, practices which present-day English speakers rarely consider together: athletics, games of chance and gambling, horseplay, role-playing, festivity, dance, theater, courting games, public contests and spectacles, board games and strategy games. Our modern English *play* is no longer adequate: popular media too rarely considers the most prominent stars of sports, theater, and dance to be “playing” or “at play” (though distinct maneuvers or performances are still “plays”) for any form of the word to be used without confusion here.²² The term *game*, which Kolve employs in his study, has too broad a range of meaning in its present-day usage; Kolve himself seems to sometimes lose track of the term.²³ In what follows, for clarity’s sake, I use *recreation* to refer to the broad set of practices referred to by Middle English *pleie*, except in certain constructions in which I employ the Middle English spelling for clarity (*pleie-within-a-pleie*, *pleie*-episodes in the cycle). The present-day meaning of *recreation*, while it is not a perfect fit, is much narrower than *play* or *game*; it does roughly approximate the set of practices signified by Middle English *pleie* in that it tends to signify a set of distinctly popular and localized ludic practices that include amateur sports, gambling, social dance, local processions and spectacles, and sometimes amateur dance or dramatics, and in that it almost never signifies the commercial or professional counterparts of any of these practices.

In order to get a good foothold on the unfamiliar breadth of medieval English recreational practices, it is helpful to begin my discussion at the moment when cultural historians first began viewing those practices with some distance. Late Tudor and early Stuart writers often looked back on premodern recreation as a major focus of the cultural shifts associated with the Reformation. As Leah Marcus has observed, these writers would characterize recreational practices as synecdoche for a fading “public mirth”—proscribed or critiqued by those who welcomed reform, and regarded with nostalgia by those who resisted it.²⁴ Particularly in Chester, which still smarted from the loss of its privileged treatment under Lancastrian rule, nostalgia was strong throughout the Tudor period and increased as the sixteenth century drew to a close, producing the wealth of antiquarian records of local recreation that now comprise many of the entries in the *Records of Early English Drama* edition for *Cheshire, Including Chester*.²⁵ David Rogers dedicates his 1609 *Breviary*, for instance, to the many locals “that desire to heare / of antiquitie,” asserting that those who call Chester their birthplace or home have vested interest in learning the city’s history.²⁶ The five extant full-cycle manuscripts of the Chester plays, which were inscribed between 1591 and 1607, were themselves part of the same antiquarian movement to preserve receding recreational practices while they still persisted in living memory.²⁷ Meanwhile, in 1601, antiquarian Cestrian mayor William Aldersey commissioned British Library Harley MS 2057, which includes “Auntient Customes in games vsed by boys & girles merily sett out in verse,” a bit of playful Cestriana alongside drier historical lists:

Table 2: A Verse on “Auntient Customes” Appearing in Two Contexts: Chester and London

<p>As commissioned by Cestrian Mayor William Aldersey, in British Library Harley MS 2057 (“The maiors of chester. the charters of ye Citty with other thinges about ye same.”) The hand of the list goes as far as 1601:</p> <p>any they dare challenge for to throw the slen[d]ge to Iumpe or leape ouer dich or hedge to <i>wrastle</i>, play at Stooleball, or to Runne; to pich the barre, or to shoote off a gunne to play at Loggets, nine holes; or Ten pinnes to trye it out at footeball; by the shinnes at <i>Tick tacke, Irish</i>, noddie, Maw, & Ruffe at <i>hott cockles</i>, leape frogge, or blindman buffe to drinke the halfe potts or deale at the whole Can: to play at chesse or pen and Inkehorne Iohn to <i>daunce the morris</i> play at barly breake at all exployts a man can thinke or speake a shoue groate venterpoynte or Crosse & pile at beshrow him thats last at any Style, at leaping ore a Christmase eue bonefier or at the <i>drawing dunne out of the myer</i> at shoote Cocke: gregory. Stoole ball & what not picke poynt topp & scourge to make him hott²⁸</p>	<p>As included in Samuel Rowlands’s anti-Northern “Satire 4” in <i>The Letting of Hymovrs Blood in the Head-Vaine</i>, published in London in 1600:</p> <p>Man, I dare challenge thee to throw the sledge, To iumpe or leape ouer a ditch or hedge, To <i>wrastle</i>, play at stooleball, or to runne, To pitch the barre, or to shoote off a gunne: To play at loggets, nine holes, or ten pinnes, To trie it out at foot-ball by the shinnes; At <i>Ticktacke, Irish</i>, Noddie, Maw, and Ruffe: At <i>hot-cockles</i>, leape-frogge, or blindman-buffe: To drinke halfe potts, or deale at the whole canne:²⁹ To play at base, or pen-and Ynk-horne sir Ihan: To <i>daunce the Morris</i>, play at barly-breake: At all exploytes a man can thinke or speake: At shoue-groate, venter poynt, or crosse and pile. At beshrow him that’s last at yonder style, At leaping ore a Midsommer bon-fier, Or at the <i>drawing Dun out of the myer</i>: At any of these, or all these presently, Wagge but your finger, I am for you, I; I scorne (that am a younster of our towne) To let a Bowe-bell Cockney put me downe...³⁰</p>
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As Table 2 also shows, the same verse appears as part of Samuel Rowlands’s fourth satire in *The Letting of Hymovrs Blood in the Head-Vaine*, published in London in 1600.³¹ The satire pokes fun at “Countrey fellowes” who adopt (and misuse) inkhorn language when they travel to London for financial or legal matters. A clownish out-of-towner, after he threatens to “transfisticate” a Londoner’s nose, challenges him to the same list of games that is in Aldersey’s “Auntient Customes.”³² Because both versions appear at almost the same time it is impossible to tell which one plagiarizes the other: perhaps Rowlands imported a Northern folk rhyme into his satire of non-Londoner culture; perhaps Aldersey’s compiler copied a London verse out of context because he thought it effectively represented his city’s old customs, missing the joke at his own expense. Aldersey preserves and celebrates the games as “auntient customs” of Chester; Rowlands caricatures them as a backwards, uncosmopolitan set of brutish practices, a sign that Northern England lagged hopelessly behind the metropolitan Renaissance. In either case, both texts look back from the end of a century at a set of recreational practices that they treat as past, passing, or obsolete, representative of the persistence into the new century of a set of fading, old-fashioned, “auntient” traditions. And all the practices enacted in the Chester *pleie*-episodes I discuss below, or close cognates to those practices, are present among those persistent ludic traditions: wrestling and hot cockles are directly mentioned, while theatricalized performance (morris dances) and dice games (Tick-tack, Irish) are well-represented.³³

The strongest evidence of recreation-as-persistence in the Tudor period is Cestrians’ continued performances of their cycle plays, a form of recreation that I argue is decisively incompatible with the aesthetic and religious values of London-centered modernity. As Beckwith has shown, the circumstances of the York plays’ disappearance were not the result of a sudden

“direct and overt suppression,” but rather of “the erosion of a culture of festivity that renders amateur and local performance meaningful to the audience who are also its players,” among other gradual social forces.³⁴ Not so in Chester. Chester’s population seems to have remained polarized between traditional practices and Reformation values through the end of the sixteenth century, with the plays standing as an emblem of the persistence of tradition. In May 1572, to the delight of “the strong Puritan presence in Chester” led by anti-drama reformer Christopher Goodman, the Archbishop of York sent an official inhibition to Mayor John Hankey, ordering him to postpone the performance “until the text of the plays had been properly authorized.”³⁵ Under Hankey’s order, Chester’s players boldly proceeded with the cycle anyway. The editors of *REED*, based on the as-yet unpublished letters of Christopher Goodman, conclude:

In his letter Goodman suggests that the mayor believed he had the support of the earl [of Derby] in promoting the [1572] performance and raises the issue of who had jurisdiction in the city. *The production thus becomes politicized as a touchstone for the tensions within the local society and also between local autonomy and Tudor centralism.* Goodman’s correspondence reflects the division in the city between supporters and opponents of the plays, a factionalism that he claims broke out whenever the plays were performed... the alleged Catholic sympathizer Hankey is said to have gained encouragement [to produce the plays] from Edward, the twelfth earl of Derby, a member of the Council of the North, who was suspected of recusant sympathies.³⁶

Three years later, under Mayor John Savage, the Cestrians performed the cycle again: “The 1575 production was understandably seen as an act of defiance against the archbishop and the earl of Huntingdon. Consequently John Savage was summoned to London to appear before the privy council.”³⁷ The cycle players in York had willingly let go of their dramatic tradition six years earlier, in keeping with the fast-changing sensibilities of the rest of England, but the Cestrian producers and players held onto their tradition even against the archbishop and the Privy Council.

That polarization between national and local perspectives on the cycle plays is absent from Chester in the 1520s and 1530s, even though, I argue, Mayor Gee used the rhetoric of national reform to quash other forms of traditional local recreation. According to the *REED* editors’ interpretation, Gee’s proclamation “appears to commingle two separate actions,” beginning with “a long preamble extolling the virtues of archery,” until:

the document completely ignores archery and goes on to substitute a foot race for the Cordwainers’ football game and a horse race for the Saddlers’ homage, and to add the presentation of glaives or arrows of silver by married persons.³⁸

The *REED* editors suggest that the archery preamble was “part of the document that instituted the [annual Easter Monday] breakfast shoot in 1511-12.”³⁹

This is not quite true: as Table 3 reveals, the preamble’s rhetoric and often its exact wording seem instead to have been borrowed from a 1528 proclamation by Henry VIII (which confirms that the preamble cannot date back as early as the 1511-12 institution of Chester’s Easter Monday breakfast shoot):

Table 3: Proclamations on Archery Appearing in Two Contexts: Chester and London

<p><i>King Henry VIII, 1528 (selected excerpts):</i>⁴⁰</p> <p>Consideryng / howe that aswell in the tymes of his noble progenitours / kynges of this his realme of Englande / as also in the tyme of his most noble reygne / by the exercisyng and vsyng of his and their subiectes in shotyng in longe bowes / there dyd insurge / encrease and growe within the same realme / great nombre and multitude of franke Archers / whiche nat onely therby defended this his said realme and subiectes therof / against the malyce and daungers of their enemyes / but also with a meane & small nombre and puissaunce / in regarde and comparison of their enemyes / hath done many notable exploites and actes of warre / to the discomfiture of their said enemyes. [...]</p> <p>to the great honour / fame / renowme / and suretye of his and their noble persons / and of this his said realme of Englande / and subiectes of the same / as also to the terryble feare and drede of all outwarde and straunge nacions / attemptyng any thing by the waye of hostiletye / to the hurt or daunger of this his said realme. In consideracyon wherof / and for the better maynteynaunce and good contynuance of the sayd Archerye and shotyng in longe Bowes / dyuers good and politique statutes haue ben made / establysshed & deuised / aswell in the tyme of our soueraygne lorde the kyng that nowe is / as also in the dayes of his sayd noble progenitours kynges of this realme. yet that nat withstandyng / for lacke of good and effectuell execucion of the sayd lawes and statutes / the sayd Archerye and shotyng in longe Bowes / is sore and marueyloussy decayed [...]</p> <p>decayed & distroyed by the vsyng hereof / and of dyuers and many other vnlauffull games [...]</p>	<p><i>Mayor Henry Gee, 1540 (“preamble”):</i>⁴¹</p> <p>For asmoche As by the ffeate and exercise of the Kinges subiectes of this his Realme of Englund</p> <p>in shouting in longe bouz ther hath contynually rison & growen & ben within the said gret multytude of good Archers / which hath not only defendid this Relme & the subiectes therof Ageynst the cruell malyse & danger of ther outward enemyes [...] But also wyth lytell number and pussance in Regarde haue done many noble octes And discomfitures of warre Ageynst the Infidels & others [...]</p> <p>to the greate honor fame & Suertie of this relme And subiectes of the same</p> <p>And to the teryble drede and fere of all strange Nacyons Any thing to attempt or to do to the hurt or damage of them or eny of them / And albyit thad</p> <p>dyuerse good statutes and ordenaunces be prouided as well in the tyme of our Right dere Suering Lorde Kinge Henry the eyght now being as in tyme of his noble progenitors Kinges of this Realme conserning th mantenaunce of archary and shouting in Long Boues / yet neuertheles archari and shouting in Longe boues is Lyttyll vsed but Dalye manyssheth decayeth and abaytyth [...] But other Vnlauffull gaymes prohibeted by the Kinges highnez and His Laues [...]</p>
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Gee’s use of an earlier text is not, as the *REED* editors interpret it, an accidental commingling of two separate documents. From the Henrician preamble through the rest of the proclamation, archery remains a constant and consistent presence. Near the end of the document, for instance, Gee’s discussion of the presentation of silver arrows by married persons closes with this explanation:

Which *arrowes of Siluer* so to be geuen & delyuerid... In manar & forme Aforsaid shall from hensforth yerly that daye or other dayes After be ordred by the said Draprs & the mayre for the tyme being to & *for ye preferment and setting forth of the Said fete / And exercyse of shouting in Longe boues...*⁴²

The “*Said fete / And exercyse of shouting in Longe boues*” can only refer back to information in the archery preamble.⁴³ The fact that the newlyweds’ homage takes the form of *arrowes* “for ye preferment and setting forth” of archery, not to mention that Gee also orders the Cordwainers to provide *silver arrowes* as prizes to the fastest runners in the footrace, affirms that archery was a

sustained theme in Gee's 1540 reforms—not an accidental attachment from 1511-12.⁴⁴ The proclamation sensibly orders that symbolic (and possibly useful) archery supplies be given in homage to the Drapers, who will be responsible for reigniting the Cestrian passion for archery that the Mayor claims currently “manyssheth decayeth and abaytyth.”

To correct the *REED* editors' attribution of the archery preamble's source is thus to locate Gee's 1540 legislation—all of it, since it is indeed a continuous proclamation—as decisively in harmony with, and subordinate to, Henrician reforms of English recreation. However, it is clear why editors have read the proclamation as two separate documents. Gee's impassioned concern for archery, lifted from Henrician rhetoric, does seem to be at odds with the rest of his proclamation, in which he somewhat coldly reduces traditional recreational practices and ceremonies to their precise monetary value, as if financial equity was the only concern of Chester's guilds during the mayor's forceful restructuring of their traditions. The proclamation, in replacing symbolic homages and sporting equipment, gives precise cost details, demonstrating that Gee's reform will not upset the Shrovetide traditions' economic balance. The Cordwainers' 3 s. worth of silver arrows replace the 3s. 4d. leather football they would usually donate for use in the annual game; the newlyweds' silver arrows are to be “fyue pence or Aboue in value... *in Recompenc* of the said baule of sylke or veluit vsed and accostomyd to be geuen.”⁴⁵ And Gee's acceptance of the Drapers' recreational drinking bouts, though he disparages the civic disorder caused by football, makes sense within a primarily economic rationale—festive ales yielded significant profits.⁴⁶

Similarly, Henry's 1528 proclamation also reduces recreation to the exchange of commodities, but in different terms. For Henry, the rise of “unlawful” pursuits—“playenge at Tennes Boules Closshe Tables Dyce Cardes and other vnlauffull games contrary to the kynges lawes”—necessarily causes an equivalent decline in more valuable pursuits.⁴⁷ Henry commands all of his subjects not only to avoid them themselves, but to seize and burn the offending material goods: any dicing tables, dice, cards, bowling or closh balls, pins, or other game balls that they find in the possession of fellow Englishmen, especially in “any Hosterye Inne or Alehouse.”⁴⁸ Concern over waste and idleness was hardly an invention of the Reformation; however, the fastidiousness of Henry's sixteenth-century rhetoric and legislation regarding recreation magnifies that concern considerably. To abolish wasteful recreation—like dice games—was now, in Henrician terms, a matter of national security.

Only in 1574 would the intensity of Henry's punishments and rhetoric on recreation be softened by Elizabeth. In her shortened summation of Henry's 1528 proclamation, Elizabeth specifies (without overtly contradicting Henry) that the list of “unlawfull games” is only unlawful when a person participates in them “for his... gayne, lucre, or lyuyng.”⁴⁹ After 1574, it is only mayors, sheriffs, bailiffs, and constables who have the authority to seize the unlawful gaming equipment, and there is no mention in the 1574 proclamation of burning that equipment. There is even a proviso that all “men of worship” who make £100 per year or more can “use these games with discretion at their pleasures.”⁵⁰ It is specifically the period from 1528 to 1574—that is, the peak and decline of the Chester cycle, whose last performances occurred in 1573 and 1575—in which the legislative distinction between profitable and unlawful recreation was at its harshest.

Profit-based values stand in stark contrast to the efforts of the antiquarians, like David Rogers, whose interest was in preserving local recreational traditions like the plays for the sake of cultural memory.

Gentle Reader I am boulded to *presente* vnto *your* sighte. a brevary of Chester that Anchiert Cittie, the *which* howsoeuar it be not profitable, for anye *yat* seeke deuine consolation. yet it maye be delightefull to many that desire to heare of antiquitie, which worke heare followinge was the collectiones of a lerned

and Reuerende father within this Cittie...

The resone that moued hime heareunto, as I conseauē was, because he was heare borne, and his prædicessors also, and some of then beinge of the beste ranke within this Cittie. and also because he himselfe was a continuall resident within this place. And did desire the continuall honor wealthe and good estimatione of this anchiente Cittie.⁵¹

Rogers defensively acknowledges that early seventeenth-century values might not consider the delight offered by the study of antiquity to be “profitable.” What drove the “lerner / and Reuerende father” who began the project of the *Breviary*, meanwhile, was a concern for Chester’s welfare that subtly combines local pride (“because / he was heare borne... And did desire the continuall honor”) and local history (“his prædicessors... this anchiente Cittie”) with a concern for the city’s “wealthe”—despite the fact that, as Rogers acknowledges, antiquarianism does not stand to increase the profits of the city at all.

In imposing Henrician values of profit and economy upon Cestrian traditions, Gee’s archery preamble seems unaware of matters of local pride, applying Henry’s wording and logic to Chester wholesale, with little effort to address specific local concerns. After thirty lines about all English archers’ duty to their realm and sovereign, Gee finally and briefly mentions Chester specifically, regarding archery’s capacity “to reveive the saide auncent fayme of this the Kinges citie of Chester”: a surprising understatement of Chester’s reputation for archery, which had won them preferential treatment by the Lancastrians.⁵² Indeed, in the margin of Gee’s proclamation, beneath the rubric “for shooting in long Bowes,” early seventeenth-century Cestrian antiquarian Randle Holme II found it necessary to add the gloss “this citty beinge of ould famous for it,” a fame that the original proclamation otherwise ignores.⁵³ Gee’s complaint that “archari and shouting in Longe boues is Lyttyll vsed” takes no account of the fact that Cestrian local pride specifically centered on archery, extending far back into Chester’s legendary institutions of the Midsummer Watch and Christmas Watch, not to mention that Chester had already instituted at least one annual archery contest as recently as 1511-12.⁵⁴ The concern about the decay of archery, and the related concern about the reform of recreation, is an English issue and not a Cestrian one. As a result, Gee’s 1540 reforms introduce a crucial change in perspective. They co-opt the recreation of a resistant Chester into the service of England, and define that recreation according to the commodity-oriented terms of early modern reform. Recreation is no longer directed at glorifying the city or preserving its culture, but rather aimed at the unified English culture imagined by Henry’s proclamation, “his said realme of Englande.”

The publication and circulation of Gilbert Walker’s 1538 *A Manifest Detection of the Moste Vyle and Detestable Vse of Diceplay* makes it clear that Henry’s 1528 legislation was not entirely successful—though it was probably instrumental in driving games of chance further behind the closed doors of the “Hosterye Inne or Alehouse,” a phenomenon that I discuss at more length later on in this chapter. Meanwhile, Gee’s 1540 reiteration of Henry’s archery polemic as an introduction to his series of reforms is a more effective strategic move: it translates Henry’s authoritative but generalized and hyperbolic prose into localized and more easily enforced legislation, whose lasting results are in line with Henrician ideals. After Gee’s 1540 proclamation, there are no records of Shrovetide football continuing in Chester, but at least one of the recreational practices instituted by Gee in the same proclamation—horseracing—remains the major regional attraction on Chester’s Roodee.⁵⁵

In his proclamation, Gee repeatedly proscribes “other Vnlauffull games... inconuenientes and dyuerse other,” which, as his Henrician source text reveals, included tennis, bowling, closh (a variant on bowling), and games of chance that use tables, dice, and cards.⁵⁶ With Gee’s “Vnlauffull games”

more clearly defined, we can sketch out the full scope of his reform of local recreation: Gee encourages athletic tests of strength (racing), but aggressively rejects riotous sports (football) and games of chance (tables, dice, cards). Archery is encouraged to the exclusion of any other feat of marksmanship and precision (tennis, bowling, cloy, as well as guns and crossbows), as these do not profit the realm by training its potential military. Gee sanctions guild ales, though these could hardly have been useful in training England's military or increasing its national pride; guild ales, however, also consistently generated local revenue. It seems certain that Gee's rationale for Cestrian recreation is both strongly economic and faithfully Henrician, though he never overtly presents it as either; Gee's tendency to reduce local traditions to their financial value (e.g. the 3 s. worth of silver arrows replace the 3s. 4d. traditional football, as I discuss above) evidences his continual concern over economics.⁵⁷

In 1586, Thomas Newton, a Cheshire-based reformer, published his translation of Lambert Daneau's *A Discourse of Gaming, and Specially of Dyceplay*. Daneau and Newton's tract postdates Gee's proclamation considerably, but it sheds a great deal of light on the profit-based rationale that drove sixteenth-century reforms of recreation. Daneau and Newton organize and describe at length an array of ludic practices according to whether they are profitable to the commonwealth, to health, and to a good Christian lifestyle. After broadly theorizing various forms of *pleie* (and predicting Johan Huizinga's *Homo Ludens* with surprising accuracy), the *Discourse of Gaming* encourages "honest Sportes and comely playes," even some dice games, provided that they adhere to the following standards:

But in these Games, Pastymes, Sportes and Playes at Cards and Dyce, there is a certaine distinction to bee vsed. For, some of them, are after such a sorte played and passed ouer, that to the winning and obteyning of the victorie, *honest industrie* of the minde helpeth more, then any blind casualtie or chaunceable hazard: in so much that the acward lucke which falleth out contrarie to desire, is supplied, amended and reformed by Arte and cunning. These kindes of Playe may not properly be tearmed Alea or Hazardrie, neither are they absolutely to be forbidden: onely let measurable meane therein bee vsed. Others there be that hang and depend (as it were) vpon mere chaunce & casting: *wherein a mans industrie (if there bee no packing, falsehoode and cogging deceipt vsed) can nothing auaille*. This kinde of Play is properly called Alea: and this is it, that wee say is vtterly disallowable.⁵⁸

According to Newton and Daneau, only those games which deliver their payoff as a result of work—*honest industrie*—can be admitted. In contrast to the unindustrious practice of diceplay, Daneau and Newton in 1586 praise five athletic tests of strength that keep a nation fit and ready to defend itself, including the shotput, fencing, running (Gee's 1540 reform introduced footraces), horseback tournaments (Gee also introduced horseraces), and wrestling.⁵⁹

Wrestling is quite clearly included in the Cheshire-based reformers' ideal of profitable recreation, as much as dicing is clearly excluded. As they were performed in the sixteenth century, then, the games depicted in the Chester cycle following Mayor Gee's reforms ranged from the officially encouraged (wrestling) to the harshly prohibited (dicing). The Chester cycle itself, meanwhile, underwent a major expansion in the years leading up to Gee's reform of recreation, and then continued on at its peak of performance for decades. I close this section with a brief consideration of why Gee, and reformers like him, might have allowed the Chester cycle to persist for as long as it did.

In "Who Are Our Customers? The Audience for Chester's Plays," David Mills foregrounds "the simple commercialism" of the plays, noting that they function as "occasions for profit."⁶⁰ His

earliest example comes from Chester Town Clerk William Newhall's Proclamation to the Plays, in c. 1531-2:

fforasm[...] as of old tyme not only for the Augmentacion & increas [...] faith of o[...]
[...]auyour iesu Crist & to exort the myndes of the common people [...] doctryne th[...]f but
also for the commenwelth & *prosperitie* of this Citie a play.... to be bro[...] forthe declared &
plaid at the Costes & chargez of the craftes men...⁶¹

Mills rightly deduces that the opposition of “prosperitie” to religious benefits “highlights the commercial returns as... tangible benefits.”⁶² Not only, however, did praise of the plays’ profitable returns defend against critics who questioned such an “extravagant use of the city’s resources,” but it also—particularly in the 1530s—secured their inclusion in an era characterized by reformers who, as I show below, only permitted recreation if it produced measurable profits. Newhall’s assurance that the Chester cycle yielded “prosperitie” and the attention to economy elsewhere in his proclamation (e.g. “at the Costes & chargez of the craftes men”) must have been representative of the rationale according to which Gee allowed the plays’ continuation, even expansion, during his Henrician reforms.

Though Daneau and Newton’s tract was published a decade after the final performance of the cycle, it does provide a useful explanation of how the economically minded reformers of recreation in the early sixteenth century might have justified the expansion of the Chester cycle, despite its capacity to cause disorder and its distinctly pre-Reform theology:

Augustine forbiddeth us to bestowe any money for the seeing of Stage Playes and Enterludes, or to give any thing unto the players therein, and yet *these kinde of persons doe after a sorte let out their labour unto us, and their industrie many times is laudable*. What shall we say then to our selves, if we lash out the same upon these iolly Gamesters and frolick companions, whose humour we feede and delight, as well as they do ours: and from whom wee receiue none other maner of thyng, but losse of tyme, and wasting of our life?... [P]ublique Exercises and even Shewes, Games, Sportes and Prizes, bee (as it were) certaine preludes, preparatives, assaies and traynings of Warfare: and may stande in great steede for sundry occasions: that when the Commonwealth shall haue any neede of our help, wee may be the readier to serue...⁶³

Newton’s Cheshire was the same Cheshire that, by the 1570s, was polarized between defenders of “Auntient Customes,” like Mayors John Hankey and John Savage, who authorized the Chester plays in 1572 and 1575 despite explicit orders from the Archbishop of York, and men like Christopher Goodman, a Cestrian Puritan who made it his business to see that the Archbishop’s prohibition took hold. A reformer like Newton would surely have been more sympathetic to Goodman than to his opponents; Daneau’s ideals, which Newton sought to disseminate, clearly support the centralized social control of the Tudors. Yet on the subject of theatrical recreation, Daneau and Newton are considerably more patient than Goodman. Guild producers paid nominal fees to their players, perhaps less for the purpose of enticing the better actors to volunteer their talents, and more to affirm that valuable labor had been put forward.⁶⁴ Daneau, via Newton, accepts theatrics and spectacles—as long as the players are willing to *work*. This rationale allows theatrics and spectacle to survive Cestrian reform as long as they are deemed sufficiently industrious, or if they produce measurable profit for the realm.

The meter and rhyme of the Chester plays are remarkably consistent for medieval English drama. R.M. Lumiansky and David Mills, in their survey of the 1,476 stanzas in the cycle, count 1,117 stanzas (about 75.7% of the cycle) that adhere perfectly to the distinct “Chester stanza” form, which scans as either $aaa^4b^3aaa^4b^3$ or $aaa^4b^3ccc^4b^3$. Most other stanzas, they add, are slight variations on the Chester stanza, “ aaa^4b^3 quatrains, seven-line stanzas, and other ‘defective’ forms [that] also derive from the same base.”⁶⁵ In the Introduction to this project, I argue that the textual layers of the Chester cycle cannot, generally, be reliably dated or separated from each other.⁶⁶ However, if two or more Chester episodes diverge from the typical Chester stanza in the same way, and if their divergence is significantly pronounced and sustained, then it is fair to assume that those episodes were in some way composed in relation to each other, and thus should be read in relation to each other—whether they were developed at the same time by the same generation of dramatists, or one episode was crafted according to an earlier episode’s stylistic precedent (e.g. an early pageant employs unusual scansion for clownish characters, so a later addition precisely replicates that scansion when it introduces similar characters). In either case, such episodes form a stylistically coherent, if not reliably datable, textual stratum. In what follows, I argue that one such stratum connects three ludic episodes in the Chester *Trial* and *Passion* plays, and clearly delimits the points at which those episodes begin and end. Those *pleie*-episodes include: a continuous dicing-crucifixion episode in the *Passion* that depicts the crucifixion as sport; the buffeting as a hot cockles game in the *Trial*; the mocking as role-play in the *Trial*. I then hypothesize that this stratum is also textually connected to sections of the *Shepherds* pageant.

The first nine stanzas of the Chester *Passion* pageant are typical Chester stanzas. Caiaphas initiates the ninth of these, and the First Jew completes it:

CAYPHAS	<p style="text-align: center;">/ - / - / - /</p> <p>Have donne, you tormentours, tyte,</p> <p style="text-align: center;">- / - / - / - /</p> <p>and spoyle him that hath donne us spyte.</p>
PRIMUS JUDEUS	<p style="text-align: center;">/ - / - / - /</p> <p>Yea, though he both growne and stryke,</p> <p style="text-align: center;">/ - / - / -</p> <p>owt hee shal be shaken.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">/ - / - / - /</p> <p>Bee thou wroth or be thou fayne,</p> <p style="text-align: center;">/ - - / - /</p> <p>I will be thy chamberlaine.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">- / - / - / - /</p> <p>This coate gettes thou never agayne</p> <p style="text-align: center;">/ - / - / -</p> <p>and I may be waken. (lines 65-72)</p>

The First Jew claims the robe, initiating the Jews’ comic battle over ownership. That battle brings with it a pronounced shift to an $aaabaaab^3$ stanza, preserving the Chester stanza’s distinct rhyme scheme, but replacing its rhythmic variation with an uninterrupted sequence of three-stress lines:⁶⁷

SECUNDUS JUDEUS	<p style="text-align: center;">/ - / - /</p> <p>This coate shalbe myne,</p>
-----------------	---

SECUNDUS JUDEUS

- / - / - /
 for yt is good and fyne
 - / - / - /
 and seame is none therin
 - / - /
 that I can see.⁶⁸
 / - / - /
 Yea, God give me pyne
 / - / - /
 and that shalbe thine,
 - / - / - /
 for thou art ever inclinid
 - / - / - /
 to drawe towards thee.
 - / - / - /
 Naye, fellowes, by this daye,
 - / - / - /
 at the dyce we will playe,
 - / - / - /
 and there we shall assaye
 - / - / - /
 thys weede for to wyn (lines 73-84).

The rhythmic shift here is dramatic, and too sustained and consistent to be attributed to omission, error, or corruption. It continues for eighteen stanzas through the Jews' diceplay and the crucifixion, then stops abruptly when, just after the Cross is erected, Pilate enters and restores the regular $aaa^4b^3aaa^4b^3$ stanza (line 217). Except for the opening dialogue between Caiaphas and the First Jew, which serves as a transition out of the previous scene and thus may have been added in a separate revision, the shifts in and out of the $aaabaaab^3$ form precisely mark the beginning of the Jews' dice game and the end of the crucifixion.

These eighteen $aaabaaab^3$ stanzas link two separate dramatic actions, dicing and crucifixion, into a single coherent episode. This continuity between actions makes the Jews' unsettling playfulness comically effective, providing opportunities for sustained wordplay throughout. After Caiaphas commands the Four Jews to get back to work, they put away their dice, but the language and attitudes of gameplay remain as unchanged as the meter does. As if the game is still underway, the First Jew jokes that his victim "never past / so parrelous a playe" (lines 167-68) as to be crucified—a clearly self-referential moment in the drama that echoes the angels' warning to Lucifer in the first play of the cycle ("You have begone a parlous playe," *Lucifer* lines 207-208).⁶⁹ The Second Jew refers to the crucifixion as a "gamon" (line 203).⁷⁰ A true craftsman, he brags about the hammer that he has "wonne," and then the Third Jew brags about his "good wonne" nails. These last examples would be unremarkable, considering that Middle English *winnen* is broadly equivalent to modern *to earn*. But the Chester *Passion* clearly plays with the more specific sense of Middle English *winnen*, "to gain (the prize) in a nonmilitary contest" (MED 6b) by placing the "wonne" hammer and nails only eight lines after the Four Jews' repeated use of the word in their dice game ("well *wonne* [the coat] thou hasse," line 146; "this coate for to *wynne*," line 123; "Which of all wee / shall *wynne* this ware?" lines 91-92; "thys weede for to *wyn*," line 84).⁷¹ Things that are *wonne* in Middle English are not always rewarded as prizes in games, but the hammer and nails' proximity to the dice game strongly suggests that they were indeed *wonne* in this way.

The Fourth Jew calls himself “sleight” (line 178) and the Second Jew’s stretching of Jesus’ arm is another “sleight” (line 186). While the primary meaning of *sleight* refers broadly to the Jews’ craft and cunning, the word was also commonly associated with card- and dice-based games of hazard.⁷² Again mirroring the dice game, the crucifixion closes with playfully competitive one-upmanship: the Third Jew, viewing his handiwork, says “I sarve to be praysed” (line 208); the Fourth responds, “Why prayse ye not mee / that have so well done?” (line 211-2).

Most importantly—and this is a point to which I return at length in subsequent sections—the Third and Fourth Jews repeatedly announce that they have “cast” Jesus. They do so at the beginning of the crucifixion, while the First Jew busies himself with the rope that will hoist the Cross (lines 165-68) and the Second Jew takes up hammer and nails, instructing the others to “Layes [Jesus] thereupon [the Cross]” (lines 169-72). When the Third and Fourth Jew follow his order, laying Jesus on the Cross before raising it, their dialogue features gaming language prominently:

QUARTUS JUDEUS	This caytyffe have I <i>cast</i> . Hee shall be <i>wronge wrast</i> or I wynd away... (lines 162-64)
TERTIUS JUDEUS	As broke I my ponn, well <i>cast</i> him I con and make him <i>full wonne</i> or I from him wend (lines 173-76).

Cast, like modern *throw*, is a term common throughout medieval discussions and depictions of gaming and sport, including the Four Jews’ dice game (line 122) and in the Four Shepherds’ wrestling match, in which it is used twice (*Shepherds* line 283, line 289) to signal the defeat of an opponent according to informal wrestling rules. *Cast* has a broad range of meaning, but when it is repeated as a boast by two relentlessly competitive game-players who take turns physically shoving their bruised, near-naked victim into a supine position, the cruel joke is hard to miss.⁷³ The Third and Fourth Jews are speaking of Jesus here as if they have bested him in a fair fight, specifically the kind of structured fight in which defeat is determined by whether an opponent has been *cast*. The Fourth Jew’s confidence that Jesus will be “wronge wrast” (alternately translatable as “badly wrung” or “misshapen by being wrested”) links his boast more directly to wrestling, while the Third Jew’s “full wonne” continues the game-oriented repetition of *wonne*, confirming the connection of *cast* to structured competition.⁷⁴ The continuity that extends into the crucifixion from the dicing scene, which sets up the Four Jews as habitual game-players, is precisely what makes these boasts work, and is the only explanation for the repetition of *cast*, an otherwise odd choice.⁷⁵

In all, the Four Jews’ crucifixion dialogue compresses a great deal of ludic banter into the short space of eight stanzas: *wonne* (line 154), *good wonne* (line 158), *cast... wronge wrast* (lines 162-63), *playe* (line 168), *cast... full wonne* (lines 174-75), *sleight* (line 178 and line 186), *gamon* (line 203), and competitive one-upmanship (lines 208-12). That ludic banter clearly mirrors the dice game that precedes it, which employs *playe* (line 82, line 108), *wyn[ne]* (line 84, line 92, line 123), *cast* (line 122), *well wonne*, (line 146), and competitive one-upmanship throughout. The ludic terms have little dramatic impact on their own; what bears meaning is the continuity between playfulness at the dice game and playfulness at the crucifixion. Clearly, the extant crucifixion banter relies on the theme and lexis of the dice game for its disturbing humor, and so it cannot have entered the cycle independently of the dice episode.⁷⁶ Rather, dicing and crucifixion are inextricably connected as a single episode, in a pairing that places gameplay at the symbolic center of the *Passion*; in fact, the Chester Passion is the only extant early English dramatization that breaks with scripture to feature the dice game before, not after, the crucifixion.⁷⁷

The Four Jews' buffeting and flagellation-humiliation episodes in the *Trial* pageant, meanwhile, sustain exactly the same aaabaaab³ stanza-form that the *Passion's* dicing-crucifixion episode uses.⁷⁸ Outside of these three episodes, no stanza that is at all similar to the aaabaaab³ form appears anywhere else in the 1,476-stanza cycle—except briefly, and in a slightly modified fashion, in the *Shepherds* play, as I discuss at the end of this section. In the *Trial's* buffeting episode, as the Second Jew covers Jesus' face with a cloth, the other Jews continue to punch and taunt him:

TERTIUS JUDEUS / - / - /
 And thou be messye
 / - / - /
 and loth for to lye,
 / - / - /
 whoe smote thee crye,
 / - / - /
 yf that thou be Christ (lines 94-97).

Not only do these lines match the aaabaaab³ stanza-form, but also, as Groves and Woolf have observed, the Jews' torture becomes an aggressive game of hot cockles here.⁷⁹ The Jews pretend to engage Jesus in the game, though Jesus is unwilling and unresponsive—later, they will boast that they have *cast* Jesus, under the same mocking pretense of fair play. Meanwhile, as I discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the self-referential resonance of *pleie-within-a-pleie* reaches its height in the *Trial's* humiliation episode. It does so in precisely the same three-stress aaabaaab³ stanza-form:

TERTIUS JUDEUS / - / - /
 Nowe thou hasse a weede,
 / - / - /
 have here a reede.
 - / - / - /
 A scepter I thee bede,
 - / - / - /
 a kinge for to bee.
 / - / - /
 QUARTUS JUDEUS Herveye, take heede!
 / / - /
 Thus must I neede
 / - / - /
 for my foule deede
 / - / - /
 kneele upon knee.
 / - / - /
 PRIMUS JUDEUS Hayle, king of Jewes!
 - / - / - /
 That so many men shewes,
 / - / - /
 rybould, nowe thee rewes,
 - / - / - /
 with all thy reverence (lines 331-42).

All of these *pleie*-episodes—*pleie* as dicing or wrestling, *pleie* as horseplay, *pleie* as theatrics—are clearly continuous. By collapsing the Bible’s separate groups of Roman buffeters and scourgers into the same four clowns, and by dramatizing the Bible’s ludic scenes in close proximity to each other, the Chester *Trial* presents Four Jews characterized by a penchant for playful torture—clearly the same Four Jews as those in the *Passion*, who also force an unwilling and unresponsive Jesus into a humiliating mock-game.

Such pronounced continuity from the *Trial*’s Four Jews to the *Passion*’s Four Jews, in scansion and character, is unsurprising: records show that the earliest known performances of the Chester plays presented the material from the *Trial* and the *Passion* in a single pageant. In a 1422 civil suit over the fairness of production costs, the earliest record of biblical performance at Chester, Mayor John Hope settles guildsmen’s financial complaints by splitting one play into two, and then assigning the two halves to separate guilds: one containing all the material from Jesus’ flagellation up to his crucifixion, the other beginning with the crucifixion.⁸⁰ At the opposite end of the cycle’s textual history, scribe James Miller, in his 1609 manuscript, presents the *Trial* and *Passion* as a single pageant.⁸¹ We cannot know whether Miller’s continuous 1609 *Trial/Passion* pageant, otherwise nearly identical to the versions in the other four manuscripts, gestures back to a version of the *Trial* and *Passion* sequence that predates Hope’s 1422 intervention, or whether, as F.M. Salter suggests, the two separate pageants were newly combined for the cycle’s final, truncated performance on Midsummer 1575.⁸² Either way, there is strong evidence based in the cycle’s scansion, content, and textual history that the ludic episodes in the *Trial* and in the *Passion*, in all five manuscripts, form a coherent stratum—one that probably connects the episodes’ composition to the period, or periods, in the cycle’s textual history at which Cestrians performed the *Trial* and *Passion* as one continuous pageant.

The York *Crucifixion* also modifies its tempo at the raising of the Cross, but that change in rhythm is a direct function of the physical action it describes:

III MILES	We are redy.
IV MILES	Gode, sirs, abide,
	And late me first his fete vp fang.
II MILES	Why tente 3e so to tales þis tyde?
I MILES	Lifte vppe!
IV MILES	Latte see!
II MILES	Owe! lifte a-lang.
III MILES	Fro all þis harme he schulde hym hyde,
	And he war God.
IV MILES	Þe deuill hym hang!
I MILES	For grete harme haue I hente,
	My schuldir is in soundre.
II MILES	And sertis I am nere schente,
	So lange haue I borne undir.
III MILES	This crosse and I in two muste twynne,
	Ellis brekis my bakke in sondre sone (lines 183-194).

In this case, and a similar case later in the same pageant, York’s torturers punctuate their physical labor with short grunts, and then return to their usual line length once they have stopped exerting themselves. The rhythmic shift does not disrupt the meter of the York stanza, nor are there any metrical interruptions in the York *Crucifixion* that suggest the splicing together of once-separate textual strata. At Chester, however, the appearance and disappearance of the aabaaab³ stanza are

not causally related to any of the pageants' internal circumstances. They are not a consistent marker of the Four Jews' voices or manner of speaking: elsewhere in the *Trial* and *Passion*, the Jews have no trouble managing the complete Chester stanza, though they are still jeering and abusive; meanwhile, when Caiaphas intrudes on the Jews' dice game, he also speaks in the aaabaaab³ stanza. And while the shortened stanza-form may set an appropriate tone for the physicality and crudeness of the Four Jews' scenes, its timing has nothing to do with the physical strain of raising the Cross. The task takes two tries at York, dislocating the First Soldier's shoulder, but at Chester—as I discuss at some length below—the Jews seem to have relatively little trouble raising the Cross as their bragging continues at a steady rhythm. In other words, the primary significance of the aaabaaab³ meter does not lie in the physical action of the speakers but in the cohesion of an episode as a dramatic unit, and in the connection of that unit to other similar episodes in the cycle. To isolate these *pleie*-episodes and compare their framing of recreation, which is the business of the present chapter, is thus to follow the precedent of a cohesive project on the part of the Cestrians who generated the texts of the cycle, in which a very specific rhythm is reserved for episodes that center on recreation. Those comic episodes, unified by a continuous textual stratum, represent in the cycle the entire set of practices represented by the broad Middle English term *pleie*.

The only other aaabaaab³ stanzas in the Chester cycle appear in the *Shepherds* play, during which the other Cestrian *pleie*-episode, the Shepherds' wrestling match, occurs. The meter and rhyme of the *Shepherds* play is the most erratic in the cycle, possible evidence of a series of partial revisions and additions; the play includes not only six stanzas (in two groups of three) that adhere strictly to the aaabaaab³ form I have discussed thus far, but also thirteen more stanzas that preserve the three-stress rhythm but shorten their rhyme scheme to aabaab³. Unlike the other *pleie*-episodes, the *Shepherds* wrestling match is not confined exclusively to its three-stress stanzas, nor do the three-stress stanzas only concern ludic action. It is also generally hypothesized—though not confirmed—that the *Shepherds* play entered the cycle between 1500 and 1516, considerably later than the 1422 record that refers to the continuous *Trial-Passion* pageant in which the Four Jew's aaabaaab³ episodes probably took shape.⁸³ The three-stress stanzas of the *Shepherds* play, then, probably did not enter the cycle at the same time that the Four Jews' *pleie*-episodes entered the *Trial* and *Passion* sequence, but instead are significantly close cousins of those episodes. The Chester Shepherds and their serving boy, Trowle, are four more physically boisterous, clownish Jews (one named Harvey) who are obliviously unappreciative of the divinity before which they play; if the *Shepherds* play did enter the cycle decades later than the Four Jews' *pleie*-episodes, then it is quite likely that the three-stress *Shepherds* stanzas were composed according to the stylistic precedent for Cestrian clowns that was set in the Four Jews' comic scenes. Across years of revision, then, a signature stanza and a particular concern with recreation connected four comic episodes in the cycle—the Shepherds' wrestling, the buffeting, the flagellation-humiliation, and the dicing-crucifixion. The *pleie*-within-a-*pleie* conceit, fundamental to each of those four episodes, thus forms a sustained theme in the cycle, across pageants, and across the unstable textual history of the Chester plays, as well as the shifting history of the actual English recreational practices that those texts depicted.

Dice at Chester's Crucifixion

In the gospels, the Roman crucifiers' gambling for Jesus' seamless garment at the foot of the cross is an act of the utmost profanity. And yet, as Matthew observes, the crucifiers' gesture of disrespect lifts Jesus up further as the Messiah, by fulfilling a prophecy from Psalms 21:19: “diviserunt sibi vestimenta mea / et super vestem meam miserunt sortem” (“They divided among themselves my garments / and upon my vestment they cast lots”).⁸⁴ To the crucifiers, casting lots leaves events to chance; to Matthew, casting lots affirms that events are preordained fulfillments of God's promises.

Like other contemporary English variations on the scene, the Chester *Passion* renders the scriptural “miserunt sortem” as a dice game.⁸⁵

In this section, I discuss the staging cues embedded in the dark humor of Chester’s dice game, which render its comedy anti-naturalistic to the point of absurdity—though glosses of the *Passion* as far back as 1607 have obscured its meaning simply by trying to make sense of it. The Chester dice game thus provides the first of a series of cases throughout this project in which elements of early English live staging can be reliably reconstructed by applying the extant texts and surrounding evidence to practical staging logic. Those elements often, as in this case, reveal discontinuities between the written scene and its implicit staging. At the dice game, if the actors perform the nonsensical text of the dice game as written, they flatten the dramatic diegesis and, in doing so, draw attention to the artifice of its frame. At multiple levels, from written dialogue to live performance, the Chester dice game draws attention to the inability of any scripted action to enact the true operation of chance. It locates Matthew’s portentous sense of prophecy and fulfillment in the medium of drama itself, aligning the divinely preordained with the theatrically pre-scripted, and opposing both to the limited logic of worldly happenstance. I argue here that the cartoonishly flat comedy implicit in the Chester dice game is richly symbolic, especially in contrast to non-comic elements of the cycle, to the Towneley *Play of the Dice*, and to aggressive Henrician reforms of recreation.

In the four out of five full-cycle manuscripts known as the Group Manuscripts, which descend from a lost source not shared by James Miller’s fastidiously edited British Library MS Harley 2124, Chester’s four Jews—who stand in for Jesus’ Roman crucifiers in the *Passion*—call out their scores in confusing terms. The First Jew does not announce his score, but the Second Jew’s confidence that “this coate shalbe myne” (line 128) is confirmed by what he calls a “good araye” (line 130) of “dubletts.”⁸⁶ The Third Jew’s “cator-traye” (i.e. “*quatre-trois*,” line 133) beats the “dubletts” decisively, enough that the Third Jew tells his opponent “goe thou thy waye... and leave this [garment] with mee” (lines 134–6). The Fourth Jew’s “synnce” (i.e. “*cinques*” or “*cing*,” lines 143, 147) beats all previous rolls, an undeniably winning roll, “well wonne... that every man might see” (lines 146–8).

R.M. Lumiansky and David Mills gloss “dubletts,” “cator-traye,” and “synnce” as “three twos,” “three fours,” and “three fives,” respectively.⁸⁷ I have found no evidence, however, to support those glosses.⁸⁸ In other late medieval and early modern texts, the terms are most often used in games involving two dice, though the Jews’ game certainly involves “dyce three” (line 90). Then again, as in modern poker, early English gamblers sometimes named only the important cards (or dice) in a hand (or throw) of more than two. In 1674, for example, Charles Cotton reports that the game “In and In” is “play’d with four Dice—Out is when you have thrown no Dubletts on the four Dice; Inn is when you have thrown Dubletts of any sort [on the four dice], as two Aces, two Deuces.”⁸⁹ Two French or Latinate numbers together usually signified a particular pair of numbers (as in “cator-traye”; compare to terms like “Ace-Ten” in modern blackjack or poker). Gilbert Walker’s 1538 *Manifest Detection of Diceplay* uses “cator-traye” only to signify a roll of one four and one three; the fifteenth-century game-poem “Fortune-Telling by the Casting of Dice” uses only “catores traye”—with “cator” consistently in the plural—for a roll of three fours.⁹⁰ As for Chester’s final dice roll, the Group Manuscripts offer spellings of “synnce,” “synnes,” “since” or “synke.” Except in the final case, these spellings could signify “cing” in the singular or plural, but there is no apparent reason to prefer Lumiansky and Mills’ reading of “fives” (that is, all fives) over “five” (that is, in total, or on one die).

In short, the Group Manuscripts’ game-rules match no medieval or early modern gambling game that I have been able to find.⁹¹ The Jews have rolled a pair, then a three and four, then a five (perhaps two or three fives), but each boastful dicer is convinced that his roll is good enough to win

the garment—until he loses to the dicer who follows him. Since the second and third rolls are named according to the scores on only two out of three dice (“doublets” and “cator-traye”), winning the game cannot be a matter of scoring the highest total on all dice.⁹² The Towneley *Play of the Dice* provides a helpful counter-example here. Its game, in which the highest total score wins, is simple and clear. Its dicers roll thirteen, then eight, then seven, then fifteen: an out-of-order series that realistically simulates the unpredictability of chance, especially when the unexpected fifteen suddenly beats Pilate’s thirteen (line 351). Pilate’s ability to claim the robe regardless of chance (lines 369–71)—as a function of his earthly power—is a somewhat chilling comment on the absence of fair play under tyranny.

The Chester Group Manuscripts’ dice rolls, as the Jews interpret them, seem to count purposefully upward—though they do so in a way that is disconnected from any attested usage of the terms. Each player is himself numbered, and rolls in turn: the Second Jew’s “doublets” (which sounds like “*deux*”), the Third Jew’s “cator-traye” (“*quatre*,” “*trois*”), the Fourth Jew’s “synnce” (“*cing*”). The fact that the Jews boast of each successive score as a sure winner, and then watch each score trump the one before it, has the opposite effect from Towneley’s simulation of unpredictability: the series suggests that chance has given way at Chester to fate, to absurd humour, to cheating, or to all of these.⁹³ In fact, the Jews’ scores seem to work better as puns than as quantities in any real game; they may only be a pastiche of gambling terms nonsensically recited in a display of oblivious foolishness, like the Chester shepherds’ misreadings of the Latin *Gloria*. Just as sexual jokes find their way into the shepherds’ gibberish, there could easily be a Middle English pun on the Jews’ “doublet” (Jesus’ garment), and perhaps on “synke” as “a pit for sewage, a cesspool” (creating a pun at the expense of the Fourth Jew when the First Jew looks at him and announces, “synke there was / that every man might see,” line 147).⁹⁴ Any or all of these readings make clear that the Jews’ score-calling subsumes realistic chance under comic conceits. Arnold Williams has criticized the Chester cycle because it lacks “the naturalism which fifteenth century revisers introduced into the other cycles”; I contend that Chester’s anti-naturalistic comedy, as the dice game exemplifies, is symbolically rich *because* it is simple and flat.⁹⁵ The senselessness of the game bears meaning—and the Chester *Passion*’s game of dice evacuates itself of sense at multiple levels beyond score-calling.

While the Towneley stage directions tend to be sparser than those at Chester, the Towneley Torturers’ dialogue makes quite clear precisely when each dice roll should occur and what score should be the result. I have inserted those rolls in brackets:

PILATUS	I assent to youre sayng; assay now I shall, As I wold at a wap wyn al at ones. [Roll: 13]
2 TORTOR	Aha, how now! here ar a hepe.
PILATUS	Haue mynde then emang you how many ther ar.
3 TORTOR	xiii ar on thre, thar ye not threpe.
PILATUS	Then shall I wyn, or all men be war.
1 TORTOR	Truly, lord, right so ye shall; Bot grefe you not greatly, the next shall be nar, If I haue hap to my hand—haue here for all! [Roll: 8]
PILATUS	And I haue sene as greatt a freke of his forward falyd; Here are bot viii turnyd vp all at ones.
1 TORTOR	Aght? a, his armes, that is yll! (lines 327-38)

Pilate announces his upcoming roll as a future event (“assay now I shall,” line 327) when the results of the roll are as yet just the stuff of wish and desire (“I wold at a wap wyn,” line 328). The dice

must land immediately before the Second Torturer exclaims “Aha,” after which the roll is spoken of as a present fact (“here ar a hepe,” line 329). The remaining rolls proceed in the same way: the verb tenses pivot from future to present after a phatic or imperative utterance cues the throw (“Aha” at line 329, “haue here” at line 335, “war you away / Here” at lines 344–5, “I byd you go bet” at line 350). The timing ensures that the characters’ positive or negative reactions to the dice throws are synchronized with the vicissitudes of a seemingly random series of scores.

Like the Towneley plays, the Chester Group Manuscripts rely on verbal cues rather than stage directions in their representations of the dice game, but their cues are much less clear to modern readers. The Group Manuscripts’ cues tend to divorce the action of the rolls from the players’ reactions to them:

SECUNDUS JUDEUS	Take! [Roll 2] Here, I darre laye, Are dubletts in good araye.
TERTIUS JUDEUS	[Roll 3A?] Thou fayles, fellowe, by my fayle, to have this to thy fee, for here is cator-traye. Therefore, go thou thye waye and as well thou maye, and leave this with mee. [Roll 3B?]
QUARTUS JUDEUS	Fellowes, verament, I read we be at on assent (lines 129–138).

The Third Jew boasts of his win (“Thou fayles”) as soon as he speaks. Nor is his boast idle: it is part of a sentence structured causally around the word “for,” with the effect preceding the cause (i.e. “you fail, because I have rolled cator-traye”). At only two moments can the Third Jew roll the dice in order to preserve the logic of his lines, marked by “Roll 3A” and “Roll 3B,” above. Roll 3A would require the Third Jew to roll silently before he speaks, so that the first thing he says is in response to his own roll of “cator-traye.” Roll 3B would necessitate that both “dubletts” and “cator-traye” refer back to Roll 2: in other words, the Third Jew argues that a pair would usually win, but not when a four and a three are also present in the same roll (i.e., a roll of 3-3-4 or 3-4-4). In that reading, the Third Jew must then throw Roll 3B after the fact without addressing his own score.

Either roll, 3A or 3B, would present a naturalistic interpretation of the dialogue. Both readings, however, require uncharacteristic pauses in the clownish banter, to leave enough time for the otherwise talkative Third Jew to pick up, shake, toss, and wait for his dice to land, without speaking. Roll 3B might allow the Third Jew to pick up the dice as early as “Therefore, go thou thye waye,” but it would force him to take his own turn without commenting on it or reacting to his score. A silent roll would be out of character for any torturer at Chester; rather, it would weaken the contrast of the Jews to the laconic Jesus in this scene.⁹⁶ Whether they are punching, spitting, hammering, or gambling, the four Jews elsewhere find it necessary to describe most of their actions as they execute them. The need for such narration is particularly high in outdoor theater when engaging with small props that are difficult to see, like nails (or dice): “I shall dryve one / this nayle to the end” (lines 171–2); “will yee see / howe sleight I shalbe / this fist, or I flee, / here to make fast?” (lines 177–80); “I dryve yn / this ilke iron pynne” (lines 194–5); “Fellowes, will you see / howe I have stretched his knee?” (lines 209–10).

The Second Jew’s Roll 2 is a good example of such narration. His imperative “Take! Here,” like the Towneley First Torturer’s “haue here,” must cue a dice roll (probably “Take!” when the dice are thrown and “Here” when they land). There is little else that “Take” could mean. One-syllable exclamations, particularly words that affirm immediacy and presence (like “here”), signify the four

Jews' percussive physical action in the Chester's *Trial and Flagellation of Christ* buffeting episode, where they clearly represent individual punches:

PRIMUS JUDEUS	For his harming <i>here</i> [nighe] will I near... (lines 70–1)
PRIMUS JUDEUS (<i>dans alapam</i>)	Fye upon the, freyke! Stowpe <i>nowe, nowe</i> , and creake. (lines 86–7) ⁹⁷

Based on stylistic precedent, the *Passion's* Second Jew should cast the dice on “Take! Here,” and then the Third Jew should pick up the dice as he says “Thou fayles” and cast them while speaking “for *here* is cator-traye.” The distinction between that reading (Roll 3C, below) and the alternate readings containing Roll 3A or 3B (above) is clearest when performed aloud.

SECUNDUS JUDEUS	Take! [Roll 2: “dubletts”] Here, I darre laye, Are dubletts in good araye.
TERTIUS JUDEUS	Thou fayles, fellowe, by my faye, to have this to thy fee, for here [Roll 3C: “cator-traye”] is cator-traye. Therefore, go thou thye waye and as well thou maye, and leave this with mee. (lines 129–136)

The Third Jew claims his win, *then* casts the roll by which he claims his win. As soon as the Second Jew says “I darre laye,” “cator-traye” is already predicted in the stanza’s rhyme scheme—and the boast that the Third Jew makes, building toward the causal “for,” seems to play consciously with that prediction. A naturalistic actor, concerned with the illogic of hints that the Third Jew knows his score ahead of time, might read the lines as an overconfident boast that claims the winnings before they are won, with no foreknowledge. That actor would have to ignore, or creatively undermine, the causal construction built upon the word “for” (“you fail, *because* here is ‘cator-traye’”)—working against the text for his interpretation. He would also have to ignore the implicit prediction of his score in the rhyme scheme of the stanza initiated by his opponent, limiting the text’s capacity for wordplay.

As written, the text most readily points toward a different (and less anachronistic) style of performance, more like the artifice typical of *commedia dell’arte*, in which actors do not pretend to be unaware of the conceits that govern their narrative.⁹⁸ The timing of Chester’s dice rolls, like the naming of the scores, thus prioritizes comedy over sense. It calls for actors not only to announce nonsensical scores, but also to time those announcements to suggest that all players know the scores before they see them, in lines whose rhyme scheme builds upon the predictability of those announcements. That comic progression of scores, each one beating the one before it, is repeated in the same order at each wagon station, every year that the players perform. In privileging comic artifice over diegetic logic, Chester’s *Passion* underscores the fact that not only the players, but also the audience members, anticipate the scores and their sequence from station to station and from year to year. Fittingly, then, in contrast to the Towneley torturers’ emphatic expressions of shock, fury, and elation at the results of their rolls, the Chester Jews never respond to their scores with anything resembling surprise.

Lumiansky and Mills have called James Miller, the scribe of Harley 2124 whose version often disagrees with the Group Manuscripts, “the first editor of the Chester cycle.”⁹⁹ They suggest that

Miller “seems not to understand” the scoring terms, but a closer look at Miller’s text reveals what may be an attempt to make more sense of the game—a possibility more in keeping with Miller’s usual fastidiousness.¹⁰⁰ I include Miller’s unique readings in italics, with Group Manuscript variants in brackets:

SECUNDUS JUDEUS	Take! Here, I darre laye, <i>a rowndfull in good fay.</i> — <i>Jacet et perdit.</i> [are dubletts in good araye.]
TERTIUS JUDEUS	Thou fayles, <i>fellowe</i> , by my faye, to have this to thy fee, for <i>it was</i> cator-traye. [for here is cator-traye.] Therefore, go thou thye waye — <i>Jacet et perdit.</i> and as well thou maye, and leave this with mee. (lines 129–136)

Miller, who may have been a witness to the final performances of the *Passion*, adds stage directions in the margins and places them within one line of where I have estimated Rolls 2 and 3C. The rolls’ timing has not shifted from the Group Manuscripts; rather, the logic of the dialogue shifts to fit the timing. The Second Jew’s “dubletts” becomes “a rowndfull,” an unspecified roll. Miller’s Third Jew names the Second Jew’s roll in the past tense (“Thou fayles... for it was cator-traye”), announcing after the fact that the “rowndfull” contained a three-four combination, and then rolling. Just as he often corrects the meter of his exemplar (by adding “fellowe” above, for instance), Miller seems to have attempted to introduce order into the dice game.

The timing of Miller’s stage direction for the Fourth Jew, however, still overtly assumes that the players and onlookers have implicit foreknowledge of the scores:

TERTIUS JUDEUS	and as well thou maye, and leave it with mee. [Roll 4A?]
QUARTUS JUDEUS	Fellowes, verament, I read you all on assent. This gaye garment that is without seame, you give by my judgment to mee this vestement, — <i>Jacet et vincit.</i> [Roll 4B] for syyes God hath me sent, thinke you never so sweene (lines 134–144).

Logically, the Fourth Jew should have to roll the winning *syyes* (Miller’s version of “synnce”) at Roll 4A, since his first line begins a sentence that claims the garment as his winnings by unanimous assent of his fellows.¹⁰¹ In performance, Roll 4A would introduce a problem with pacing and character: the boastful Fourth Jew would have to roll in silence before speaking. Miller places the winning roll at 4B, six lines *after* the Fourth Jew starts claiming his winnings. That claim, like the Third Jew’s, comes in a sentence structured causally around the word “for” (i.e. “I advise, by way of my judgment, that you give the gay garment to me, *for* [because] God has sent me ‘syyes’”). For a naturalistic actor to retain Miller’s stage direction but to still disallow the Fourth Jew’s foreknowledge of the roll, he must in some way resist the extant text so that the six lines do not lead up to the causal “for.”

The modern actors for the Chester 2010 *Passion* in Toronto were not working within any assumed context of naturalism. In the base text for that production, Alexandra Johnston places the dice rolls on the same lines that Miller does:

3RD SOLDIER

Thou fails, fellow, truly,
to have this to thy fee,
for here is quatre-trais.

He throws and loses.

Therefore go thou thy way,
and as well thou may,
and leave this with me.

4TH SOLDIER

Fellows, verament,
I propose we be at one assent.
This gay garment
that is without seam,
you give by judgement
to me this vestment,

He throws and wins.

for cinqes God hath me sent,
think you never so swem.¹⁰²

In Johnston's version, the Third Soldier announces the defeat of his opponent, *then* explains that defeat to have been caused by "quatre-trais," *then* rolls, and *then* claims the robe as his own. The Fourth Soldier begins his claim well before he wins. Johnston's comma after "vestment" (mimicking Lumiansky and Mills' punctuation) makes clear that the sentence built around "for" is continuous and causal, though its effect precedes its cause ("*He throws and wins*"). Johnston and Miller's texts do not require stringent realism from their gamblers—only boastful and brash comedy.

In all five medieval manuscripts the First Jew graciously confirms the Fourth Jew's win, (though perhaps with a subtle pun on "synke," as I mention above): "[W]ell wonne yt thou hasse, for synke ther was / that *every man might see* (lines 145–8, emphasis added). For the absurd game of the Chester *Passion*, visual confirmation of the dice score is all that is needed to assure all players of fairness: "every man might see" the "synnce." In contrast, the Towneley dice game is interrupted by Pilate's two accusations of cheating, which assume visual confirmation to be suspect.¹⁰³ But in the streets of Chester, outside the diegesis, such an affirmation of faith in visuality comically contrasts with what the players are actually doing: staring blankly at mimed dice (as at Chester 2010), or falsifying the scores on prop dice (which could not actually have come up "dubleetts," "cator-traye," and "synnce" at every performance)—evidence that *no* man might see. No medieval player or audience expected any suspension of disbelief in order to enjoy the play, but the dice game's comedy exploits the unreality and superficiality of the diegesis, which is most evident when the First Jew visually confirms the final score in his mock-game.¹⁰⁴

The gamblers' flawed reliance on visuality is a reminder that Chester's version of the *Passion* re-imagines Jesus' crucifiers as four *Jews*. Sheila Christie points out elsewhere in this volume that the Chester cycle presents unusually positive characterizations of Octavian, Pilate, and other Roman

characters; it makes sense that the cycle should reassign Rome's worst biblical sins to non-Roman characters. Meanwhile, V.A. Kolve has already argued convincingly that the presence of the crucifiers' unserious dice game is a symptom of their inability to see the human impact of their acts—supporting Jesus' judgment that they “know not what they do.”¹⁰⁵ In addition, the live performance of the Chester dice game embeds the Jews' blindness in a specifically Christian interpretive context by implying a distinction between literal and figural hermeneutics. The First Jew sees and reads what he believes to be plain information in front of him, while the Christian witnesses around him can see that he is looking at nothing at all, or reporting false scores from prop dice. Within the conspicuously thin diegesis, none of the Jews sees anything unusual or portentous about the improbable progression of nonce-rolls, nor about his opponents' ability to predict those rolls before they are cast. Chester's Jews are clowns who wander into the most portentous moment in Christian history and who, unable to see its fatalism, try to play with chance. Chance fails in the Towneley version too, but it fails because Pilate's earthly power supersedes it; at Chester, the power that defeats chance exists outside of the Jews' world, where the Christian revellers sit, laughing—and where the visibly present bleeding God waits and watches knowingly. In the same way that they are oblivious to the Cestrian comic pattern that governs their actions, the Jews are unaware of the still greater divine pattern that contains them. They forget—and have to be reminded by an annoyed Caiaphas—that Jesus stands there before them, waiting for the prophecy to get underway: “Men, for cockes face / how long shall pewee-ars / stand naked in that place? / Goe nayne him on the tree!” (lines 149-52). “For cockes face” reminds us of the presence of Jesus' body and gaze, while its use as a phatic oath emphasizes the Jews' lack of attention to that body and gaze. The conspicuous lack of realism and failure of visuality in the comic dice game provides a stark contrast to Jesus' physical, visible presence nearby, and to the tragic torture that Jesus undergoes. The Chester 2010 *Passion* mimed the dice, but it used unsettlingly realistic stage make-up for the wounds on Jesus' back. The body of Christ in the modern production was especially shocking, moving, and meaningful because it stood in contrast to the less realistic conceits that surrounded it. That powerful contrast was not an accident of modern staging; rather, it is implicit in the extant text of the Chester *Passion*.

At the end of the dice game, the Fourth Jew brags that his dicing win is divine: “you give by judgment / to mee this vestement, / for synnce God hath me sent” (lines 141–43). These lines introduce the notion that the Jews believe that their game of chance constitutes an appeal to divine right. In the context of performance, however, the fact that Jesus himself is standing unnoticed, naked, and awaiting his fate, asserts that the nature of that divine order is not what the Jews expect. Early English writing on gambling acknowledges that lots and dice can be a valid gauge of divine intention. Lambert Daneau's *Discourse of Gaming* (translated into English by Thomas Newton of Cheshire) distinguishes between good, serious reasons to cast lots and “sporting toyes and friuolous causes,” which “tempt God,” “as though we would make God, seruauant to our vanities and pastimes.”¹⁰⁶ In *Dives and Pauper*, Pauper condemns lot- and dice-casting “withoutyn nede and only for vanyte,” but accepts both for the “3euynge of pyng þat may nou3t wel ben departyd, or whan men ben in doute what is to don.”¹⁰⁷

Significantly, the Chester cycle is the only medieval biblical cycle to stage the Apostles' lot-casting at Pentecost. Peter's plea for a sign from God—“lord, that knowest all thinge... shewe us here by some tokeninge / whom that we shall take” (lines 50-2)—is, fundamentally, no different than the Fourth Jew's “synnce God hath me sent.” By Daneau's and Pauper's standards, the four Jews' lot-casting is acceptable in that it doles out property that “may nou3t wel ben departyd.” It is only because the *Passion* sets up its dice-playing as hollow and simple, a false appeal to divinity that undeniably falls on the side of frivolity and vanity, that it can stand in contrast to the Apostles' proper lot-casting. Considered together, the *Passion* and the *Pentecost* map out the full range of

human relationships to chance and to divine providence. The dice game illustrates the hazards of misinterpretation and self-deception; after the dice have already been cast, the Fourth Jew retroactively claims to understand God's intentions even as he prepares to crucify God's son. In contrast, Peter recognizes his own subjection to Providence, asking for a sign ("some tokeninge") to guide him before he casts the lots. The Chester plays thus provide their audiences with positive and negative examples of hermeneutics, exemplifying how Christians should and should not respond to signs from God.

The symbolic power of the dice game, meanwhile, must have shifted considerably in performances after 1528. In that year, Henry VIII proclaimed a universal prohibition of "Dyce Cardes and other vnlauffull games."¹⁰⁸ Other monarchs had prohibited these practices before, but only for certain classes or groups (apprentices, servants, clergymen, labourers, or artisans); Henry not only commands all of England to stop gambling, but also authorizes his men to seize and burn the dice, cards and other gaming equipment, especially if they find them in "any Hosterye Inne or Alehouse."¹⁰⁹ The inflammatory rhetoric of that proclamation found its way into the 1540 legislation of Cestrian mayor Henry Gee, which proscribed "vnlauffull games" locally.¹¹⁰ Henry VIII presumably targeted hostelrys, inns, and alehouses because, as spaces that were at once public and enclosed, they provided room for prohibited practices but hid them from the view of authorities. Walker and Daneau assume throughout their sixteenth-century treatises that dice gambling remains a common practice behind closed doors. The Chester *Harrowing's* distinctly Cestrian Alewife is certainly guilty of "Usynge cardes, dyce, and cuppes smale" in her establishment (line 333).

An indoor context sheds further light on the Chester *Passion* dice game. As the episode begins, the First Jew tells his fellows to lay Jesus' garment "on boord or we blyn!" (line 88); ME *boord* is only attested for wooden surfaces.¹¹¹ The "boord" can be explained with some strain as the floor of the wagon, though it is most probable that the dice game (as at Chester 2010) would have taken place in the *platea*, rather than on the wooden floor of the wagon, whose space would already have been crowded by three crosses. As Lumiansky and Mills point out, however, the First Jew's reference to a wooden surface remains confusing, since his scene is meant to take place outdoors.¹¹² Even more confusing is the Second Jew's reference to a "halle": "Iche man in this halle / wottes I doe not amyse" (lines 111–2). The editors comment:

[A "halle"] seems inappropriate to the setting on Calvary and seems rather to be part of an appeal to the audience. It might be used as evidence of an indoor performance, in a hall. Alternatively, the noun may represent *bale* n (2), MED "a temporary structure for housing, entertaining, eating meals, etc.; an open pavilion, a tent," of which *halle* is a recorded variant.¹¹³

The lines may suggest that the dice game represents a fragment of the cycle that dates back to fifteenth-century Corpus Christi stationary performances.¹¹⁴ A pavilion or tent would be unnecessary (and difficult to build) around most of the sixteenth-century wagon stations, which were surrounded by Chester's elevated Rows. In the context of their sixteenth-century performance and inscription, "boord" and "halle" suggest instead that dicing is an activity which automatically brings with it some assumption of an indoor setting. These terms thus imply that, in the Chester *Passion*, the indoors is displayed outdoors.

In 1570, Elizabeth I tempered Henry's proclamation somewhat, legalizing previously "unlawful games," prohibiting the dicer from playing "for his... gayne, lucre, or lyuyng" (unless he made £100 or more per year) and ordering local authorities to search for and seize (but not to burn) the gaming equipment.¹¹⁵ Still, a 1591 "Report of the Council of the North on Abuses in Cheshire" suggests a disconnection between Tudor gaming laws and their local execution:

In Church townes and in divers other places of those Counties, Cockefightes and other exceeding unlawfull games are tolerated vpon Sondaies & holidays at the tyme of devyne Seruice, And oftentimes thereat are present divers of the Iustices of the peace of the same Counties, And also some of the eccliaisticall Commisioners.¹¹⁶

This weak enforcement of English law in Cheshire might remind us of the many conflicts between sovereign and local power recently described by Robert Barrett and Tim Thornton, but it resonates especially with the final two performances of the Chester cycle itself, another *game* condoned by local authorities despite its 1572 prohibition by authorities outside Cheshire.¹¹⁷ Sixteenth-century Cestrian players, whose participation in the plays was itself an act of resistance against Tudor reforms that were systematically destroying local traditions, might have delighted in the mock-up of an illegal form of recreation (dice gambling) *within* a questionably legal form of recreation (the cycle). The cartoonish artifice of that *pleie-within-a-pleie* (the early English term *pleie* encompasses sports, spectacles, theatrics, and gambling) at once ensures that its players are not actually engaging in any illicit activity and emphasizes the metadramatic impact of their flippant mock-up.¹¹⁸ On a theological level, the mock-dice game affirms the blindness of the Jews to the portents of the crucifixion and to the inevitable progression of prophecy, creating a gap between the ignorance of the characters and the hermeneutic sophistication of the Christian actors and their audience of revellers. On a political level, the dice game functions at the moment of performance as a ludic practice specifically and fervently prohibited by the sovereign's earthly authority, though condoned by local authority; resistance is thus representationally acted out in the open air, long after actual dice-play had had to retreat indoors. In contrast to the triumph of Pilate's authority in the Towneley dice game, in which earthly tyranny subdues the workings of chance, victory in the Chester dice game belongs to God, to whom chance is utterly subject. The game staged by the performance of the Chester *Passion* is thus simultaneously a reassertion of divine order and a challenge to secular authority.

Wrestling, Reform, and Reception

Daneau and Newton present wrestling as a symbol of Greco-Roman military excellence, but dice as a portent of Rome's fall. In addition, various earlier cases depict wrestling as a particularly respectable, classical practice that was prominent in the recreation of both nobles and commoners. As Gregory M. Colón Semenza has observed, Chaucer's Knight imagines wrestling at Arcite's funeral games, and not only Sir Thopas but also the Miller are champion wrestlers—and specifically *not* footballers:

If Chaucer's intention were simply to emphasize the Miller's coarseness by alluding to a favorite pastime, he would have been better served by presenting him as a football player since that sport had almost exclusively lower class associations in the fourteenth century. The decision to present him as a wrestler is a far more interesting choice. As we have seen, wrestling is relatively unique among medieval sports in that it is practiced by members of the upper as well as the lower orders. The ancient idea that sport could provide the training and skills required in warfare received consistent endorsement throughout the medieval and early modern periods. Since gentlemen did not fight wars alone, however, the skills of the soldier needed to be learned by commoners as well.¹¹⁹

Colón Semenza convincingly argues, based on literary and documentary evidence of medieval wrestling, that the Miller's competitive and class-crossing *quyting* of the Knight is bound up with

both pilgrims' connection to wrestling.¹²⁰ Meanwhile, according to Gail Gibson, European records of wrestling are so similar to records of theatrics that modern scholars often mistake one for the other: “[w]restling, indeed, seems to have been as much a popular ingredient of medieval drama as the gun fight is in twentieth-century popular films.”¹²¹ Gibson briefly mentions the two extant medieval English cases in which dramatic action depicts wrestling: an East Anglian Robin Hood play fragment and the Chester *Shepherds* play.¹²²

Something about the *Shepherds* play made it sufficiently palatable to late sixteenth-century sensibilities that Chester could still include it in an officially sanctioned day of recreation in 1578, three years after the suppression of the cycle took effect. As part of the mayor's entertainment for Henry, earl of Derby—himself a supposed recusant—Cestrians presented the *Shepherds* play at the High Cross, separate from the cycle, as well as a student production of a Terentian comedy at the mayor's house, and “other Trivmphes” on the Roodee (an open field usually used for sporting events).¹²³ This extended survival of the *Shepherds* cannot be attributed entirely to the fact that it would have been less offensive to reformers than plays like the Chester *Last Supper* or *Pentecost*. Outspoken reformer Christopher Goodman, in his diatribe against the plays in 1572, seems to have been especially offended by the “unreverent speaking of the shepherds who by the Scriptures seem to be honest men,” their “lewd merry song,” and their “vain offerings to move laughter & to maintain Superstition,” complaining more about the *Shepherds* play than he does about most other plays in the cycle.¹²⁴

To close the present chapter, I contend that the persistence of this “unreverent” biblical play attests less to its immunity to Puritan religious reform and more to its compatibility with late Tudor-era reform of recreation, specifically the kind of ideals espoused by Daneau and Newton. The Shepherds' wrestling, though it occurs within a distinctly premodern cycle, easily conforms to the sixteenth-century humanist ideal of “honest industrie.” It enacts an industry-driven version of an already industrious sport, representative of classical values that transcended the medieval and modern. I propose that to stage the *Shepherds* play is itself a conspicuously industrious *pleie* practice, which imbues the wrestling *pleie*-within-a-*pleie* with self-referential meaning and anchors the scripted recreation in real recreation. In the *Trial* and *Passion* sequence, however, the Four Jews' dice game gives way to mock-wrestling, presenting a decidedly unindustrious version of recreation. Textual evidence suggests that the Four Jews' *pleie*-episodes may have preceded the Shepherds' by as much as ninety-four years; as I suggest above, the *Shepherds*' clownish *aaabaaab*³ stanzas were formed according to the stylistic precedent set in the *Trial* and *Passion* sequence. The sixteenth-century introduction of the Shepherds' younger *pleie*-episode would have considerably *shifted* the resonance of the Jews' ludic mocking by making the Four Jews look like anti-Shepherds, as conspicuously unindustrious as the Shepherds are industrious—especially as Henrician reforms intruded into Cestrian tradition and prohibited whatever recreation did not yield tangible profits. At the close of this section, after close readings of the Chester cycle's representations of wrestling and horseplay, I present a brief model for the shifting reception of those scenes across sixteenth-century performance.

In order to accomplish what Goodman disregarded as “vain offerings to move laughter,” the *Shepherds* players have to play harder than any other players in the cycle. Each cycle play depicts some sort of staged physical action, but even the slapstick of the *Noah* play is brief and effortless in comparison to the Shepherds' wrestling match, which must occur after the Shepherds' feat of excessive eating and drinking, and which requires at least enough acrobatic stage combat for three grappling battles, each ending in an exaggerated throw (*projiciat* in the stage directions). Further, the *Shepherds* play is not only physically challenging, but it also requires feats of memorization and recitation comparable to few other plays in the cycle. The players must memorize and recite lines that include not only lengthy lists of sheep medicines and food, but also 67 lines of near-gibberish,

voiced when the Shepherds and their boy Trowle hear the Angel's *Gloria in excelsis Deo* and fail comically at parsing her Latin ("hit was 'grous glorus' with a 'glee'... Nay, yt was 'glorus glarus' with a 'glo,'" etc., lines 368-435). The parsing scene involves multiple nonsense words that defy memorization, because the stanzas do not occur in any logical order, but they also function as rhyme words, providing little room for error or improvisation. After the feasting, wrestling, and gibberish, the stage directions require the Shepherds to sing a folk song, "troly, loly, loly, loo"—surely the "lewd merry song" of Goodman's complaint. In many other pageants, singing seems to have been the responsibility of musicians separate from the actors, but the *Shepherds* players must be singers, acrobats, and actors skilled enough to handle some of the most difficult dialogue in the cycle.¹²⁵ To use Daneau and Newton's words: if any Cestrian players can be said to "after a sorte let out their labour unto us" in a laudable display of "industrie," it is those responsible for the *Shepherds* play.¹²⁶

The *Shepherds* play's cartoonish narrative consists mostly of a set of contrived (though amusing) circumstances that roughly link together that impressive series of industrious feats; very little happens in the play that is in any way necessary to the grand narrative of the Chester cycle. Not only do acrobatic spectacle and narrative simplicity make the *Shepherds* the most sensible choice among the Chester plays for a stand-alone performance (as in the 1578 staging that placed it alongside schoolboys' recitations and "Trivmphes" on the sports field), but these features also provide the basis upon which its *pleie* within a *pleie*, wrestling, becomes a self-referential and Reform-friendly conceit.¹²⁷ Wrestling constitutes a special kind of performance; as Roland Barthes argues, wrestling "is an immediate pantomime, infinitely more efficient than the dramatic pantomime, for the wrestler's gesture needs no anecdote, no decor, in short no transference in order to appear true."¹²⁸ According to Barthes, the truth of a wrestling match is in its spectacle; the players must perform a series of impressive physical feats that produce basic, stable, and easily intelligible types—the "bastard" villain, the good hero—engaged in a simplistic narrative.¹²⁹ The simplicity of the *Shepherds* play, like the wrestling match within it, also produces easily intelligible types: the plucky Trowle and his oafish bosses, whose physical comedy and easy banter appear especially intelligible because they stand in opposition to the Angel's scriptural *Gloria in excelsis Deo*, whose incomprehensibility to vernacular speakers is itself dramatized in the play's comic action.

Barthes writes that the most important simple truth of wrestling, carried forth in its simplistic and universally legible narratives, is its sense of "paying one's debts":

[W]hat wrestling is above all meant to portray is a purely moral concept: that of justice. The idea of "paying" is essential to wrestling, and the crowd's "Give it to him" means above all else "Make him pay"... wrestling is above all a quantitative sequence of compensations.¹³⁰

This sense of popular justice founded on "paying one's debts" in a "quantitative series of compensations" is made manifest in the Shepherds' portrayal of *quyting*. Based on the set of values implicit in Henrician proclamations (and explicit in later tracts like those by Daneau and Newton), a *quyting*-based pantomime is exactly the kind of *pleie* that would pass easily from its medieval origins through reform and into modernity. It constitutes one of Daneau and Newton's "publique Exercises and even Shewes, Games, Sportes and Prizes," public displays which were "preludes, preparatives, assaies and traynings of Warfare," both spectacle and sport.¹³¹ Wrestling, then, satisfies Henrician ideals of economical *pleie* on multiple levels: the *quyting* structure of the sport is based on proportional compensation, while the sport itself enacts an exchange of industrious exertion for recreational delight (if not a prize); England's investment in the sport promised to return the tangible benefit of military skill and strength. The representation of the physically challenging recreation of wrestling within the physically challenging *Shepherds* play draws attention to the "honest industrie" at work in both.

The dialogue of the play continually emphasizes that “quantitative sequence of compensations.” Trowle, the Shepherds’ boy who wins the wrestling bout, insists that in the proper order of things, industrious service should be compensated with proportional pay and abuse should be compensated with punishment. When he enters the scene, Trowle complains that he must watch the Shepherds’ flocks while the Shepherds, shamefully inactive, drink and feast together: “Fye on your loynes and your liverye... your sittinge withowt any songes” (lines 202-205). “Your sheepe full sycerly save I” (line 209), he jeers, as if it is especially unjust that he should have to care for possessions that he does not even own. Elsewhere, he refers to the sheep as “my flocke” (line 166), perhaps suggesting that labor constitutes partial ownership. When the Shepherds try to offer Trowle the leftovers of their feast, Trowle refuses, demanding his apparently overdue wages instead:

Therefore meate, if I maye,
of your dightinge todaye
will I nought by noe waye
tyll I have my wages (lines 218-21).

Those wages, when they have been paid in the past, have not been enough:

I wend to have binne gaye
but, see, soe ragged is myne araye;
aye pinches is your paye
to any poore page (lines 222-25).

Trowle’s happiness, here, hinges on the amount of pay he receives for his work, and on his ability to exchange that money for new clothing—in contrast to Harvey, the Second Shepherd, who muses, “Howsinge enough have wee here / while that wee have heavon over our heddes” (lines 141-42). Trowle himself is not a paragon of industry—but as he amusingly explains, his laziness is a matter of thrift: to stand up for any reason, whether to honor a king or to direct a wanderer, would be “travell lost” (lines 180-187), an unnecessarily wasted physical effort. Trowle appraises the Shepherds’ invitations in terms of their relative worth (“All this lottes I seet at little,” line 104), and refuses to acknowledge them—until Tudd, the Third Shepherd, challenges him to a wrestling match.¹³²

The previously immovable Trowle, who would not take free food when offered, is more than willing to engage in wrestling. Though the Shepherds have not offered any reward for the match, in four of the five play manuscripts Trowle assumes that he will be able to earn winnings. Where scribe Edward Gregorie records Trowle’s response at line 230 as “That shall I never flee,” George Bellin and William Bedford give “*that wages* shall I never flee” in their manuscripts, and James Miller gives “*that wager* shall I never flee.”¹³³ Gregorie’s reading is the only one that does not conspicuously add a stress to the characteristic rhythm of the *aaabaaab*³ stanza, which suggests that Trowle’s focus on compensation may have been amplified by the addition of *wages/wager* to performances of the play, after the textual stratum of the *pleie*-episodes had already been composed.

Trowle throws his three masters, far enough that they are propelled from “here by the wall” (line 257) to “ther... in the lake” (line 280), and forcefully enough to cause Harvey to land “on his loynes” (line 267). Among Trowle’s threats to his opponents are sarcastic warnings that the Shepherds should mind their belongings, continually underscoring his attention to economy. Trowle remarks that Harvey should save his old clothes (“Good were thee thy ould ragges to save soone,” line 263), suggesting that Harvey’s current clothes will be ruined in the fight and will need to be replaced. And Trowle cautions Tudd, “Keepe well thy store / for feare of a farte” (lines 278-79)—*store* is a general Middle English term for any set of possessions that is saved up, reserved, or

hoarded.¹³⁴ Lumiansky and Mills suggest, probably correctly, that Trowle is referring to Tudd's excrement; whatever Tudd's figurative *store* may be, Trowle's metaphor treats it economically, as a collection of possessions to be minded.¹³⁵ When Trowle decisively wins the match, he defines his recreation in quite clear terms of compensation:

My liverye nowe will I lach:
This curye, this clowt, and this cake.
For yee be cast, now will I catch. (lines 281-83).

Trowle will not accept the Shepherds' leftovers in lieu of proper wages for shepherds' work, but he will proudly, if wryly, take the same food according to the terms of a fair economic exchange: he has *cast*, so he has earned the right to *catch*. Such *quyting* logic magnifies the "quantitative sequence of compensations" at the heart of any wrestling match, which in turn affirms the place of wrestling, and of the play that contains it, in the economic rationale of sixteenth-century *pleie*-reform.

Barthes opens and closes his essay with the assertion that "true wrestling" is "a spectacle and not a sport."¹³⁶ For Barthes, the predetermined, exaggerated dramatics of popular wrestling are themselves valuable and real ends, similar to those of theater or of religious ritual, and not to be confused with the actual combat and competition of a sport like boxing.¹³⁷ Kolve's observations on the breadth and flexibility of medieval *pleie* and game—which show that athletic sports and theatrical displays have not always been strongly distinguished from each other—undermine Barthes's claim that wrestling cannot be *both* a spectacle and a sport. That said, Barthes' point still holds: popular wrestling's simplified and immediate truth, the "very principle of triumphant classical art," lies necessarily in its rigged, predetermined outcome.¹³⁸ According to that argument, the fact that the Shepherds' wrestling unfolds within the frame of a scripted drama does not make it a less real example of popular wrestling—a counterintuitive conclusion at first, until one considers the degree to which the very real recreational practice of popular wrestling, obviously staged but spectacularly acrobatic, has persisted into the twenty-first century. Gibson and Clopper have noted the near-interchangeability between medieval wrestling and medieval drama in the way both events were staged and recorded. As far as popular wrestling can be real, the scripted wrestling on and around the Cestrian pageant wagon is a *real* popular wrestling match, just as the Shepherds' feast used real food and drink, literally engaging in recreational practice during the performance of the play. And the Cestrian players, not only representing but also *participating in* wrestling, must employ a great deal of "honest industrie": sweat is sweat, and the players in the *Shepherds* play must sweat considerably.

Meanwhile, Chester's Four Jews seem to sweat very little, even when faced with considerable physical labor, joking and boasting with uninterrupted ease throughout the episode. I have already mentioned Sarah Beckwith's observations on the physical exertion depicted in the York *Crucifixion*, a pageant in which the technical difficulties of raising the Cross put enough of a strain on the characters—and, surely, the players—to clip the lines twice into percussive grunts.¹³⁹ To raise the prop Cross must have been equally difficult at Chester, but the Chester *Passion* is relatively unconcerned with the dramatic impact of that difficulty. Only one out of five manuscripts, James Miller's British Library MS Harley 2124, adds the important stage direction that the Four Jews should actually raise the Cross (*Tunc omnes crucem exultabunt*, line 240+SD)—but Miller inserts the direction twenty-six lines after the moment the First Jew's call for assistance "that [Jesus] / on height rayseed bee" (lines 213-214). That timing suggests that the short dialogue following the dicing-crucifixion episode, in which Pilate argues with the Jews about Jesus' superscription, occurs while the Cross is erected *during other action*—masking the technical difficulty of the stage business (rather than framing it, as at York) by drawing focus elsewhere. The superscription scene unfolds as an exchange between Pilate and the Second Jew, then Pilate and the Third Jew; perhaps, in the

staging which Miller imagined or witnessed, the Second and Third Jews stepped away from the Cross-raising only when needed in the dialogue, then stepped back again. It is also possible that Miller's stage direction is meant to cue the beginning of the Cross-raising, not its completion; if so, then Mary's extended lament (longer in Miller's manuscript than in any other) would provide ample time to raise the Cross. The other four manuscripts simply do not add a stage direction for the crucifixion at all, nor do they provide a clear hint in the dialogue for when it should occur.

If Miller's direction is not to be trusted here, then it is likely that the dialogue paused after the First Jew's call for assistance, allowing the pageant's most difficult, impressive, and portentous special effect to be executed quietly, a contemplative lull in the *Passion* chatter that, if it did occur, surely created at Chester the "still center of the cycle" that Beckwith perceives in the York *Crucifixion*. However, if that "still center" did happen at Chester, then it happened outside the *Passion's* diegesis, to such a degree that it is not even recorded in the manuscripts. In that likely staging it is not Chester's Four Jews who are interrupted by the physical difficulty of the task. Rather, it is their universe that is interrupted. The progression of time in the world that contains them is broken, and the drama is paused so that the Cestrian players may raise the prop Cross. When the progression of time resumes, the Four Jews proceed without consciousness that any difficult or significant physical action has taken place. They have not broken a sweat, though the Cestrian players have. While the York crucifiers must deal with strain, injury, and a failed first attempt to lift the Cross, the only technical difficulty that Chester's Four Jews address is their discovery, in keeping with apocryphal legend, that Jesus' arm will not fit to the cross-beam. At York, the crucifiers place responsibility for that error on the constructors of the Cross, probably themselves ("it was ouere skantely scored"), and they assume that the problem comes from the contraction of the tortured Jesus' sinews ("It failis a foote and more, / þe senous are so gone ynne"). At Chester, the Jews only remark that Jesus is himself "shorte-armed" (line 182) before remedying the problem with the "sleight" of stretching their victim with ropes (line 186)—a word that seems to stand in direct opposition to the notion of "honest industrie." The immediate presence of the physical task of crucifixion, if it is foregrounded in the staging of the Chester *Passion*, is not foregrounded in any way of which the Four Jews are aware, as they (unlike their counterparts at York) play through the task without a grunt or a strain. In other words, if a production of the Cestrian *Passion* does pause its action and interrupt its dialogue to contemplate the slow difficulty of raising the Cross, then such a pause only frames the industrious sweat of the Cestrians, not the Four Jews. And if it does not do so, as James Miller seems to suggest, then it frames no one's sweat, by placing the action of raising the Cross behind other action.

The Four Jews's labor in preparing and erecting the Cross involves little exertion on their part: the difficulty of the task is either displaced onto the Cestrian players by breaking the scene, or it occurs in the background while other dialogue occurs. The Four Jews' crucifixion, then, is quite unindustrious in comparison to the hyperactive comedy of the Shepherds' wrestling. It is fitting, then, that when hints of wrestling appear in the Four Jews' puns on *cast*, recreation is at its most unindustrious: the victim does not fight back, nor do the Jews have to exert themselves to *cast* him:

QUARTUS JUDEUS

This caytyffe have I *cast*.
Hee shall be *wronge wrast*
or I wynd awaye... (lines 162-64, emphasis added)

TERTIUS JUDEUS

As broke I my ponn,
well *cast* him I con
and make him *full wonne*
or I from him wend (lines 173-76, emphasis added).

The mock wrestling match in the *Trial* exhibits the same imbalance as the Jews' hot cockles game in the *Trial*, staged as a series of unreciprocated, or poorly reciprocated, exchanges:

TERTIUS JUDEUS	And thou be messye And loth for to lye, whoe smote thee crye, yf that thou be Christ.
QUARTUS JUDEUS (<i>percutiens</i>)	[For all his prophesye yet he fayles thrye; though my fiste flye, <i>gettes he a feiste.</i>
PRIMUS JUDEUS]	Though he sore stryke a buffett shall byte; <i>may no man myne white [quyte],</i> though I do him woo.
SECUNDUS JUDEUS (<i>percutiens</i>)	[Hym failes to flytt or ought to despitte; <i>for he base to lite,</i> <i>now must he have moe.</i>
TERTIUS JUDEUS] (<i>percutum</i>)	<i>And moe yett I maye.</i> I shall soone assaye <i>And shewe large paye,</i> Thou prince, on thy pate (lines 94-105, emphasis added).

The players' opponent refuses to engage with them, and so the series of fair and just compensations expected in any popular play form, especially a violent one, is left ominously incomplete. The Jews continually provide their opponent with "moe" and "moe yett," "large paye" that they "laye on"—even, in an unsettling reversal of Trowle's compensation in foodstuffs, Jesus' supposed failure earns him a "feiste" of a fist. As the First Jew observes, no man can appropriately *quyte* [*white*, line 100] these violent payments.¹⁴⁰

A sense of *quyting* very similar to Barthes's sense of compensatory justice in modern popular wrestling, then, drives the industrious comedy of the *Shepherds* play: "[t]he baser the action of the 'bastard,' the more delighted the public is by the blow which he justly receives in return."¹⁴¹ After the *Shepherds* play, the cycle's audience is preconditioned to expect that every violent comic action will be comically *quyted*. The Four Jews' emergence in the *Passion* re-activates that precedent of comic justice, but leaves that justice ominously uneven in a manner appropriate to the play's portentous material. When the Four Jews appear—in so many ways obvious counterparts to the four clowns of the *Shepherds* play—the audience witnesses violent comic action that echoes the Shepherds' antics, including a direct reference to *quyting* and clear puns on wrestling. But at the end of their horseplay and mock-wrestling, the Four Jews still await their *quyting*—which, as the final prophecies of the cycle reach fulfillment and *Judgment* approaches, will finally return with due vengeance. Trowle's dialogue clearly frames public feats of athleticism and virtuosity—as embodied by wrestling, and by the entirety of the Shepherds' spectacular play—as a legitimate site of profitable exchange. In turn, the Four Jews' mock-athleticism rings hollow against the Shepherds' fair play, and intensifies the spectators' expectation that the "bastards" will, soon enough, get their due. The Four Jews' recreation only rings hollow, however, if Cestrians see and play the *Shepherds* play on the day before the *Trial* and *Passion*. The presence of mock-athleticism and deferred *quyting* in the

Passion, so essential to the comedy in the Four Jews' *pleie*-episodes, is a function of the interaction between the *Passion* and the *Shepherds* plays. Yet as I discuss above, the extant cycle ordering was probably adjusted to include the *Shepherds* during the first decades of the sixteenth century, while the extant *Passion* may have been in place a century earlier.

It is tempting here to hypothesize a reception model for the *pleie*-episodes, one which can be divided into stages across the sixteenth century. The introduction of the *Shepherds* play into the cycle at some point before 1519 (perhaps much earlier) enacts fair play in real time, a counterpoint that magnifies the imbalanced and incomplete *quyting* in the Four Jews' ludic mocking. Mayor Gee's aggressive Henrician restructuring of Cestrian recreational practice in 1540, and its distinction between profitable-industrious and unlawful-unindustrious recreation, would have squarely located the *Shepherds* and the Jews on either side of Reform—aligning the Jews with traditionalists, a problematic resonance that I explore more deeply in the two final sections. Finally, the prohibitive efforts of Christopher Goodman and the Archbishop of York in the 1570s would fully quiet the whole cycle *except* the *Shepherds* pageant, whose industrious series of playful feats would earn it a place in a day of spectacular and virtuosic “trivmphes” for the earl of Derby in 1578.

However, that model would dangerously flatten the truth of what goes on in the *pleie*-stratum—that is, a play of meaning, engaging a full range of contentious fifteenth-century views of recreation at the local and national levels. There is enough reliable information to isolate the *pleie*-stratum from the cycle, but hardly enough to date it with respect to the cycle, or to separate it into datable parts. The play texts, whose style and portrayal of *pleie* are characterized by a resistance to the progression of sixteenth-century history, would not fit well into such a precise approach to dating anyway. Nor could the street-level attitudes toward *pleie* in Chester, during the Chester plays, have adhered monolithically to the values espoused in any of the treatises or proclamations I have cited above. It is most accurate to approach the plays as a cluster of perspectives on *pleie*, inextricable from each other, all signifying at once but roughly bounded within the range of perspectives that is visible in contemporary writing on the subject.

Chapter Two
The Cestrian Community in Time

In the Introduction to this project, I calculate that at the height of Chester's cycle performance, 353 Cestrians—about ten percent of the city's population—were involved closely enough with the plays to have direct physical contact with a pageant wagon.¹ Actual performances probably involved many more participants.² As these players performed at four or five wagon stations simultaneously through the main thoroughfares of the city, the remaining ninety percent of Chester's population (about 2,700 of them) became spectators. Even if they wanted to miss the cycle, they would have to go to considerable lengths to avoid it: the performers used the public thoroughfares surrounding their wagons as an unbounded playing space—the *platea*—enveloping the whole center of the city as a site of spectatorship. Some of those Cestrian spectators would have been the guild players whose pageant was not currently underway—players watching other parts of the play. Other spectators would have been those Cestrians who indirectly involved themselves in the performances by designing or preserving wagons, costumes, backdrops, stage properties, or manuscripts, or by providing the players with refreshment during rehearsals and performances.³

C.P. Lewis estimates the size of the average sixteenth-century Cestrian urban family at four or five members.⁴ For each of the 353 Cestrians involved in the cast, chorus, and crew of the cycle, then, there were at least three Cestrians who could see their parent, sibling, or child involved in the cycle—whether they were watching from the *platea* or from the stage, playing alongside their immediate family members. That latter case, importantly, allows a local player to be counted as both a spectator and a performer simultaneously—within what Sarah Beckwith calls “a culture of festivity that renders amateur and local performance meaningful *to the audience who are also its players.*”⁵ Even in earlier years when the cycle may have been smaller, or in later years when Chester's population spiked, it is likely that nearly all residents of Chester could count at least one cycle player among their close acquaintances, especially since the producers and performers all came from the fraternal guilds that structured most of the city's social gatherings.⁶ The only audience members who were not highly likely to have some personal investment in the productions were the relatively few non-local spectators who came to see the plays from outside Chester.⁷

For the most part, however, the community of Cestrians for which the cycle was performed was the same community of Cestrians by which the cycle was performed. This chapter is concerned with the ways in which the extant form and content of the cycle texts can be understood and interpreted as manifestations of community-wide participation and personal investment. As I demonstrate below, the extant texts rely for their symbolic and aesthetic power on a style of production that accentuates the recognizability and familiarity of local players, cast across years of repeated performances. I argue that the Chester cycle narrates two genealogies across its generations of performance: at the center of the cycle is the story of the ancestry, life, death, and afterlife of Christ; secondary to that primary genealogical narrative is the story of how the Christian community present in the *platea*, including those participating in the performance, came to be there. Cestrians could see themselves in their cycle; in performance, the cycle reflects Cestrians back to each other and endows them with a place in both scriptural history and local memory. Fittingly, the occasion of the sixteenth-century performances of the Chester plays—Whitsun week, the feast of the Pentecost—commemorates the earliest dissemination of Christianity through the travels of the Apostles, the originary moment through which Christians, including the audience in the medieval present, could affirm their linkage to the blessed family whose genealogy is so central to the cycle. As the structure of the cycle's repeated performances amplified the progression of new generations of Cestrians from year to year, the content of the cycle links that progression to the genealogy of Christianity. Meanwhile, beyond the prophecies and anachronistic punning typical of all medieval

biblical drama, the Chester cycle continually plays with temporality. It runs on its own internal clock, a complex of temporalities that continually loops the past and future into the present. Sarah Beckwith's comments on ritual in the *Croxtton Play of the Sacrament* are relevant to that localized sense of recurring time:

The enormous advantage of the modern introduction of the category of ritual in the interpretation of drama lies in its affirmation of the central relevance of drama and its symbolism to social life... Renewing the world as the same, abolishing time, ritual creates the world as eternally recurrent.⁸

Beckwith warns, meanwhile, that bringing an anthropological understanding of ritual into the study of early drama also “denies both histories and subjectivities to the agents supposed to enact its homogenising modes, and so it eviscerates them of the capacity to think and doubt, and act and play.”⁹ Below, I employ terms from performance studies, as opposed to anthropological studies of ritual; in so doing, I attempt to uncover a way of discussing a performance practice that “creates the world as eternally recurrent” while still maintaining Cestrians’ agency in that process, especially in their capacity to play.

Throughout the present chapter, I argue that certain cues embedded in the texts (dialogue, gestures, casting, and *mises-en-scène*) play actively with multiple temporalities that only become visible in a community-based performance milieu. Implicitly and explicitly, these cues communicate meanings in a special way when read diachronically, as they recur throughout the lifespan of a Cestrian, across the perceived genealogy of Cestrians, or at a designated point in the Cestrian liturgical year. Since this chapter draws so frequently on performance cues, I rely heavily on the methods and terminology for reconstructing performance that I discuss at length in the Introduction to this project. The chapter will be useful on its own, but stronger when read after that Introduction.

I begin my discussion by surveying and analyzing the plays’ frequent interactions with the *platea*, constant reminders of the Cestrians’ visible presence as witnesses. Next, by reconstructing a moment in the *Bethany/Jerusalem* play that unfolds in the *platea* across generations, I demonstrate that the cycle’s aesthetic power derives from its capacity for staging what performance studies scholars call *community-based performance*. The third section considers youth and age in the cycle as a complex signifier of local time and history, beginning with the boy singers in *Bethany/Jerusalem* and culminating in the *Abraham* play’s sacrifice of Isaac. The fourth section posits that the cycle connects the medieval Christians in Chester’s *platea* to the generations that precede them, casting them as descendants of Abraham and exploiting anxieties about compromising or cutting off that bloodline. The final section shows that such generational symbolism is deeply resonant with Whitsun—the liturgical holiday that occasioned the cycle’s sixteenth-century performances—and reads the Chester *Pentecost* and *Moses/Balaam* plays in terms of that resonance.

In the chapter prior to this one, I discuss the Chester cycle’s resistance to the cultural movements in London on which traditional historical periods are based—allowing the Cestrian performance to produce and maintain a medieval text during the same years that other parts of England had already passed into the early modern period. In the current chapter, I present a sense of time, history, and memory within which the Chester cycle *can* be read. In short, the chapter reads the cycle diachronically—in order to draw evidence out of the play texts for local performance as an ongoing expression of local time and timelessness, a Cestrian present that fuses together, by means of its performance of the cycle, the temporalities of biblical history, local genealogy, community memory, and the liturgical calendar. The cycle texts’ poetic power often relies upon that Cestrian present, and the multiple temporalities that it contains, to make meaning.

Positioning the Platea

Before I can move forward with a deep analysis of the Cestrian community's presence in the Chester cycle, I must show that the cycle meaningfully represents and engages with the local community of spectators at all. That engagement is most visible in the way that the extant texts instruct players to deliver blessings and curses, which happens often enough in the cycle to establish it as a theatrical convention—eighteen of the twenty-four Chester plays depict at least one blessing or curse, while many depict more than one.¹⁰ In what follows, by carefully reconstructing the staging logic embedded in those blessings and curses, I determine that fifteen of them are directed toward the *platea* and the audience in it.¹¹ Since later sections closely examine the role of the *platea* as representative of the Cestrian community in the medieval present in the *Moses/Balaam*, *Annunciation/Nativity*, *Pentecost*, *Antichrist*, and *Judgment* plays, I restrict my discussion here to the ten remaining plays from that list of fifteen. These blessings and curses are often delivered in ways that blur the already porous lines between biblical history and present reality, so that the utterances remain inside the drama but still engage with the spectators as speech acts actually performed by Cestrians, upon Cestrians. Looking outward from the play-world but never breaking it, the plays' blessings and curses do not take their characters out of the drama, but rather draw the present population of Chester into it, as active participants in a real tradition that seems to extend back into biblical roots. The Cestrian community itself is "cast" in the play, as a visible presence in the cycle narrative.

The Chester *Abraham* play ends with two blessings. The first is spoken by the Expositor:

Here lett the [Expositor] kneele downe and saye:
Such obeydence grante us, O lord,
ever to thy moste holye word;
that in the same wee may accorde
as this Abraham was beyne.
And then altogether shall wee
that worthye kinge in heaven see,
and dwell with him in great glorye
for ever and ever. Amen (lines 475-483).

When the Expositor had first entered into the play, he was in the *platea* but raised well above it, declaiming from on horseback (*equitando*, line 113+SH). By the time he reaches his valedictory blessing, 362 lines later, he has moved from the *platea* (the only staging area that can accommodate a horse's entrance) onto the wagon (where he can kneel and still be seen). Then the kneeling gesture brings the Expositor back down to the level of the *platea*, whose onlookers he had once characterized as "the unlearned standinge herebye" (line 115). It also signals a structural change in the drama: the Expositor is now closer to "us," where he closes the play not with his usual exegetical glosses of the action, but by calling forth a communal blessing. Next, the Messenger emerges and adds a final farewell—a somewhat boilerplate valediction, but still a blessing of all bystanders ("you all"), in which a reference to Christ's Passion resonates powerfully with the typological readings performed by the Expositor:

That lord that dyed one Good Frydaye,
[save] you all, both night and daye.
Farewell, my lordings, I goe my waye (lines 489-491).

Normally, an utterance cannot be performative if it is delivered as part of a theatrical pretense: as Richard Schechner points out, when a character in a drama says “I bless,” he does not effect a blessing.¹² However, the two blessings at the end of *Abraham* are uttered by players who are no longer pretending to be anything. The Expositor and Messenger are simply those Cestrians who deliver exposition and messages; after the Expositor kneels, he relinquishes his role as glossator and locates himself more closely to his fellows in the *platea*. As the wagon is about to roll through the *platea* to its next station, its characters bless the *platea* on behalf of all the players: the Messenger’s farewell is also the *Abraham* play’s farewell; the Expositor’s prayer is for all of the spectators gathered nearby. Later, in the *Prophets of Antichrist* play, another Expositor delivers the same kind of valediction:

[H]eaven God grant us in to bee,
 for his names seaven.
 Nowe have I tould you, in good faye,
 the tokens to come before doomesdaye.
 God give you grace to do so aye
 that you them worthy bee
 to come to the blysse that lasteth aye.
 As mych as here wee and our playe,
 of Antechristes signes you shall assaye.
 Hee comes! Soone you shall see! (lines 331-340)

Like the Expositor and Messenger in *Abraham*, the *Prophets of Antichrist*’s Expositor exists just at the border of the diegesis, just as narrative time gives way to real time. He explicitly speaks on behalf of the players (“wee and our playe”), subtly playing local time against biblical time by announcing that the Antichrist—perhaps the dramatized version, but perhaps the real one—will soon arrive into the present moment (“Hee comes! Soone you shall see!”). Meanwhile, in the *Purification/Doctors* play, it is an angel who breaks from the diegesis as it comes to an end (“Now have you hard, all in this place / that Christ is commen through his grace,” lines 327-328), addressing the audience directly:

Leeve you well this, lordes of might,
 and keepe you all his lawes of right,
 that you may in his blisse so bright
 evermore with him to leene (lines 327-334).

In all three plays, the extradiegetic blessings quite clearly address the gathered Christian community from within itself, at the moment when the players are about to move their wagon physically through the *platea*.

What most visibly establishes the blessing of the *platea* as a convention are the four parodies of it, in which villainous characters, as they exit the diegesis, comically curse the audience. The Demon of the *Innocents* play, not content to consign Herod to hell, promises damnation to others who wait in the *platea*:

Warre, warre, for now unwarely wakes your woo!
 For I am swifter then is the rowe.
 I am commen to fetch this lord you froe,
 in woe ever to dwell.

And with this crooked crambocke your backes shall I clowe;
 and all false beleevers I burne and lowe... By my lewtye,
 that filles there measures falselye
 shall beare [Herod] companye;
 the gett none other grave.
 I will you bringe thus to woe,
 and come agayne and fetch moe
 as fast as I maye goe.
 Farewell, and have good-daye (lines 434-457).¹³

The ironic valediction (“Farewell, and have good-daye”) at the end of the Demon’s violent malediction frames the speech less as a genuine warning against future punishments and more as a comic anchoring of the cycle performance in the recurring present. Similarly, the *Harrowing*’s damned Alewife also singles out the “tavernes, tapsters *of this cittye*” (line 301, emphasis added), with a curse: “I betake you, more and lesse, / to my sweete mayster, syr Sathanas” (lines 321-322). In the British Library Harley MS 2124 version of the *Temptation/Adulteress* play, Satan performs his curse as he exits:

Therefore is nowe myne intent
 or I goe to make my testament:
 to all that in this place be lent
 I bequeath the shittle!¹⁴

In all manuscripts of the *Adam* play, Cain performs another curse, similar to Satan’s in the Harley 2124 *Temptation/Adulteress*:

Yea, dam and syre, farewell yee;
 For owt of land I will flee.
 A losell aye I muste bee,
 for scapit I am of thryfte.
 For soe God hath toulde mee,
 that I shall never thryve nee [thee].
 And now I flee, all yee may see.
 I grant you all the same gifte (lines 697-704).

Cain’s curse stands out because of its subtlety—not only because its language is less comically explicit than Satan’s, but also because its target is ambiguous. The other three curses are clearly aimed at the *platea*: the Demon and the Alewife specifically address local criminals and nonbelievers, while Satan’s testament to “all that in this place be lent” can only refer to the audience, since he and Jesus are alone in the desert at the Temptation. The “all yee” who “may see” Cain, appositive with the “you all” whom he curses, most likely refers to the spectators watching the action from outside the world of the play. Within the diegesis, however, it should refer to Adam and Eve, the “dam and syre” to whom Cain initiates his farewell. Cain is still supposed to be speaking to two listeners, his parents, so neither the singular “thee” nor the broad “all yee... you all” seem appropriate. Rather than drawing a clear line between Cain’s curse on his parents and his curse on the audience, the slippage among pronouns (“yee... thee... all yee... you all”) treats the diegetic action as continuous with the world of the *platea*. The audience does not suddenly become visible when Cain addresses them; rather, they have always been present. That ambiguity works well, since the Christian

audience *is* the future progeny of Adam and Eve, extended into the medieval present—a collapsing of biblical and present time that, as I argue later on, will become essential to the *Abraham* play.

The *Lucifer* play also blurs the *platea* into the diegesis by means of ambiguous blessings. God’s first blessing seems clearly directed to the Angels (“As I you made of naughte, my blessinge I geve you here,” line 77), but his second blessing, “As I have made *you all* of noughte / at myne owne wisheinge, / my first day heare have I wroughte. / I geve yt here my blessinge,” (lines 298-301, emphasis added) ends the play with another “you all”—a reminder that the breadth of God’s creation includes the present *platea*. That kind of shift in focus can also occur from manuscript to manuscript. In most cases, God ends the *Noah* play with a blessing of Noah alone, using a singular “thee”: “My blessinge nowe I give thee here, / to thee, Noe, my servante deare, / for vengeance shall noe more appeare. / And now farewell, my darlinge dere” (lines 325-328). In Bodleian Library MS Bodley 175, however, God’s final valediction is to “my *lordinges* dere,” which switches the recipient of God’s blessing (first of protection, then of farewell) before the sentence has ended (the final line is conjoined with “and”), suggesting that the scope of Noah’s covenant extends to all of Noah’s descendants, who are present in real time.

The valedictions of the *Shepherds* and *Emmaus/ Appearance* plays blur the edges of the diegesis more playfully, exploiting the ambiguity of pronouns to gradually draw focus from the wagon outward to the *platea* at the close of the pageant. As the Shepherds bid farewell to each other at the end of their play, for instance, the focus of their language gradually shifts from the personal to the general:

PRIMUS PASTOR	Turne to thy fellowes and kys. I yelde, for in youth we have bine fellowes, iwys. Therefore lend me your mouth, and frendly let us kysse.
SECUNDUS PASTOR	From London to Lowth such another shepperd I wott not where is. Both frend and cowth, God grant you all his blys.
TERTIUS PASTOR	To that blys bringe you great God, if that thy will bee. Amen, all singe you; good men, farewell yee.
GARCIUS	Well for to fare, eych frend, God of his might graunt you; for here now we make an ende. Farewell, for wee from you goe nowe (lines 680-96).

The First Shepherd’s “we have bine fellowes” (line 682) directs itself exclusively to the players standing on the pageant wagon—those who are in close enough proximity to kiss. The Second Shepherd’s “London to Lowth” (line 685) begins to draw the focus outward, while “Both frend and cowth / God grant *you all* his bliss” (lines 687-8, emphasis added) could refer to the fellow Shepherds as easily as to the gathered onlookers in the *platea*, who know that the players are about to move on from their wagon station. The Third Shepherd’s “Amen, all singe you; / good men, farewell yee” (lines 691-692), while it continues to make sense as a blessing from Shepherd to Shepherd, serves especially well as a general valediction to the audience on behalf of the whole *Shepherds* play. Finally, Trowle’s farewell (under the speech heading “GARCIUS”) moves from the

ambiguous to the explicit extradiegetic “for here now we make an ende. / Farewell, for wee from you goe nowe” (lines 695-696)—the play has made its “end,” and it is a plural “wee” (i.e. the whole company, rather than any of the Shepherds, each of whom sets out alone at the end of the play) who say the goodbye to “you” (the audience). Jesus’ final speech in the *Emmans/ Appearance* play employs just as much poetic play:

Yea, Thomas, thou seest nowe in mee.
Thou leevest nowe that I am hee.
But blessed must they all be
that leeve and never see
that I am that same bodye
that borne was of meeke Marye
and on a crosse
your sowles did bye
upon Good Fridaye.
Whoso to this wyll consent,
that I am God omnipotent, as well as they that be present
my dearlynges shalbe aye.
Whoso to this wyll not consent
ever to the daye of judgment,
in hell-fyer they shalbe brent
and ever in sorrowe and teene.
Whosoever on my Father hath any mynd
or of my mother in any kynd,
in heaven blysse they shall yt fynd
withowt any woe.
Christe give you grace to take the waye
unto that joye that lasteth aye,
for there is noe night but ever daye,
for all you thider shall goe (lines 252-275).

Jesus begins with a direct address to Thomas, who sees alone (“thou seest,” in the singular, line 252), but then he refers broadly to “they all / that leeve and never see” (lines 254-255). Then, still speaking in a generalized third person future (“whoso... wyll consent,” line 260), he changes his primary focus from Thomas to Christians across time, necessarily including those present in the *platea*, who will later (as I discuss below) be symbolically separated in the *Judgment* play. He finally breaks character and refers to “Christe” in the third person (line 272), while the Christians who must choose the right “waye” are addressed in the second person plural (“you,” “all you,” line 272-275).

It is the repetitive nature of a theatrical convention that makes it recognizable and familiar to spectators. The cycle’s convention of blessing and cursing, and its location of that convention at the threshold between theatrical play and real performatives, opens up the capacity of the cycle to execute real civic ritual in Chester. The fifteen blessings and curses I have mentioned in this section were repeated across at least four wagon stations, creating a performance tradition that worked sixty or more real performatives into its dialogue. The presence of Christian spectators, then, is not only frequently visible in the texts through direct address, but is also accessible, even tangible, as a real and meaningful presence in the drama. In subsequent sections, I examine the range of valences that the broader Cestrian community, visibly cast in the diegesis, bore as a theatrical signifier.

The Chester Bethany/Jerusalem Play

In the summer of 2010, the University of Toronto and its *Poculi Ludique Societas* hosted *Chester 2010*, a massive revival that invited performance troupes and college clubs from across North America to each prepare and perform a different play from the Chester cycle. During the performances, I asked Linda Phillips, the artistic director of *Poculi Ludique Societas* and the interim director of the revival, what the most memorable performance of the 2010 cycle was. She immediately thought of Kenyon College's *Bethany/Jerusalem* play:

[I]hey had five episodes that they had to do—and their huge elaborate set! I know they've been incredibly enthusiastic. They had thirty students, and they all had matching shirts... and they've just been so excited and happy and having a great time. I was talking to Don-John [Dugas, the play's producer and dramaturge] about it this morning and he said that all this has been “transformative,” he said, for them all. That's exactly what I want—because I had the same experience the first time I saw the Chester cycle in 1983.¹⁵

According to Rosemary Woolf, “there is an obvious danger” that the Chester *Bethany/Jerusalem* play's “fidelity to biblical completeness will lead to the disintegration of the cycle into tiny scenes, and this is the effect of the Chester author's unwillingness to select or rearrange.” Phillips finds thrillingly “huge” in the *Bethany/Jerusalem* performance what Woolf finds “dispersed and sprawling” in the corresponding manuscript texts.¹⁶ The idea of a singular “Chester author,” a subject I take up at length in the Introduction to this project, necessarily flattens the modern reader's experience of the cycle; still, many critics continue to employ a single-author model (most notably Peter Travis). But Phillips's appraisal takes in the entire performance process, witnessed partially from the inside, as experienced by an inclusive, large cast that brings players into close contact and creates links with those who have come before (“because I had the same experience”). The power of the production, for Phillips, was in the way its participants performed, throughout the process, their personal commitment to and investment in the material.

In the present section, I analyze the *Bethany/Jerusalem* text to uncover the aesthetic values around which it is organized. Of particular interest is the unwieldy size of the play's cast. Cast size is especially inflated in the *Bethany/Jerusalem* play, but many of Chester's plays call for more than twenty participants at a time, often including more roles than dramatically necessary. I show that the form of such plays, which commonly includes large-scale actions performed in the *platea*, like the communal recitation of hymns, demands many players. These large casts' formalized recitations are not haphazardly misshapen; rather, they are subject to a community-based aesthetic in which size, scope, and repetition are sources of beauty and affect.

To the critic accustomed to aesthetic distance, Phillips's responses may seem patronizing or unserious, more a measure of whether a production is cute than whether it is artistic. However, according to theater theorist and practitioner Jan Cohen-Cruz, performance criticism that assumes aesthetic distance cannot make proper sense of an art form that “relies on closeness”:¹⁷

[It] is awkward at times but also capable of providing a different perspective than professional actors can communicate. The commitment of people who've lived through the circumstances performed is the pleasure it offers in place of virtuosity.¹⁸

Diachrony is inherent to the criticism of what Cohen-Cruz and her colleagues call *community-based performance*. “Time is opened up,” Cohen-Cruz writes, by an art form in which “equal value [is] placed on pre- and postperformance phases—the play, in and of itself, is *not* the (only) thing.”¹⁹ The

“engaged critic” must adjust the scope of his or her analysis so that it can comprehend the total artistic work over time, which includes development stages, rehearsal, ongoing social effects, and future recurring productions.²⁰ Such a reading requires the critic to consider how that process might look or feel to those making and performing it—not just to those watching it. As Cohen-Cruz puts it, a work of community-based performance is “reciprocal” in that “destination and source are joined at the hip,” so critics must focus “on a collective purpose rather than on the individual maker.”²¹ Those who perform and produce the plays are among the most important audience members of the plays, even as they experience them from the inside.²² I argue that to read the Chester *Bethany/Jerusalem* play without considering its recurring performance using familiar actors—its community-based aesthetic—is to empty its textual, gestural, and musical structure of its most evocative symbolisms.

A long view on performance can “provide emotional and intellectual linkage between our individual lives, those who have come before, and those who will come after.”²³ In the case of the *Chester 2010* revival, Phillips quite clearly engaged with the productions as community-based performances. Cohen-Cruz asserts above all that Phillips’s kind of values are valid measures of aesthetic effect. A critic’s view is “obstructed” if he or she assumes polished, professional virtuosity is always superior to the thrills of raw, personal risk and commitment that the arts can also afford.²⁴ Like Phillips, Cohen-Cruz “enjoy[s] the efficacy in a community-based performance, sensing a person transforming or a situation moving forward as a result of the work.”²⁵ The aesthetic value of a community-based performance depends on how much, how visibly, and how skillfully it makes use of a collective process and relies on as many participants as possible, displaying their real identities, vulnerabilities, personal connection and commitment.²⁶ For instance, the director of the *Chester 2010 Bethany/Jerusalem* play, Molly MacLagan, noticed that a “go big or go home” production concept was implicit in the extant *Bethany/Jerusalem* text itself, which is why, she says, the sets and costumes became accretive collaborations that employed design ideas drawn from nearly all participants in the process (another way in which the production was community-based).²⁷ Cohen-Cruz points out that such performances are especially effective when they broadly encompass and interact with the community’s physical location over an extended period, as with much of Suzanne Lacy’s community-based dance and theater.²⁸

It is my contention here that the extant text of the Chester *Bethany/Jerusalem* play is indeed governed by an aesthetic system that is aligned more with Cohen-Cruz’s values than with Woolf’s, and that this system carries with it a community-based discourse by which Cestrian players communicated meaning by making their identities visible. The performance of the cycle was continuous with an ongoing set of guild festivities that marked the liturgical year. Guilds continued to parade their plays’ characters in costume or tableaux during the Midsummer procession even in years that the cycle was not performed, evidence that the performance “process” never decisively ended, or at least that it persisted in Chester’s social life and cultural memory for an extended period.²⁹ The citizens of Chester certainly conceived of themselves as continually living through the biblical history that they performed. As I mention in Chapters One and Three, they often insert recognizable representations of themselves into the narrative as revelers, players, clowns, drunken gossips, and alewives. That performance of local identity relies on recurrence across a broad process—not only from rehearsal to performance, but also from performance to performance, across generations. Sarah Beckwith has already made a strong case that the York community constitutes itself around the body of Christ in its *Entry into Jerusalem* play, gathering in celebration as at a royal entry or civic procession, and then bearing guilt when those same social bonds are used to persecute and crucify Jesus.³⁰ The added episode at Chester, which fuses Jesus’ ejection of the merchants from the temple with his entry into Jerusalem, is another probable nod to the guild classes as members of the guilt-bearing community. What concerns me in this section is how the

form of the extant text not only supports the community-based resonance of its content, but also how that form extends beyond scriptural symbolism to strengthen local bonds in local terms.

The extant text of the *Bethany/Jerusalem* play does yoke together multiple episodes, to the degree that it necessarily requires many changes of scene and a large cast. In the text, Jesus announces that he will travel to Simon the Leper's house; there, Martha receives Jesus, and Mary Magdalene offers expensive ointment to Jesus, offending both Simon and Judas. Jesus drives the devils out of Mary Magdalene, then announces his intention to travel into Jerusalem, sending Peter and Philip to retrieve an ass and foal for his journey. After a comic exchange with the Stable-keeper, Peter and Philip take the ass and foal and return to Jesus; the Stable-keeper, meanwhile, tells his fellow citizens the news that Jesus has come. Seven adult citizens and three (or more) boys make plans for Jesus' arrival by waving palm fronds and laying fine clothes on the ground, and by singing hymns. Jesus enters Jerusalem on the ass; he delivers a monologue lamenting that the kind city will soon turn on him, and then he finds that two merchants have set up shop in the temple, so he drives them out. The frustrated Judas, meanwhile, meets Caiaphas, Annas, and two Pharisees, with whom he conspires to betray Jesus.

The *Chester 2010* production, to accommodate the scope of its play, made use of two wagons. The Chester Cordwainers, who produced the early English productions, had neither the resources nor the space to do this: the records make clear that guilds could maintain and store only one wagon each. The streets of Chester, while wide, could not accommodate more than one wagon at a time. Since the playing areas are so limited, and since the *Bethany/Jerusalem* play demands from those areas an unusually high number of scene changes, it is relatively easy to use the *Bethany/Jerusalem* play's basic staging requirements to reconstruct a reliable sense of whether each scene took place on the wagon or in the *platea*.

1. *Opening*: Jesus' announcement that he will travel to Bethany and to Simon's house requires that he, Peter, and Philip (along with Judas and any other Apostles who are not named in the scene) stand somewhere distinct from Simon's house. That means (see below) that the opening must occur either in the *platea* or on the outside lip of the wagon, as close to the street as possible. Since Jesus' announcement takes the form of an aside, it makes sense that he would be physically close to the spectators.
2. *Tunc ibunt versus domum Simonis leprosi* ("Then they go to the house of Simon the Leper," line 16+SD). Simon's house requires room for a table and chairs, and enough space to accommodate at least Jesus, Judas, Peter, Philip, Martha, Simon, and Mary Magdalene. Mary Magdalene's primary and extended gesture occurs when she washes Jesus' feet, so it is necessary that she be raised to eye level even while crouching (otherwise, bystanders could not see her). Also, the scene occurs indoors (where others are clearly outside): it is thus almost certain that Simon's house is located on the wagon.
3. *Peter and Phillipe, my brethren free, / before you a castle you may see. / Goe you thider and fetch anon to mee / an asse and a foale alsoe* (lines 137-140). Jesus refers to the new location as a place distinct from where he is currently standing (on the wagon, at Simon's house). He sees a "castle" there, which may be a light reference to one of Chester's structures (though Chester Castle would not have been in close proximity to any wagon station, other major civic structures were adjacent to the stations).
4. *Tunc ibunt in civitatem* ("Then they go into the city," line 152+SD). Peter and Philip must make a clear exit from the house of Simon into the outdoor scene at Jerusalem, strongly suggesting that they now cross from the wagon into the *platea*. Further evidence that this scene is in the *platea* is that it, like many other scenes in the cycle, involves livestock (in this case, the ass that Jesus must ride, as well as the foal). Livestock, especially those

- animals who can carry a fully-grown player, are easy to manage and lead in the street but almost impossible to lead onto and off of a raised mobile wagon, where they would take up too much space and where they would likely cause unnecessary disorder and mess.
5. *Tunc ibit Janitor ad cives* (“Then the Stable-keeper goes to the citizens,” line 168+SD). Peter and Philip take the ass and foal back to Jesus, who was last seen on the wagon. Meanwhile, the plays focus remains on the Stable-keeper, who approaches the “cives,” the citizens of Jerusalem. It is most likely that he remains in the *platea* to do so, since the outdoor area of Jerusalem has already been attached to the *platea*, and since the present scene is bookended by two scenes that clearly take place indoors (see above and below). That likelihood is strengthened by the fact that the citizens lay their clothes “in the way”/“*in via*” (“in the street,” lines 195 and 208+SD), since the *platea* offered a street setting. It is further strengthened by the fact that Jesus must ride the ass back across those clothes, a task that is vastly easier to do on solid ground (see above). It is confirmed by the necessity that the temple scene (see below) should take place on the wagon. The wagon must be vacated and the focus shifted from it for long enough for the players to strike the chairs and cast members from Simon’s house and replace them with the merchants and their tables, which (see below) require some care in setting up.
 6. *Et cum venerit ad templum, descendens de asina dicat vendentibus, cum flagello* (“And having come to the temple, he speaks to the merchants while descending from the ass, with a whip,” line 224+SD.) Jesus must descend from his ass in order to begin the scene in the temple, another scene that takes place indoors. The location of this scene on the wagon is especially likely because Jesus threatens the merchants by swinging a whip—an effect that is much more difficult to execute effectively (not to mention safely) in the *platea*. There is still further evidence that this scene takes place on the wagon: Jesus casts down the merchants’ wares and money, which probably require small props (if they are not mimed). If small props are scattered during the action of the play, then the scattering must occur in a way in which the small props may be quickly and easily retrieved. If the props are scattered in the street, then the players must scramble to find them after the show, likely under the feet of spectators. If they are scattered on the wagon, then the players can clear the area more easily (when the wagon is moved, the props will move with it), so that they can be collected from a more confined space, while the wagon is in transit between stations.
 7. *Judas’ monologue*. It is likely that Judas’ aside still occurs on the wagon (distinguished from the other action of the table by Judas stepping to an outer lip of the wagon) because the next stage direction specifies that he exits (*abiiit*), suggesting that he remains indoors and steps forward to deliver an aside.
 8. *Tunc Judas pro tempore abiit, et Cayphas dicit* (“Then Judas exits for the time being, and Caiaphas speaks,” line 304+SD.) Judas likely meets the Pharisees in the *platea*, but it is also possible that he meets them on the wagon (his monologue leaves enough time for exits and entrances to occur behind him, and it would make reasonable sense for the Pharisees to be located in the temple).

At scene 4, when Peter and Philip *ibunt in civitatem*, they literally go “into the city” by crossing into the *platea*—the street of Chester becomes the street of Jerusalem. It is full of citizens who are potential witnesses to Christ’s divinity (or potential persecutors, as Jesus’ lament affirms). When Peter and Philip cross into that space, the tone of the dialogue changes:

PHILLIPUS

Hye that we were at the towne.

Great joye in hart have we mone
on this arrand for to goe.

Tunc ibunt in civitatem, et dicat Petrus Janitro:

JANITOR
How, how! I must have this asse.
Here thou gettest neither more then lesse
but thou tell me or thou passe
whither they shall goe (lines 150-156).

The play could make a smoother transition here by jumping directly to when Philip explains to the Stable-keeper that Jesus is coming, causing the Stable-keeper to lend the ass and foal readily (lines 157-165). Instead, the Apostles' grand rhetoric, which infuses even the smallest errand with symbolic power, is counterbalanced by the Stable-keeper's common sense—just as the Apostles have stepped down into the street, the scene becomes decidedly more down-to-earth. Following on Jesus' direction that his "brethren free" should look out at the city, the community gathered around the wagon—among whom the Stable-keeper stands—is rendered newly visible.

The Apostles take the ass and foal and recede, but the action remains centered on the Stable-keeper: he keeps moving and he keeps talking. He makes his announcement of Jesus' arrival while he remains in the *platea*:

Tunc ibit Janitor ad cives.

Tydinges, good men evrye one!...
The prophet Jesus comes anone.
Of his disciples, yonder gonne
Twayne that were nowe here.
For his marvayles leeve aye upon
that hee is verey Goddes Sonne
although hee in this [worlde] wonne—
for elles wonder were (lines 169-76).

Delivered from street level among an audience that was free to come and go as it pleased, this speech cannot but serve to gather and alert possible witnesses in Chester as much as it does in Jerusalem. It emphasizes that the presence of "Goddes Sonne" is right here, in the real, immediate world—in some manuscripts, he "in this worlde wonne" (dwells in this world), and in some he is "in this wonne" (is in this dwelling place). The Stable-keeper's "*ibit... ad cives*" might require that he walk in a new direction, but not in one that is away from the audience. Every direction in the *platea* is outward—and so every possible arrangement of Jerusalem's *cives* places them among Chester's citizens. The scene renders the crowd a still more active presence, addressing them all as "*cives*" (which, as Cestrian locals, they are) and it does so without interrupting the dramatic flow of the scene. Six Citizens emerge from the *platea* and speak four-line verses in turn, one by one:

PRIMUS CIVIS

A, lord, blessed most thou bee!
Him will I goe nowe and see;
and so I read that all wee
thidderward take the waye.

SECUNDUS CIVIS

Fellowes, I leeve that Christ is hee,
commen from God in majestie;
elles such marveyles, as thinkes mee,
hee ney did daye for daye (lines 177-184, emphasis added).

Each Citizen presents a four-line half-stanza, so that every other Citizen completes the stanza initiated by the one before him. There is a sense that some are moving “thidderward” to meet Jesus while some are staying closer, to spread fine clothes “in the way / as soone as I him see.” In other words, rather than moving between wagon and *platea*, the suggestion is that the Citizens are moving through and around the *platea* (to form the path along which Jesus will ride). For the remainder of this section, I closely analyze the series of four-line speeches delivered by the Citizens of Jerusalem in the *Bethany/Jerusalem* play—a series which culminates in the singing of a hymn.

The Citizens’ speeches often address the imagined collective of fellow citizens that is represented by the unnamed *cives*, or their town and its traditions: “and so I read that all wee / thidderward take the waye,” “Fellowes,” “devotion nowe I have / to welcome him to this towne,” “wee... welcome him to this cittie / with fayre processionn.” The repetition of “this towne” and “this cittie” with its “fayre processionn” bring attention to the immediacy and presence of Chester itself as a player in the drama. After the six Citizens recite their lines in turn, two Boys emerge, continuing to spread the good word:

PRIMUS PUER	Fellowes, I hard my father saye Jesu the prophet will come todaye. Thidder I read we take the waye with branches in our hand.
SECUNDUS PUER	Make we myrth all that we maye pleasant to that lordes paye. “Hosanna!” I read, by my faye, to syng that we founde.

Tunc ibunt pueri versus Jerusalem cantantes “Hosanna!” cum ramis palmarum in manibus. Et cives prosternent vestimenta sua in via: “Hosanna, filio David! Benedictus qui venit in nomine domini! Hosanna in excelsis!” (“Then the Boys go into Jerusalem singing ‘Hosanna!’ with palm fronds in their hands. And the Citizens lay their clothing in the street: ‘Hosanna, son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!’” lines 201-208+SD)

Here, six boys of Chester (the play text above calls for at least three of them, since the First Boy refers to his “fellowes”; the Cordwainers’ records for 1549 account for six) emerge and declaim their version of the tidings of Jesus’ arrival.³¹ They probably begin on the wagon or some other high place, since the direction “*ibunt... versus Jerusalem*” follows their speeches, suggesting that they must enter from outside the *platea* in order to walk into it.

According to the same stage direction, the Boys walk into the *platea* (“Jerusalem”), where they lead the whole group, Citizens and Boys, in a familiar liturgical hymn (the “Hosanna.”) Sung in the street among the spectators, the stage direction presents the “Hosanna” as a call-and-response, initiated by youths and completed by adults. The Citizens and Boys carry out the simple but symbolically powerful gestures (waving palm fronds once, placing clothes on the ground, singing a call and response) that often characterize the modern community-based performances discussed by Cohen-Cruz.³² When there are very large groups of local performers, community-based aesthetics tend to create massive unison, creating an effect that not only affirms common ground but that also makes the group of participants seem still larger. When a local space is surrounded by or saturated with performers carrying out simple gestures in unison, that space effectively becomes “part of the performance,” framed into a coherent shape.³³ In sixteenth-century Chester, the Citizens and Boys’ gestures and song draw spectators into that sense of unison. Those gestures are

located in the *platea* and performed by characters whose only identifying characteristic is that they, like most of the spectators, are *citizens* who witness and then pass tidings about what they witness.

What Chester's original productions had that the Kenyon undergraduate performers at *Chester 2010's Bethany/Jerusalem* could not have had, other than a *platea* full of citizens from the same community as the players who acted as Citizens, was the other side of community-based unison for large groups of performers: diversity, at least in terms of performers' ages. Often playing against the unison effect of community-based aesthetics is the desire on the part of organizers to involve a cast whose demographics are proportional to the demographics of the community at large. They take special care in some cases to involve participants of diverse ages.³⁴ The call-and-response in *Bethany/Jerusalem* is initiated by children, who mimic their adult counterparts by passing on the tidings of Christ's arrival ("Fellowes, I hard my father saye," line 201). I discuss the effect of age difference in the cycle at more length in subsequent sections, but suffice it to say that a diversity of ages in *Bethany/Jerusalem* allows its gestures of unison to appear not only to be large in scale but also inclusive in scope, involving the community at all levels.

Performed unison and diversity are at their most effective when the group of community performers featured in a performance is as large as possible. With that in mind, arts facilitators often take steps to increase cast sizes, to add participatory spectacles, and to redouble recruitment and outreach (especially in parts of the community whose demographics are not yet well-represented in the group of participants). The oversized structure of the Chester cycle makes new sense when it is evaluated in terms of a community-based aesthetic in which bigger is better (because the beauty of the performance is in its scope, and so in its representation of diverse people acting together). There are at least twenty-seven speaking or singing players featured in the *Bethany/Jerusalem* play—and there may be as many as nine non-speaking Apostles present at Simon's house. What Woolf sees as "danger" in the play's "fidelity to biblical completeness" is what allows the play to include a critical mass of players, including the Merchants, as a representation of the community. In the Chester cycle's New Testament plays, the seemingly haphazard organization of diverse biblical episodes into distinct play units actually ensures relative continuity in cast sizes. The play prior to *Bethany/Jerusalem*, the *Blind Man/Lazarus* play, involves at least nineteen participants, probably more; the play following *Bethany/Jerusalem*, the *Last Supper*, involves at least twenty-two. Dramatic economy and unity do not govern the Chester *Bethany/Jerusalem* play; if they did, half of its players would have to be cut. Instead, the play's aesthetic relies on its capacity to engage vibrantly with as large and as varied a group of citizens as possible, in part because the experience of the players is as important as the experience of spectators—the players, too, are local Cestrians who are personally invested in the production process. In the fabric of its casting, the *Bethany/Jerusalem* play ensures that the convivial guild events that occur in conjunction with the production—players' breakfasts and rehearsal dinners, which I discuss at more length in Chapter Three—will be well-attended. The large size of the cast also has an important effect on the audience; it ensures that the Cestrian spectators will be likely to recognize a familiar face in the cast as the players' gestures encourage the audience to make "myrth" with them (line 205).³⁵ Like any good community-based performance, it skillfully asks for different contributions from different people: while Jesus and Judas must carry forward emotional narratives that are many lines long, the Citizens and Boys each recite only four lines of tidings each (A, lord, blessed most thou bee! / Him will I goe nowe and see; / and so I read that all wee / thidderward take the waye," lines 177-80), then they sing the Hosanna as a group.³⁶ The variation in size and type of contribution strongly suggests the involvement of players with differing skill levels, another sign that a broad scope of Cestrians were visible in the plays.

Those four-line recitations of tidings are a call-and-response too, though in a less strict sense than the "Hosanna" hymn that follows. The tidings are not densely packed with meaning: they

often only affirm what has already been said. Spoken in turn, the verses bring the small roles in the *Bethany/Jerusalem* play into a strongly symmetrical sense of order:

QUINTUS CIVIS

With all the worshippe that I maye
I welcome him will todaye,
and spread my clothes in the waye
as soone as I him see.

SEXTUS CIVIS

These miracles preeven appertlye
that from the Father almightie
hee is comen, mankynd to bye;
yt may not other bee (lines 193-200).

That order itself creates bonds between speakers—citizens are paired by the b-lines of the typical Chester stanza, here rhyming on “see” and “bee” (lines 196 and 200), so that every other citizen neatly completes the rhyme of the speaker before him. What matters, and what is entertaining, is that each familiar player speaks his bit part in turn before a community of neighbors. Having entered into and moved through the *platea*, then, the Citizens bring to Chester’s streets and bystanders a kind of poetic unity, in which each person introduces the next person after him, with the children of the city coming last in line.

An ordering structure of half-stanzas or stanzas spoken in turn by bit players is not only built into the *Bethany/Jerusalem* play. It recurs throughout the cycle, in *Lucifer*’s nine orders of angels, the four Angels in *Adam*, Noah’s six sons and daughters-in-law, the prophets in the H Manuscript’s *Moses/Balaam*, the Doctors who debate with the Boy Jesus, the unnamed Pharisees in the *Trial and Passion*, the Three Maries at the *Passion and Resurrection*, the Prophets and Kings of the *Antichrist* plays, the Damned and Saved at *Judgment*, and especially the twelve Apostles at the *Pentecost*. In each case, the content of the lines is often redundant, while the form is dedicated to increasing the visibility of a wide variety of players. The lines very often occur in ways that metrically pair speakers together, speakers who are often numbered rather than named and who emerge from or explicitly speak on behalf of a crowd.

In other words, the Chester cycle’s requirement of at least 353 participants is the result of most of its plays’ inflating their casts for the sake of inclusion. Its diverse cast is continually lined up by number and often by age. In the bit roles especially, the cycle engages the community in a highly participatory dramatic *game* in which everyone gets a turn, and whose aesthetic is one of radical symmetry and order.³⁷ The *Bethany/Jerusalem* play in particular brings many and diversely aged participants into close contact with each other and with spectators; it broadly encompasses and interacts with the community’s physical location; it exploits its players’ varied strengths. It creates a down-to-earth interruption in the gospel narrative that draws focus away from the major players and puts it on the *platea*. It provides an experience for as broad a group of community members as possible, and displays those community members engaging in a set of familiar and accessible gestures, words, and especially songs, whose call-and-response structure is oriented toward collective participation. It repeats, over and over, the idea that its ensemble is made up of the citizens of “this town.” It *works*—but it works because it is based in its community, and because it involves as much of that community as possible.

The Boys of Chester

In the Cestrian *platea*, the short verses (four-line speeches), hymn (the “Hosanna”) and physical gestures (lifting palm fronds in unison, laying clothing in unison) cued by the *Bethany/Jerusalem* play

most powerfully create patterns by separating Cestrian children from adults, and having their words and actions mirror each other. The First Boy refers back to the Stable-keeper as his “father,” suggesting that when the Boys repeat the same tidings that the Citizens relay, they are mirroring a prior generation. It is endearing to imagine the Boys’ short lines recited by local Cestrian children; it is moving to consider, across generations of performers, the likelihood that the Cestrian boys singing the response in “Hosanna” were once quite probably the men who sang the call.³⁸ Because the plays are performed many times during the players’ lifetimes, this call-and-response staging between boys and men implies a rite of passage in which the males of Chester are placed in an order—established by gesture and recitation—that visibly marks the stages in their lives.

That is the thrill of modern community-based youth performance—think of the countless local productions of the *Nutcracker*, in which we watch our children grow from sugar-plum fairies into Rat Kings, then into Claras—we realize that the *Nutcracker* is so frequently produced at the local level precisely because it displays, in clear stages, the maturation of recognizable family members. I argue here that the Chester cycle is doing the same thing for its community at large, and that the symbolism of its content amplifies the effect. The entire cycle’s cast list is inflated with bit parts and cameos, small parts whose sole purpose seems to be to reflect real Cestrians back to each other and endow them with an imagined place in secular and scriptural history. And half of the twenty-four Chester plays feature at least one role for a child. There is no evidence that adults ever took on the role of boys; on the contrary, there are cases in which guild expense accounts record stipends specifically paid to boy performers.³⁹ I have already mentioned that the *Bethany/Jerusalem* play conspicuously brings Cestrians of different ages or levels of experience into close contact with each other; I argue here that the Chester cycle as a whole relentlessly creates scenes of such close contact, especially involving children.⁴⁰ The structures of Chester’s *Annunciation/Nativity*, *Shepherds*, and *Purification/Doctors* plays, especially in their *mises-en-scene* and gestures, exploit the implicit rite of passage in the distance between old and young roles. The display of the boys’ bodies highlights their reproductive capacity and provides a focal point for blessings or mandates that ensure the continuing procreation of Cestrians.

In order to analyze Cestrian players’ engagement with children, I must briefly consider what it means to be a child in a medieval context. Nicholas Orme has demonstrated decisively that medieval adults, especially after the twelfth century, tended to regard childhood as a distinct phase of life.⁴¹ That distinction rose to a new height of importance when belief in the Real Presence developed in the late twelfth century:

One had to guard against the [sacramental] elements being spilt or regurgitated, and a conviction grew among Church leaders that you needed to believe in the Presence to receive communion rightly. Children came to seem too young to understand what they were getting.⁴²

Those concerns crystallized in the Fourth Lateran Council’s requirement that all Christians confess and receive communion annually, but only after they had “reached the age of discernment.”⁴³ That precise age of passage from youth into adulthood could vary widely depending on context, but according to Orme it seems to have roughly occurred at the beginning of puberty, based on the (dubious) assumption that sexual maturity brought with it “mental maturity,” a shift from *pueritia* into *adolescencia*.⁴⁴

The Chester cycle, as I have already shown, tends to inflate its casts and add extra roles wherever possible. Especially noticeable, beyond the Boys in the *Bethany/Jerusalem* play, is the cycle’s incidental and often extra-biblical addition of roles for boys, its inclusion of biblical youths, and its assignment to boy players certain characters whose age is not specified in the Bible. Some care

seems to have been taken in seeing that young Cestrians could always participate in holiday theatrics. About ten of the twenty-four Chester plays feature at least one speaking role for a boy. Half the plays thus feature children reciting lines—a spectacle in itself.

Clues to the relative ages of the boy actors in the Chester plays emerge when the speeches of the boys are examined: the parts assigned to the boys marked as “lyttle” usually require little memorization. In two manuscripts of the *Pentecost* (Hm and B), Jesus appears as “Lyttle God” and speaks six lines to the Apostles; in two manuscripts of the *Offerings* (A and R), the baby Jesus speaks four lines of blessing from Mary’s arms.⁴⁵ In the *Shepherds* play, Four Boys bring gifts to the baby Jesus (as I discuss below, those boys are younger than the Shepherds’ young apprentice, Trowle); each Boy speaks between eight and thirteen lines. Meanwhile, there are roles of comparable length assigned to children whose ages are less clearly specified. I have already mentioned the short speaking, singing, and gestural roles for boy citizens in the *Bethany/Jerusalem* play. Chester’s *Resurrection* features two players as Angels who, according to Mary Magdalene, appear in the form of “children”; they each speak four lines. After Jesus’ opening monologue in Chester’s *Blind Man/Lazarus* play, a Boy enters, leading the Blind Man (“*ducens caecum*”). To help the Blind Man collect his alms, the Boy speaks four lines, then waits silently as Jesus cures his master and sets the play’s action in motion. The Boy does not speak again.⁴⁶ Another boy silently brings Herod’s drinking-cup (a “pigge”) in the *Three Kings* play.

In contrast to the small roles (some or all of which are reserved for small boys), another group of boys also emerges in the cycle—those hovering around *adolescentia*—whose parts are more complex. These latter boys play very significant parts in the cycle overall, parts which are the central subjects of this section and the one immediately following. Chester’s *Abraham*, *Annunciation/Nativity*, *Shepherds*, and *Purification/Doctors* plays feature Isaac, Octavian’s Herald, Trowle, and the boy Jesus, respectively.⁴⁷ These most important of the boys in the Chester cycle are, as I demonstrate below, just entering or just leaving *adolescentia*. As I note above, the cycle’s internal clock is calibrated on the assumption that it will continue in perpetuity; its Abraham, Octavian, or Joseph might easily cast his eyes across the wagon and see the Isaac, Herald, and Trowle that he himself once played as a boy. The plays’ emphasis on the sexual capacity of youth is instrumental in the cycle’s capacity to mark the passage of time in the lives of Cestrians. As these boys grow into or out of *adolescentia*, losing the ability to play some roles and gaining the ability to play others, they are drawn into a religiously charged symbolic order of gesture and recitation that marks the various stages in their lives. I propose that the aesthetic structure of the cycle as a whole is largely founded on that order—an unending progression from youth to age across generations.

Chester’s *Annunciation/Nativity*, like many medieval Nativity plays, is above all a play about fertility, not only in the miracles of Mary and Elizabeth’s wombs, but also in the archetypal sterility of the “ould and cold” Joseph, who, after “these xxxtie winters,” “might not playe noe playe” (lines 134-6). At Chester, the metadramatic pun on *playe* as both a recreational and reproductive act sets in place the notion that a player’s participation in the Nativity *playe* is itself, at some level, related to his reproductive capacity. Joseph thus stands in stark contrast to the emperor of Rome, Octavian, another aging man, but the “manfulst man of might” (line 224). To a Christian audience, what will be most impressive about Octavian is his humble but powerful denial of the divine status that his Senators attempt to give him, even before he learns about the birth of Jesus:

[O]f all flesh, blood, and bonne
made I am, borne of a womane;
and sycker other matter nonne
sheweth not right in mee.
Neyther of iron, tree, ne stonne

am I not wrought, you wott eychone.
And of my life moste parte is gone,
age shewes him soe in mee (lines 322-9).

Counterbalancing the godlike imperial power that his Senators offer him is Octavian's own focus on his human "flesh" (line 322), its place in the reproductive order ("borne of a womane," line 323) and its age (lines 328-9). The aged Octavian summons his Herald ("Preco"), whom he addresses twice as a "boye" (lines 274, 278). Even if this address to the Herald is a diminutive only because he is a servant rather than because of his literal age, Octavian's choice of "boye" still powerfully contrasts the Herald with his lord, in whom "age shewes" (line 329). In the figure of the Herald, the reproductive symbolism of the *Annunciation/Nativity* emerges in comic form:

OCTAVIANUS	Have donne, boye! Art thou not bowne?
PRECO	All ready, my lorde, by Mahounde. Noe tayles tupp in all this towne shall goe further withowten fayle (lines 274-7).

The Herald playfully compares his own ability to "goe" (i.e. to travel on Octavian's behalf) with that of a tail-less "tupp," a breeding ram. As Lumiansky and Mills point out, this reference "almost certainly contains sexual suggestion," perhaps especially because the breeding time for sheep was in late December, the time of the Nativity.⁴⁸ Chester's First Shepherd, Hankeynn, later suggests that it is his "taytful" (nimble, lively, vigorous) "tuppes" who have led him so far into the wild (*Shepherds* lines 9-11)—breeding rams seem to "goe" farther than usual sheep, with extra stamina and energy.⁴⁹ The Herald, by assuring Octavian that he has even more "going" power than a breeding ram, suggests that the speed and stamina required for his travel on Octavian's behalf is driven by the same sexual energy.

After some comic banter, Octavian is pleased enough with his Herald's promise that he offers him his choice of sexual mates from Judea:

Boye, there bine ladyes manye one;
amonge them all chose thee onne.
Take the fayrest or els none,
and freely I give her thee (lines 293-6).

When the Herald leaves Octavian to survey Judea (and to collect on his reward), the stage directions instruct him to speak his verses in a loud, public voice ("*alta voce*," line 372+SD)—a clue that in this case, as in so many other similar speeches throughout the cycle, the "men and weomen and eych wight" (line 374) to whom the Herald speaks are represented by the gathered community in the *platea*. This suggestion is confirmed when the Herald directly addresses the Cestrians, demanding that each man give him a penny (line 385), thereby dissolving the distinction between Chester and Judea. The audience gathered to watch the play, then stands in for the people of Judea, from whom the Herald will choose his mate. In the *platea*, the past world depicted by the play merges with the Cestrian future in the figure of the young actor playing the Herald—who, presumably, will one day search among the same Cestrian community for a mate as he passes through his own "tupping" time. The past and future events are historically real; the Cestrian present is the representational fulcrum on which they are balanced.

Youth and age come into contact again in the *Shepherds*, this time involving more specific variations among its characters' ages. The gift-giving in the *Shepherds* is done in turn, first by the adults, then by youth:

PRIMUS PASTOR Who shall goe first? The page?
SECUNDUS PASTOR Nay, yee be father in age.
 Therefore ye must first offer (lines 549-551).

The “page” here is Trowle; I suggest that Trowle, like the Herald, is a subordinate who is undergoing the transition between *pueritia* and *adolescencia*. The language used to refer to Trowle, and the ordering of the gift-giving ritual itself, place Trowle at that moment of transition, especially with respect to his fellow characters. As Trowle’s superiors alternate between easy banter and friendly mocking, they sometimes call Trowle a *miting* (a “diminutive creature,” line 159), sometimes a *kenave* (another word that can stand for “servant” and “boy,” line 211), sometimes a *page* (lines 225, 549), sometimes a *boy* (line 226, 258), sometimes a *man* (line 192), often a *lad* (lines 243, 250).⁵⁰ His gift to the baby Jesus is “a payre of my wyves ould hose” (line 591), so he is old enough to marry, but perhaps just barely. In three of the five manuscripts, his speech headings are not “Trowle” but “Garcius,” from medieval Latin *garcio*, probably via Old French *gars*, which during the sixteenth century in French and English usage was narrowing its meaning from “attendant” to “boy.”⁵¹

Trowle refers to his “fellowes” at line 208; Lumiansky and Mills are probably correct that “[s]ince his fellows seem to be distinct from the three shepherds, the reference is probably to his companions, the other boys, who... appear to give gifts to the infant Christ.”⁵² The “other boys” in this case are the four other shepherds’ assistants who have cameo-length speeches between eight and thirteen lines, near the end of the play, under the speech headings “THE FIRST BOYE,” “THE SECOND BOYE,” and so forth. The brevity of these Boys’ speeches is a clue to their age, relative to Trowle’s more substantial role. The Fourth Boy’s gift, in contrast to Trowle’s wife’s old hose (a symbol of Trowle’s sexual maturity), is a nuthook:

Nowe, chyld, although thou be comen from God
and bee thyselfe God in thy manhoode,
yet I knowe that in thy chyldhood
thow will for sweetemeat looke.
To pull downe apples, payres, and ploomes,
ould Joseph shall not neede to hurte his handes;
because thow haste not plentye of cromes,
I give thee here my nuthooke (lines 633-640).

The Fourth Boy characterizes the search for sweetmeats as a practice that is reserved for Jesus’ childhood (lines 634-6), as opposed to the more serious activities in which he will engage as a man—a tender reflection on the idea that though Jesus is born into both godhood and manhood, he is currently only a child. The fruit still ripening on the tree works is a sign of fertility here, a metaphor for a series of rites of passage between ages. Joseph’s body has become too old to pluck fruit (line 638) just as it can no longer produce offspring (*Annunciation/Nativity* lines 134-6; *Shepherds* lines 496-499). Jesus passes into the “chyldhood” stage of pulling down fruit with a nuthook, a reminder that it will otherwise be too high for him to reach (lines 634-6). The Fourth Boy, in making a gift of a sign of early childhood, gives it up himself—it is *his own* nuthook (line 640)—which suggests that he is passing into a new age too, perhaps from *infantia* into *pueritia*. The four Boys seem considerably younger than Trowle; meanwhile, since Trowle is old enough to have a wife, the four Boys certainly

cannot be older than him (otherwise, they would not be boys). In other words, the gift-giving truly occurs in descending order of age, beginning with the First Shepherd, who is “father in age” among the Shepherds (line 550), and then the “page” Trowle (line 549), and finally the four Boys, who are Trowle’s juniors. In this ritual ordered by age, Trowle falls right in the middle, between boyhood and manhood.⁵³

The *Shepherds* play makes further explicit references to the transgenerational quality of the cycle plays, creating an even clearer and more variegated spectrum of age on which Trowle may be located. The gift-giving ritual is preceded immediately by the Shepherds’ comic play upon age at Joseph’s expense:

PRIMUS PASTOR	Take heede how his head ys whore. His beard is like a buske of bryers with a pound of heare about his mouth and more (lines 496-499).
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Later, at the close of the *Shepherds* play, the First Shepherd’s valediction—“in youth / we have bine fellows” (lines 681-682)—reminds spectators that the Shepherds are surrounded by young Cestrian players and were once young Cestrian players themselves. The mocking of Joseph, next to the reminiscence for youth, draws further attention to the fact that the *Shepherds* cast represents Cestrians at all stages of life, or at least Cestrians that are dressed up in ways that represent all stages of life, from the infant Jesus to the four Boys to Trowle to the Shepherds to the hoar-headed Joseph.

Trowle’s age, near to the boundary between late youth and early manhood, is crucial to the *Shepherds* play—because the play’s physical comedy so often centers on Trowle’s *crossing* of that boundary during the staged action. The play thus pointedly stages the generational shift that the multi-year performances of the cycle enact. In it, Trowle’s developing abilities, from boyish mischief to manly combat, are continually on display. He spars with, and overcomes, the Shepherds: first verbally, then physically in a wrestling match. Trowle, the “lad” whom the Shepherds had mocked with taunts hinting that he lacks sexual maturity, approaches the wrestling with an energetic and proud boast.⁵⁴ He directs his attacks at the “golyons” (testicles) and “loynes” of his opponents, who repeat their surprise that a youth could best them:

SECUNDUS PASTOR	Howe should wee suffer this shame, of a shrewe thus to be shente?
TERTIUS PASTOR	This ladd lusts to be lame and lose a lymme or hee went.. But lett mee goe now to that lad. Sheppardes he shames and shendes..
PRIMUS PASTOR	Fellowes, this a fowle case ys, that wee bine thus cast of a knave (lines 242-89).

Trowle, the “boy” who has grown old enough to have a wife at home—and whose sexual connection to his wife is underscored by the fact that he carries her hose with him—has come of age before his community’s eyes. The Shepherds do not make the mistake of mocking his virility again; he has become a sexually mature young man—and in so doing, he has decisively knocked the Shepherds from manhood into comparative old age. Though he mocks Joseph’s age, the Third Shepherd is already nearing that stage of life himself: he is losing his hearing (line 60) and he names himself “eldest of degree” among the Shepherds (line 380, though the First Shepherd claims the

same honor later on). The play thus stages the transformation of boys into men and men into old men, a process that was inevitably reflected in the casting, as the Cestrian players found themselves growing out of one role and into another.

Trowle's coming of age is timely, because it foregrounds the themes of reproduction and procreation that underlie the play as a whole. It is crucial to remember that the *Annunciation/Nativity* and *Shepherds* plays take place in December. For shepherds who wander in the wilderness "from comlye Conwayne unto Clyde" (i.e. eastern Wales, line 5), or for anyone whose economy rested on the delivery of wool from that area (i.e. most Cestrians), December was time for breeding sheep; winter breeding prepared the flock for lambing in the spring (the time of year at which the *Annunciation/Nativity* and *Shepherds* plays were performed).⁵⁵ The Herald's playful comparison of himself to a ram and Trowle's proximity to those rams create an atmosphere of reproductive potency and fertility that is very appropriate for both times of year, a reminder of the cyclical quality of the year and the plays' role in marking the passage of time. Across the generations of production of the *Shepherds* play, familiar Cestrian bodies visibly progressed across each stage of life, taking on a different role each time; the comedy of that play, which maps the human lifecycle onto both the locally relevant cycle of sheep husbandry and the universally recognizable liturgical cycle of birth and rebirth, powerfully asserts Chester's perpetuation as both a natural and a Christian phenomenon.

To pass from innocent boyhood to reproductive manhood, for Octavian's Herald and for Trowle, is to spar as equals with (and in Trowle's case, surpass) older adults. Both episodes, along with the sacrifice of the young Isaac in the *Abraham* play (which I discuss in the next section), manifest in a repeatable dramatic tradition the physical transitions being undergone by the Cestrian youths playing the roles in any given generation. These episodes also act as preludes to the manhood of Jesus himself. Jesus' growth from child to man, dramatized in the Chester *Purification/Doctors* play, is a symbol of the cycle's passage from the Nativity sequence into Jesus' ministry and Passion, as well as from Old Testament figurae into New Testament events. By splicing together its two distinct episodes, the *Purification/Doctors* play allows spectators to see young Cestrians mature before their eyes, while older Cestrians symbolically pass out of the tradition.

In the play's first episode, the Purification, Simeon is a very old priest who has weathered "many a winter" (line 3) and the "teene and incommoditie [that] followeth age" (lines 5-6), waiting to see the child prophesied in his holy books. Unable to believe that a virgin can give birth to a child, he repeatedly attempts to scrape the word "virgo" from his scripture (lines 30-40) to correct the apparent error. Simeon's inability to understand the prophesy as a Christian reader, paired with his marked old age, makes him an obvious effigy for the practice of reading the Old Testament literally—as a looking backward to history and past ages—rather than the typological, tropological, or analogical readings that look forward to their various kinds of newness. When the Angel corrects Simeon's misunderstanding, he promises that Simeon will see the Christ child before Simeon dies ("Lett me never death tast, lord full of grace, / tyll I have seene thy childes face... death shall thou never see / tyll thou have seene Christe verey," lines 100-8), setting up the advent of the new child Jesus as contingent upon the passing away of the old man Simeon. Jesus enters the scene silently, when Mary offers him to Simeon for a blessing ("Receave my sonne," line 139). Mary remarks that she seeks the ritual of purification "fortye dayes" after her son's birth (line 121), so that Jesus is still imagined as an infant here. At Jesus' entrance, the Angel's promise is inverted: not only will Simeon not die without seeing the Christ child, but the sight of the Christ child is also what seems to bring about his death, or at least to allow the overdue death to occur. Simeon sings the hymn "Nunc dimittis servum tuum, domine" ("Now dismiss your servant, Lord," line 166+SD) and then asks God to "lett thy servant bee / after thy word in peace" (lines 167-8), then disappears from the scene. It is the entrance of the new, here, that brings about the passing of the old.

At that moment of transition from old to new, another shift occurs. With little warning, the second episode of the play, Jesus' confrontation with the Doctors, begins. Immediately after Simeon and his companion Anna bid farewell to Jesus and his parents, Mary notices that Jesus has also vanished from sight:

Josephe, husband leeffe and deare,
our child is gone upon his waye.
My harte were light and hee weare here;
lett us goe seech him, I thee praye.
For sodenlye hee went his waye
and left us both in Jerusalem... (lines 207-212)

Simeon opened his episode by locating himself in "Jerusalem" (line 4); by positioning herself in the same location ("Jerusalem," line 212) despite a shift between distinct episodes, Mary makes clear that it is not the setting of the play that has changed, but it is Jesus himself. The holy family and the spectators remain for the time being in Jerusalem. It is Jesus who has left, suddenly grown from a quiet 40-day-old infant into a child mobile enough to walk from one city to the next. Mary initiates the movement of the holy family, the focal point of the scene, back to Bethlehem ("homwarde therfore I read wee hye," line 226); the spectators' view follows Mary on that journey, where they rediscover Jesus, now old enough to be mobile and quite talkative.

The casting of Jesus' on-the-spot aging could have worked in two possible ways. There may be two children playing Jesus in the *Purification/Doctors* play, or one doll and one child; after Simeon's passing, the younger version of Jesus would be removed from the scene, and replaced when Mary and Joseph discover the older version of Jesus in Bethlehem. There is also a reasonable precedent that the same young actor played both roles, since in two manuscripts of the *Offerings* play, the baby Jesus speaks four lines of blessing from Mary's arms.⁵⁶ In either possible staging, the Cestrian youth representing Jesus undergoes a representation of physical growth; instead of creating a conceit that represents time passing, Mary's reminder that she remains "in Jerusalem" (line 212) strongly suggests that dramatic time has continued uninterrupted, creating an illusion of a hypercompressed maturation of a Cestrian youth by means of the cycle.

That newly-grown young actor exerts the same kind of domination over his elders that Trowle did, enacting a similarly structured rite of passage. At Bethlehem, Mary discovers Jesus lecturing to the Doctors at the temple. The Doctors repeatedly express that they are impressed that "this child... which is yonge and tender of age" (lines 299-300) should "knowe our lawes, both lesse and more" (line 268). All Jesus must do in order to demonstrate his precocious mastery of Mosaic law is to recite, in the distinct verse of Chester stanzas, the Ten Commandments. The Chester cycle's effective engagement with its community emerges again here: it presents the impressive feat of a child reciting the Ten Commandments, not only in front of the Doctors but in front of all Cestrian witnesses, who are themselves watching a Cestrian "child... yonge and tender of age" recite the lines. From performance to performance, especially in the sixteenth century when performances were at intervals of four or five years, the *Purification/Doctors* play would require that a new youth be chosen to play the important role of the boy Jesus. That youth would have to be young enough that his recitation could be impressive to the Doctors—and to the audience—but old enough that he could actually recite the lines.

The worried Mary, still experiencing "great care" because her young son has been away from her, finds Jesus at the temple and sends Joseph to retrieve him. The weak Joseph tells her that he cannot do so, because, as she "wottes right well... with men of might I cannot mell" (lines 310-313). Mary, without addressing Joseph's complaint, takes it upon herself to retrieve her son:

My deareworthy sonne, to mee so deare,
wee have you sought full wonder wyde.
I am right glad that you be here,
that we found you in this tyde (lines 307-318).

The subsequent exchange between Jesus and his mother indicates that the tender youth has risen decisively to adult responsibility (though not, in this case, sexual maturity); it is marked, like Trowle's triumph, with a sudden reversal of power:

DEUS	Mother, full ofte I tould you tyll: my Fathers workes, for wayle or woe, hither was I sent to fulfill; that must I needes doe or I goe.
MARIA	[Thy] sawes, sonne, as have I heale, [I] can nothings understand. I shall thinke on them full well and fownd to doe that the command (lines 319-26).

Jesus has put his mother in her place: though the *Purification/Doctors* play opens while Mary still carries and protects her son in infant form, Jesus now asserts that Mary should submit to him, and she humbly does so. The weakness of Joseph also stands in contrast to the new strength of Jesus that allows him to be counted among the “men of might,” whom Joseph fears to approach. The Chester cycle's splicing of the Purification episode and the Doctors episode into a *Purification/Doctors* play thus aligns the old Joseph, the worried Mary, and the authoritative Doctors with the aged Simeon; like Simeon, they must lose power as a sign that the young Jesus has achieved manhood.

Especially in the plays surrounding the Nativity of Jesus, the inflated casts of the cycle conspicuously feature young Cestrians. In most cases, a local child's recitation of poetry is a sufficient enough spectacle and a clear enough demonstration of the gradual maturation of Cestrian youth to warrant its inclusion in the cycle. In the older characters of Trowle, Octavian's Herald, and the young Jesus, the cycle places its youth just at the verge of manhood, often setting them in opposition to men just on the verge of old age. In so doing, it allows for the repeated staging from year to year of a new generation overtaking the one before it, both in the content of what these three plays depict and in the community-based, age-diverse casting that they must employ in order to depict it. The most extended dialogue between youth and age in the cycle, however, occurs in the Chester *Abraham*. That play, as I discuss in the next section, adheres to all of the elements of a community-based rite of passage, but it does so in a way that plays *mise-en-scène* against dialogue, creating a dissonance that must powerfully cut away the old in order to make room for the new.

Endangering Boyhood in Chester's Abraham Play

The *Abraham* play provides its audience with an explicit interpretive guide in the figure of the Expositor. This Expositor comments on the Christian significance of the Old Testament story, informing the audience that the boy Isaac must be understood symbolically, as a prefiguration of Jesus. However, the fact that the play is performed locally, by Cestrians, for Cestrians, means that Isaac's body is endowed with an additional and very powerful significance. The *Abraham* play—especially by means of its casting, costume choices and *mise-en-scène*, which I take some time below to reconstruct—endows Isaac's body with a symbolism beyond its prefiguration of Christ, in spite of

the Expositor's persistent reading. The play's intense sentimentality amplifies the boy's latent reproductive capacity and his connection to the *platea*. In the present section, I consider at length what it means *to see someone you know* in a medieval cycle play, and how the extant texts amplify the recognizability and familiarity of the player who is meant to speak the lines.

Christian spectators would have envisioned themselves as the descendants of Abraham's progeny anyway, but the staging implicit in the Chester *Abraham* compresses that sense of gradual descendancy into a visible present moment—making it familiar and local. The play's emphasis on the present body of Isaac charges the real body of a local boy as the bearer of the future of the people of Chester. I have already shown above that the Chester cycle repeatedly and conspicuously displays the reproductive potential of the city, embodied in local boy players. This symbolism, cast across a dramatic tradition that is repeated in Chester's public spaces every few years, reinforces a sense of community in that gathered crowd of neighbors, inscribing into the play texts a real civic ceremony that marks the passage of time across generations of local celebrants.

The *Abraham* play's biblical source already reverses the typical coming-of-age rite. Rather than bringing a young man into an order that will allow him to produce further generations in the community, God's command poses the threat of forever ending Abraham's bloodline before his son reaches puberty—though some medieval readings of that biblical source, including the depiction of the episode at York, cast Isaac as a thirty-year-old man.⁵⁷ Chester's Isaac is far from thirty: once he learns of his father's intent to sacrifice him, he pleads, "If I have trespassed in any degree / with a yarde you may beate mee" (lines 289-90). The fact that Isaac is *under the yarde*, which means that he is still subject to corporal punishment, is a clear social marker of his youth. Like Chaucer's *Shipman's Tale* or *Prioress's Tale*, the Chester *Abraham* play uses the suggested appropriateness of corporal punishment as a reminder that its young character has not yet reached the age of social and sexual maturity, or that he has only just reached it.⁵⁸ Well after the Chester plays had ended, the Chester Barbers were still casting "a younge striplinge or boy" to dress as Isaac in the Midsummer procession.⁵⁹ The Isaac of their *Abraham* play is "but a chylde" (line 292), a "yonge innocent" (line 398) whose youth, as I show below, is affirmed again and again. While the actor playing Isaac must be old enough to manage the largest number of lines of any of the youths I have discussed so far, his characterization throughout the play requires that his body be that of a child. In the *Abraham* play, then, Isaac seems to be another character at the rough border between *pueritia* and *adolescencia*, between the state of being a child and the state of being able to produce a child.

Isaac's plea to be beaten with a *yarde* is a sign not only of his youth but also of his submissiveness. Before he learns the full truth behind the "little thinge" (line 230) his father must do, Chester's Isaac is a cipher; he can think and speak only of his father's "byddinge" and his readiness to follow it, repeating this point four times (lines 237-58). Once Isaac understands that his father's disturbing behavior is driven by divine mandate, he abruptly changes his objective but remains submissive:

ISAAC	Is yt Godes will I shalbe slayne?
ABRAHAM	Yea, sonne, yt is not for to leane...
ISAAC	Marye, father, God forbydde but you doe your offeringe... Be I once out of your mynde, Your sorrow may sonne cease. But yet you must doe Godes byddinge (lines 306-21).

Here, Isaac's submissiveness becomes aggressive—he *encourages* a sentimental Abraham to get on with it already and kill him. In all early English dramatizations, Isaac eventually accepts his fate;

however, none of the Isaacs are as quick to do so or as seemingly eager to be killed as Chester's Isaac.⁶⁰ Isaac's aggressive submissiveness allows him to take control of the scene. His intense words of "meekenes" are what make Abraham "affraye" (line 349), creating a melodrama driven by Isaac, in which Abraham only reacts. Isaac walks to the altar, rather than being carried, dragged, or otherwise forced; there, with his son's consent, Abraham binds Isaac's hands and feet ("Here Isaack ryseth and cometh to his father, and hee taketh him and byndeth him and layeth him one the alter," line 358+SD).

From the altar, Isaac has a set of last requests, each of them slightly changing the stage picture; the requests grow progressively more fastidious, perhaps even comically so. First, Isaac requests that Abraham bind a kerchief over his son's face, because Isaac doesn't want his father to have to suffer by seeing his child's face as he kills him (lines 385-90+SD). Next, he requests that Abraham turn Isaac's face downward, so that Isaac will not resist or flinch once he sees the blade coming (lines 390-2). Finally, Isaac asks:

My deare father, I thee praye,
let mee take my clothes awaye,
for sheeding blood on them todaye
at my laste endinge (lines 401-4).

Here, the bound and bekerchiefed Isaac asks his father to let him take off his clothes. The staging that seems to be embedded here, while potentially surprising to the modern reader, is not too difficult to imagine in a performance tradition that developed in relative proximity to the late sixteenth-century English theater of London, in which, as Dymphna Callaghan has written, "[a]dult infatuation with juvenile masculinity was a distinctive feature."⁶¹

Still, Allen Frantzen has read this stanza as a request that Abraham "hide [Isaac's] bloody clothes," implying that Isaac only wants to be stripped after the expected sacrifice has already occurred.⁶² In Frantzen's reading, since the sacrifice never does actually come to pass, Isaac's stripping is never staged. In the Northampton *Play of Abraham and Isaac*, which focuses heavily on the reactions of Sarah (who is not present at Chester), Isaac indeed asks that the clothes, after they are bloody, be hidden from his mother's eyes.⁶³ Yet Frantzen's reading simply does not apply to the Chester *Abraham*, in which Isaac does not refer to already bloody clothes; rather, he tries to prevent them from being bloodied in the first place: "for sheeding blood on them todaye" (line 403). Obviously, the disrobing must occur prior to the attempted sacrifice, when the blood will be spilled. In his plea, Isaac specifically asks, "let *mee* take *my* clothes awaye," (line 402, emphasis added)—that is, allow *me* to take *my* clothes off. Clearly, if Isaac is to remove his own clothes, he must do so before he expects Abraham to kill him. This explicit emphasis on Isaac's agency—let *me*—means that we cannot read this passage as a plea by the boy for Abraham to strip him after death.

The stage directions a few lines corroborate the implicit direction for Isaac to strip: they require that Abraham "take and bynde his sonne Isaack upon the aulter" (line 420+SD). Editors R.M. Lumiansky and David Mills have expressed confusion about this direction, which appears to them to be a redundant scribal error, since Abraham has already bound Isaac once (at line 358+SD: "Here Isaack ryseth and cometh to his father, and hee taketh him and byndeth him and layeth him one the alter."). That supposed error appears in all five manuscripts, including the fastidiously corrected Harley 2124. A simpler explanation is that, as Isaac realizes in his request to be "let" to remove his clothes, Abraham must temporarily unbind his son's hands and feet so he can undress. The scribes' call for a second binding strongly suggests that, in their imagined staging, *they* assume that Abraham does allow Isaac to undress.

At the center of the Chester Barbers' *Abraham* play is a pre-adolescent, or just barely adolescent, boy actor on an open-air wagon in the middle of town, watched by three stories of his neighbors, gathered in the streets, in the raised Rows, and in the windows that Cestrian tenants rented out for privileged seating.⁶⁴ That boy has been bound, his face has been covered over with cloth, and his body has otherwise been stripped. The Expositor's final gloss of the scene presents one way of reading this powerful physical symbol:

This deede yee seene done here in this place,
in example of Jesus done yt was,
that for to wynne mankinde grace
was sacrificed one the roode....
By Isaack understande I maye
Jesus that was obeydent aye,
his Fathers will to worke alwaye
and death for to confounde (lines 468-475).

Later on, in Chester's *Passion*, Caiphias taunts Jesus as a "pewee-ars" standing "naked," awaiting the Crucifixion (lines 150-1). Isaac's extreme physical vulnerability certainly prefigures that of Jesus in a powerful way, just as his aggressive obedience stands in for "Jesus that was obedient aye"—also forming an obvious link to Adam, who, earlier in the cycle, stopped being obedient exactly when he stopped being naked. It is certain that the Cestrian man playing Jesus would have been displayed only in a loincloth; it seems just as likely that the Cestrian boy playing Isaac did the same.

Local records specific to Chester strongly corroborate the idea that a boy's stripped body could indeed be incorporated into a public spectacle in the main streets. Chester's Midsummer Watch parade, in which the Barbers and other guilds paraded their characters, also afforded the following spectacles: they call for payment for "ffoure Ieans, won vnicornne won drombandarye, won Luce won Camell, won Asse, won dragon, sixe hobby horses & sixtene naked boyes."⁶⁵ In another year, the parade involves "6 naked boyes"; in another, funds are allocated for "the makeinge new the dragon... & for 6 naked boyes to beat at it."⁶⁶ Middle English *naked* can just as easily equate to modern English "nude" as to "scantily clad," so the boys in the parade might have worn a small covering or they might have worn nothing at all.⁶⁷ Either way, the Cestrian guildsmen's repeated inclusion of those boys with only the modifier *naked* makes clear that, full nudity or loincloth, it is *the revelation of the boys' unclothed bodies* that granted them their inclusion in the list of public spectacles—it is nakedness that makes them something to be paraded.⁶⁸ By 1600, Cestrian Mayor and reformer Henry Hardware had prohibited the naked boys from the procession:

This mayor was a godly zealous man, yet he gott ill will amonge the Commons, for putting downe some anchant orders, in the Cittie and amonge some Compaiyes... The dragon and naked boyes he suffered not to goe in midsomer showe nor the diuell for the Butchers.⁶⁹

Two more manuscripts record similar accounts of the general muttering ("ill will amonge the Commons") in response to Hardware's repression of "ancient Customs" that include the naked boys and their dragon.⁷⁰ There is a clear precedent, then, showing that the display of a boy's unclothed body was a spectacle in its own right, included in traditional public performances that were distinctly Cestrian. I have already argued in Chapter One that these performances, and the Chester cycle in general, must be understood as sites of resistance to sixteenth-century reform, which took hold far more slowly in the North than in the South, specifically because the commons clung to traditional performance of plays, parades, and sporting events as a symbol of local identity. Indeed, the

traditionalist rhetoric in this quotation—in which commoners preserve their “ancient” tradition against the newfangled efforts of reformers like the mayor—also appears throughout the defenses of the Chester cycle itself in the years immediately preceding its prohibition.⁷¹

After Isaac is saved, God reiterates and reaffirms the biblical covenant he had made with Abraham in the previous episode, a blessing upon Abraham’s progeny. The reiteration of the same covenant at the beginning and end of the Isaac episode (the third of three episodes in the *Abraham* play, following the exchange of gifts with Melchisedech and the covenant of circumcision) decisively centers the episode on the issue of progeny: “Thy seede shall I soe multiple / as starres and sande, soe many highe I / of thy bodye comminge” (lines 449-51). Isaac’s body remains bound, bekerchiefed, and exposed during the second delivery of God’s covenant. In this stage picture, Isaac *is* the seed, which will then multiply. Delivered over Isaac’s exposed body, those lines remind us that God’s promise of future fecundity will issue from Isaac; especially with his face covered, Isaac’s lower body becomes the site of reproductive potential—whether it is in a loincloth or simply naked. That body’s age, just on the verge of manhood and reproductivity, makes that symbol powerfully clear. Just in time, a “horned wether” appears (line 440)—a lamb for sacrifice, but specifically a male one in Chester’s version. It is another typological link to Christ, but because it is a ram, it also connects Isaac to the breeding *tuppes* of Octavian’s Herald and the Shepherds’ Trowle.

Both of God’s pivotal speeches, the promise of the covenant and the reiteration of the covenant, direct Abraham’s gaze outward. In the first case, before Isaac has entered, God explicitly directs Abraham to point his gaze upward, to see how many progeny will come of his seed:

Abraham, doe as I thee saye—
looke and tell, yf thou maye,
stares standinge one the straye;
that unpossible were.
Noe more shalt thou, for noe neede,
number of thy bodye the seede
that thou shalt have withowten dreede;
thou arte to mee soe dere.

The second time, with the bound and exposed young body nearby, God refers Abraham to the sky and the sand:

Thy seede shall I soe multiplye
as starres and sande, soe many highe I
of thy bodye comminge (lines 449-51).

Abraham and Isaac must climb onto the edge of a mountain to do sacrifice; it seems likely that this “mountain” area is on the lower level of the wagon, leaving the upper level for God and his angels. Standing on the lower level of the wagon, if Abraham’s gaze is directed upward and outward (at the stars), he must also see the Rows, where Cestrian spectators have gathered, and the line of windows above the Rows, where well-to-do Cestrians would rent out viewing stations.⁷² When Abraham’s gaze is directed downward and outward (at the sand), he would also see the street, another area where Cestrian spectators gathered. The actors gesture, verbally and probably physically, toward the *platea*, where the “soe myche folke” (line 173) promised by God literally do dwell. They can see and hear each other surrounding the play just as they can see and hear their neighbors performing it. When these covenant speeches are performed in an open-air space, they bring with them a suggestion that the innumerable seeds of Isaac’s line are out there, in the direction in which God has

twice directed Abraham's gaze. What extends outward from the wagon, and from Isaac's body, are the onlookers in the street area—which rises above the playing space in the raised walkways and windows (where Abraham would look toward the stars, since the second wagon platform would likely prevent him from looking directly upward). God locates Abraham's vision of his future progeny by ordering him to gaze outward and upward, then outward and downward; within that line of sight, and so included in that vision of the future, were the audience in the windows, Rows, and street, the multi-levelled area that I have referred to throughout this project as the *platea*. The identity between Abraham's progeny and the people in Chester's *platea* forms the premise of much of the Expositor's exegesis throughout the play. He takes that reading as the premise of his exposition:

EXPOSITOR

Lordinges all, takys intent
 what betokens this commandement [of circumcision]...
 when Christe dyed away hit went,
 and then beganne baptysme.
 Alsoe God a promise behett *us* here
 to Abraham, his servant dere:
 soe mych seede that in noe manere nombred yt may bee,
 and one seede mankinde for to bye
 (lines 193-204, emphasis added).

Here, there is apposition of “Abraham” and “us” as the recipients of the promise of progeny. The Expositor's gloss presents two parallel genealogies: on one hand, there is the genealogy of Jesus, aligned with the system of typology and prophecy that drives this and other biblical cycles, glosses, and sermons.⁷³ More unique to Chester is the genealogy of “us”—the Christian community of players and spectators, who are also subtly implicated as the recipients of God's promise to Abraham, as the chosen people. The Expositor frequently connects his Cestrian listeners to Abraham; in the lines I have provided above, his typological interpretation of circumcision takes as its premise the idea that the present players and observers *are* the innumerable folk born from Abraham's seed—otherwise, there would be no need to translate circumcision into baptism.

The multitude of Christians—dramatically represented by the crowd in the local audience—springs from the seminal point located at Isaac's body in the *Abraham* play. But remember our casting choices here. The body in which that promise is manifested is the body of a boy *drawn from the local community*. The locals know the child playing Isaac and they know his parents; when he grows up, they will know the children that issue from him. As I make clear above, Chester was not that big a city, not in comparison to places like York; about ten percent of its population was visible in the cycle. The boy playing Isaac, who has been powerfully *uncostumed* in the *Abraham* play, is quite literally a bearer of Chester's future. To disrobe him, or even to suggest disrobing him, draws attention to his real body, the most powerful reminder possible of the real Cestrian presence behind the represented biblical character. Meanwhile, once his face has been covered by a kerchief, the boy's identity is anonymized even as the realness of his body has been emphasized, turning him into a local Everyboy whose primary importance, like the character he plays, is in his latent reproductive capacity. The boy playing Isaac will be the father of future Cestrians; the play celebrates that future with visible gestures that appear beneath biblical promises of fecundity. And since these productions happened every few years, Isaac would have to be played by a new boy each time. Each time, there would have to be a new acquaintance or family member of the Barbers' and Surgeons' Guild who produced the play, one who was young enough to be a “striplinge” under the “yarde” but old enough to handle the demands of the role. By the next performance, the boy playing Isaac

might likely graduate to the role of Lot; a generation later, perhaps Abraham. Or if he stopped participating in the plays, he would certainly remain in the audience. The performance of these plays so saturated Chester's main streets that they would have been nearly impossible to miss. The play's repeated gestures outward to the city of Chester, which it casts as the manifestation of the seed of Isaac, also point directly toward any number of former Isaacs (also our neighbors) who watch the display of the newest boy's body.

The revelation of Isaac's boyish body suggests the potential revelation of the boy's genitals. Whether or not those genitals are literally visible, the exposure of most of Isaac's body is a powerful reminder of his latent manhood, especially once his face has been covered with a kerchief, hiding his individual identity behind a prop, while revealing his physicality by removing a costume. The extreme vulnerability of that body, especially if his genitals are exposed, reminds Abraham and the audience that to kill Isaac is to render null the covenant made by God in the prior scene, and reiterated at the end of the play: Isaac bears Abraham's "seede," which God will "soe multiplye / as starres and sande" (lines 449-50), carrying forward the future of Christendom and of Chester. The community is affirmed as continuous, whole. As I show in the next section, however, this model of community affirmation comes at a price, where the physical exposure of youthful nakedness implies masochism and potential violence.

The Bloodline of Abraham

The young Cestrian playing Isaac was probably not aware of the implications that his exposure had in terms of manhood, reproductivity, the renewal of local generations, and the identifying of his present neighbors and future children with Abraham's progeny. On a personal level, his exposure to his neighbors might have brought about more immediate, primal reactions: embarrassment, perhaps, or an opportunity for mischief. In the Chester *Abraham* play, Isaac's aggressive submissiveness could only have exacerbated that tension, forcing the young Cestrian player to volunteer to be tied down, to ask to be beaten, and to finally have his face covered—so that he is the only one in Chester who cannot see what is happening.

Even as it builds up that sense of tension, the extant text provides a release valve, because the community-based performance of Isaac's seminal boyhood is shaped in opposition to a demonized Other—in this case, the celebration of youth comes only with the rejection of the *old*. I propose that the undesirability of oldness is continually associated with Jewishness in the cycle, particularly at moments when typological readings demand that Christian figures be drawn out of Jewish lore or practices. Following from the insistent reproductive mandate that surrounds the presentation of boys in the cycle, the *Abraham* amplifies an anti-Semitic anxiety about *threats* to Abraham's bloodline, an anxiety that grows further in the subsequent *Moses/Balaam*, *Annunciation/Nativity*, *Three Kings* and *Innocents* plays, and then persists through the end of the cycle.

As I show below, the crowd in the *platea*, relentlessly referred to with blessings and curses (see the Introduction to this project) across the cycle, is cast as a character in the *Abraham* play. That character, at once in the biblical history and in the Cestrian present, follows its own storyline throughout the subsequent plays: it faces a threat of corruption in the *Moses/Balaam* play that shapes its journey through the cycle, only resolved in the final two plays in the cycle. It is in the way the *platea* is absorbed into the drama of the cycle, rendered visible in the diegesis as the *ad hoc* crowd or multitude that the characters can interact with, that the spectators themselves are characterized as part of biblical history. That characterization does not only affirm the genealogical connection between present Christians and the biblical seed of Abraham, a process that has already been localized by the way it features Cestrian youth in performance, but it also continually insinuates that threats have infiltrated the community, both in history and in the present. The first half of the cycle

gradually attaches that genealogical threat to Jews, who could not have been present in Chester in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (acquitting any actual non-Cestrians in attendance at the plays, who are otherwise favorably represented, as I discuss in Chapter Four). In so doing, it primes the *platea* for the second half of the cycle, when it will include both Jesus' disciples and his persecutors, and for the *Antichrist* play, during which the population of Chester will undergo its final division and cleansing, a division that only removes a threat that the cycle invented, leaving the community intact.

The *Abraham* play begins the process of insinuating a threat into the spectators' perception of themselves as the manifestation of the blessed seed of Isaac. That threat, because of the dissonance between text and stage picture in the *Abraham* play, becomes located in the body of Abraham himself—as *opposed* to Isaac. The Abrahams of other contemporary English dramatizations exhibit heroic resolve, but it is only Chester's Abraham who so intensely and repetitively laments the imminent death of his son that his pathos becomes melodramatic and sentimental, especially alongside Isaac's bravery. Isaac drives the scene; Abraham only reacts. Chester's interference with Abraham's biblically strong, laconic personality leaves a gap in meaning between biblical context and the play's visual content; in the stage picture, over the a young, vulnerable boy, almost always either kneeling or on his back, is an old man shakily bearing a blade, if only because he is trying to follow God's law to the letter. But the literal reading of old law is exactly why the Expositor must appear: to make absolutely clear that God's Old Testament law for Abraham, a Jew, is no longer his law for Chester Christians.

The Chester cycle, more than any other English biblical play, is haunted by an invented spectre of Judaism, produced in a street in which no Jews had walked since the expulsions of 1290 had ejected them entirely from England. The Expositor continually associates Abraham—whose most visible feature is his age, his bearing of a child past his prime—with the *ould lawe*, a law medieval Christians reject and replace with what Jesus taught them. The sacrifice of Isaac is the third of three distinct episodes in the *Abraham* play, each punctuated by the Expositor's interventions: first, Abraham exchanges gifts with Melchisedeck; second, Abraham makes the covenant of circumcision that earns him God's promise of innumerable progeny; third, Abraham attempts to sacrifice Isaac. So, just before the Isaac episode, Abraham agrees to an *ould lawe* that requires him to mutilate his genitals, at least in a medieval Christian's idea of mutilation: he must circumcise himself. God orders Abraham to see to the circumcision of “thou thyselfe full soone” (line 180-4), where *soone* could have the sense of modern English “immediately” as easily as “in the near future.” Abraham replies “Lord, all readye in good faye. / Blessed bee thou ever and aye, / for therby knowe thou maye / thy folks from other men.” He kneels on one knee, and then the Expositor jumps in to interrupt the episode with his exegetical reading, in which he assures the spectators that circumcision is only a type for the present practice of baptism.⁷⁴

Abraham's implicit raising of the surgical blade to himself immediately precedes his visible raising of a sacrificial blade to his son, whose genitals (exposed symbolically and perhaps literally) represent the future of Chester and Christendom. Because no physical result of Abraham's self-circumcision could have been visible (assuming the Chester players did not put that much stock in verisimilitude), the Cestrian spectators were left to complete the circumcision in an imaginary way, conjuring up for themselves an image of the circumcised penis. This mental image would stand in contrast to the *mise-en-scène* created by the stripping of Isaac. Whether Isaac was naked or merely scantily clad, the spectators would have been focused on his genitals, which they would know were fully intact—since so much of the staging of Isaac's sacrifice emphasizes the fact that Isaac was played by a real, familiar Cestrian boy—and thus very different from the circumcised genitals of Abraham. In biblical time, Isaac would have had to be circumcised as well, but the compressed dramatic time of the Chester *Abraham* makes it look like the act of circumcision is acted out only upon Abraham's genitals. This contrast between the genitals of the represented Abraham and those

of the real boy playing Isaac would inevitably be understood in terms of fertility; the young, intact boy would symbolically represent the future procreation of men, while the old man would seem to have sacrificed his own virility through self-mutilation, cutting his penis and thereby cutting away his reproductive capacity. God promises Abraham an endlessly multiplied seed, but in the stage picture that seed has been effectively cut away from his own body (alongside the cutting gesture of the circumcision) and located within Isaac's. The body in which the blessed seed is located is reimagined as an uncircumcised one, since Isaac's genitals are presented, and perhaps exposed, as belonging to a familiar present-day Cestrian boy—who would have had his foreskin intact.

The occupation of the Barbers' guild, who produced the *Abraham* play, reinforces the centrality of genital mutilation in the play's symbolism. Guilds often produced pageants that connected to their craft in some way. For instance, the Bakers presented the *Last Supper*, the Ironmongers staged the *Passion* (with its digression on the quality of nails), and the Waterleaders and Drawers of the River Dee took on *Noah*. The Barbers, who produced the play along with, in some records, the Surgeons or Leeches, would have been responsible for all surgery—including the drastic genital modification or amputation used to treat venereal disease. In other words, undercutting the symbol of local fertility represented by Isaac's bare body and God's speeches about future generations was Cestrians' inevitable association of the Barbers' Guild with the dangerous cutting of our flesh.

Though in the world of the story Abraham is looking upon his own son, the stage picture figures an old, blade-wielding and genitally disfigured Jew staring intently—or, considering the sadomasochistic tension that could easily be read into this scene, ravenously—at the genitals of a visibly Christian and Cestrian Everyboy which embody the city's reproductive future. The future of the *ould lawe*, located by the Expositor at Abraham's genitals, is cut short, but Abraham is prevented from cutting his son (and Chester's son) as he cut himself. Chester's community, as it displays the reproductive potential of one of its young players, can thus simultaneously position itself as a branch of Abraham's blessed bloodline while divorcing that bloodline from its Jewish source. Sarah Beckwith's observations on the *Croxton Play of the Sacrament* report a similar phenomenon in that play's treatment of Jewishness—as a symbolic expulsion:

The work of the play is to convert all its outsiders to insiders, to construct a world so totally incorporated and encompassed by the body of Christ that to be outside is no longer conceivable. And yet the very process of that incorporation cannot expel from its own dramatic rendering the riven ambiguities of the divided collectivity whose concerns it stages.⁷⁵

A process of symbolic division and expulsion explains, to some degree, why the Chester cycle creates an Abraham that is so unusually weak-willed. While the Abrahams of other contemporary English dramatizations exhibit heroic resolve, and the Abraham of the Bible is praised by Church fathers for his stoicism in the face of his son's sacrifice, the Chester Abraham so intensely and repetitively laments the imminent death of his son that his pathos becomes melodramatic and sentimental.⁷⁶ “[W]ringinge his handes” (line 323 + SD), Abraham is “sorye” twice (lines 293, 393), prays for Jesus' pity (line 415), almost loses his wits in despair (lines 326-8), is afraid (line 349), and would rather die himself (line 383). His heart is “full sore” (line 342) and it will soon break “in sunder” (line 276) or “in three” (lines 253, 282, 405, 413). There is Trinitarian significance to a three-part breakage, but in performance, the repetition of any lament makes Abraham look still weaker, especially in contrast to a young son who encourages him to “doe away, doe away / your makinge of myche mone,” to stop “taryinge,” and to “come of and make endinge, / and lett mee hence bee gone” (lines 351-5). Chester's is the only Abraham to try lying directly to his son, at first

assuring Isaac that the upcoming rite will only be a “little thinge” (line 230), then claiming that an animal will be sacrificed (lines 269-272), compounding the character’s lack of resolve with an unsure sense of morality. Abraham undermines his own lie by suddenly drawing his sword (line 266) and bearing it “naked” (line 279)—quite prematurely, as he has not yet begun to tie Isaac down—adding (with the term “naked”) a hint of physical inappropriateness to the scene. Chester’s interference with Abraham’s biblically strong, laconic personality leaves a gap in meaning between biblical context and the play’s visual content. In the stage picture, an old man shakily raises a sharp blade over a young, vulnerable boy, almost always either kneeling or on his back. Even though the audience knows that Abraham is only trying to follow God’s law, the stage picture arouses feelings of protectiveness, pity, and horror. This contrast between the literal biblical story and later Christians’ interpretation of it is exactly why the Expositor must appear: to make absolutely clear that God’s Old Testament law for Abraham is no longer his law for Chester Christians. As I discussed in Chapter One, Chester’s Jews tend to read literally, blind to the typology that ties the cycle together.

Though in the world of the story Abraham is looking upon his own son, the stage picture figures an old, blade-wielding and genitally disfigured Jew staring intently—or, considering the sadomasochistic tension that could easily be read into this scene, ravenously—at the genitals of a faceless, visibly Christian Everyboy which embody the reproductive future of Christendom and Chester. When Abraham is prevented from cutting at his son (and Chester’s son) as he cut at himself, the future of the blessed seed, displaced from Abraham’s mutilated genitals onto Isaac’s exposed body, can continue to grow. Chester’s community, as it displays the reproductive potential of one of its young players, can thus simultaneously position itself as a branch of Abraham’s blessed bloodline while divorcing that bloodline from its genitally disfigured—that is, Jewish—source.

The subsequent plays in the cycle progressively strengthen the identity between the present people in the *platea* and the seed of Abraham, while also maintaining the paradoxical idea that a Jewish threat to the seed of Abraham continues to grow alongside it. In the next play, *Moses/Balaam*, God addresses the *platea* directly as “all my people that be here” (line 2); King Balack asks Balaam to bring a curse upon “Godes people here” (line 272). That God’s people should be “here” makes little sense in the second case: Balaam and Balack are supposed to be viewing Israel from a mountaintop, so “there” would be more appropriate. However, Balack’s reference to “here” becomes clearer when it is considered in light of the Cestrian audience:

BALAACK	For one this hill, soe mott I thee, the folke of Israell shall thou see... Lo, Balaham, now thow seest here Godes people all in feare. Cittye, castle, and ryvere— looke now. How lykes thee?...
---------	---

Tunc Balaham versus austrem dicat.

(Then Balaam speaks toward the south.)

BALAHAM	How may I curse here in this place that people that God blessed hasse?... I saye this folke shall have there will, that noe natyon shall them gryll; the goodnes that they shall fulfyll nombred may not bee...
---------	--

BALAACK	I bade thee curse them everycheone and thow blessest them blood and bone.
---------	--

To this north syde thow shall gone,
for here thy deede is nought.

Tunc Balaack rex adducet Balaham ad boriolem partem montis, et dicat alta voce:

(Then King Balack leads Balaam to the northern part of the mountain, and he says in a loud voice:)

BALAHAM

A, lord, that here is fayre wonninge:
halles, chambers great likinge,
valles, woodes, grasse growinge,
fayre yordes, and eke ryvere (lines 265-307)

Instead of cursing the people “everycheone” (line 300), Balaam blesses them in defiance of Balack’s order. He directs his blessings downward from the mountain, to the south, then the north, then the west. (He cannot bless the *platea* in all four cardinal directions—since the pageant wagons used backdrops, we know that they did not perform in the round, so to bless the fourth direction would force Balaam to deliver his lines with his back to his listeners.) From Balaam’s high vantage point he sees and thrice blesses specific geographic details “here in this place”: people gathered together, a city, a castle, a river, fair dwellings, halls, chambers, vales, woods, grass, and yards. Assuming that he is standing at the top of a two-story wagon shaped like a mountain (see Appendix 3 for a full staging diagram), the Cestrian player would certainly have seen a city, its people, halls, dwellings, chambers, halls, yards, grass, and in three of the performance locations, a river. A castle (Chester Castle) was nearby, though probably not visible from any of the wagon stations; woods, also nearby though not immediately visible, extended from just outside the city walls into a vale (Cheshire was famously known as a “vale royall”).⁷⁷

At lines 290-1, “the goodnes that they shall fulfyll / *nombred may not bee*” (emphasis added), Balaam echoes the reproductive blessing that God just repeated twice in the *Abraham* play (“God a promise behett us here / to Abraham, his servant dere: / soe mych seede that *in noe manere nombred yt may bee*,” *Abraham* lines 202-4, emphasis added). If Balaam’s promise that the good works of the people he blesses will be innumerable reminds us of God’s earlier promise that the bloodline will continue endlessly, then that promise suggests that Abraham’s bloodline not only is embodied in Moses and the Israelites, but also flows through the cycle as a whole, up to and including the Cestrian present. That genealogy runs parallel to the cycle’s central genealogy narrative; Balaam refers to the “sterre of Jacobb” (line 322) of which “God is both crop and roote” (line 330). By the time the Jesus of the *Appearance/Ascension* play sends his Apostles through “eych cowntree / to the worldes end” (line 71-72), it seems reasonable that his brethren, given endless time and endless space to spread, can branch out as far as Chester.

Moses/Balaam ends, however, by reframing the act of reproduction, required for the continuation of any genealogy, as the site at which that genealogy may be compromised by the introduction of a corrupt bloodline. After Balack pressures Balaam to make good on his promise to curse the Israelites, Balaam offers Balack an alternative way to vex the Israelites without outrightly cursing them:

Send forth woomen of thy contrye—
namely, those that bewtyfull bee—
and to thy enemyes lett them drawe nye,
as stales to stand them before.
When the yonge men that lustye bee
have percauyved there great bewtye,
they shall desyre there companye,

love shall them soe inflame
 Then when they see the have them sure
 in there love withowten cure,
 the shall denye them theyre pleasure,
 except the grante this same—
 to love theyre great solempnitye
 and worshipp the godes of thy contrye,
 and all things commenlye
 with other people to use.
 Soe shall the theyre God displease
 and torne themselves to great disease (lines 352-69).

Balack agrees to implement Balaam's program of sexual warfare (line 372). Later, the Expositor confirms that the program was so successful that it caused the Israelites to fall into war with each other, eventually leading to Balaam's death (lines 398-439). After the *Moses/Balaam* play has positioned the descendants of Abraham decisively in the *platea* by means of Balaam's blessings, it thus introduces the idea that the *platea* is compromisable, or has already been compromised, by an undesirable alien presence—a presence that insinuates itself into the community sexually, turning the community's means of replicating itself into a means of corruption.

It is worth noting here that Balaam's strategy specifically uses the sexuality of women as a site of reproductive warfare. While critics like Christina Fitzgerald have already thoroughly examined the problematic portrayal of women in the English cycles, I would add that most of the unruly women of the Chester cycle are punished because they attempt to deviate from the reproductive mandate that will ensure the cycle's genealogical progression. For example, the Serpent's ironic promise to "teach [Adam's] wiffe a playe" (*Adam* line 179) hints that Eve's disobedience is similar to female extra-marital sexuality, especially because the Serpent has both female and male physical features. In *Noah*, Noah's wife must choose between her friends and her family; when she disobeys her husband by refusing to board the ark, her sons physically force her to return to her proper place (lines 241-244). The *Annunciation/Nativity* presents the midwife Salome in contrast to the compliant Mary; Salome's arm is withered as punishment for her attempt to test Mary's virginity (lines 540-547). In the *Shepherds* play, the uxorious Third Shepherd is mocked because he is ruled by his wife and known by his matronymic rather than his patronymic, while the *Judgment* play shows us the Damned Queen, the only sinner at Judgment who is punished for lechery (line 275). The Herod of the *Three Kings*, planning the slaughter of the boy children of Bethlehem that will amplify the anxiety expressed in *Abraham* about threats to Isaac's progeny and to young bodies in general, finds precedent for his crime in the actions of a female counterpart, "Athalia... that fell and furious queene, / that made slea all men children that of kinges blood were" (*Three Kings* lines 333-5).

The idea that human reproduction is both a necessity for generation and a site of corruption provides a subtle tension beneath the Nativity sequence, which, as I show above, otherwise celebrates fertility and reproductive potential in a way that draws attention to the passage of real generations in the *platea*. In the *Annunciation/Nativity*, Mary, whose mind is on God's work "from progenye to progenye" (line 90), interrupts the narrative with a vision, which Gabriel interprets for her:

MARIA

A, lord, what may this signifye?
 Some men I see glad and merye
 and some syghinge and sorye.

ANGELUS

Wherfore soever yt bee?...
 Syth Godes Sonne came man to forbye—
 is comen through his great mercye—
 methinke that man should kindlye
 be glad that sight to see.
 Marye, Godes mother dere,
 the tokeninge I shall thee lere.
 The comen people, as thow seest here,
 are glad—as they well maye—
 that they shall see of Abrahams seede
 Christe come to helpe them in there neede.
 Therfore the joyen withowten dreede
 for to abyde this daye.
 The morneinge men—take this in mynde—
 are Jewes that shalbe put behinde,
 for they passed owt of kinde
 through Christe at his comminge.
 For they shall have noe grace to knowe
 that God for man shall light soe lowe;
 for shame on them that soone shall showe.
 Therfore they bine mourninge (lines 429-52).

Mary's prophecy allows her to see the Christian progeny of the future—undoubtedly a metadramatic gesture out toward the *platea* across time. The “comen people” visible in the *platea* are doing precisely what Mary says they are doing: they are being “glad and merye” (as revelers at the Whitsun festival) and they are seeing (as spectators). Mary is giving a direct address to the spectators in her prophecy, but alongside the “comen people” who hear her address, she imagines “morneinge men,” the Jews. According to Gabriel, both groups are intermixed in the *platea*. The Jews “shalbe” removed in the future—so in the present moment viewed by Mary, which happens both in biblical history and in the Cestrian present, the threat has yet to be “put behinde” (line 447). That adulterated version of Abraham's bloodline makes sense, since in the previous play the spectators (cast as the Israelites) have been made subject to Balack and Balaam's sexual warfare.

Parallel to the Chester cycle's narration of Jesus' infancy in the Nativity sequence is its in-depth development of the worst threat to that infancy, Herod. The version of the Herod story in Chester's *Three Kings* and *Innocents* plays is unique among early English biblical adaptations in its extended focus on Herod's son.⁷⁸ In sacrificing everyone else's children out of concern for his son and bloodline, Chester's Herod becomes an anti-Abraham. He communicates the mad attempts to secure his own grandiose sense of power typical of most dramatizations of the Herod's tyranny (“I am the greatest above degree / that is, or was, or ever shalbe; / the sonne yt sare not shine on me / and I bid him goe downe,” *Three Kings* lines 180-4). However, in the *Three Kings*, Herod's objective in securing his power is founded not only in greed, but also in his concern that the only heir to that power be his *own* progeny:

For everye man may well say thus—
 that I maynteane my realme amysse,
 to lett a boye inherite my blys
that never was of my blood (*Three Kings* lines 386-9, emphasis added).

At Chester, Herod thus conceives of Jesus as a worldly king in competition with himself *specifically because* Jesus is of a bloodline that is not his own. That conception continues from the *Three Kings* play into the *Innocents* play, firmly establishing a concern for heritage as fundamental to Herod's tyranny:

Alas, what purpose had that page
that is soe yonge and tender of age,
that would *bereave my heritage*,
that am so micle of might? (*Innocents* lines 25-28, emphasis added).

Historically, the conflict between the bloodline of Herod and the bloodline of Jesus does not involve the actual genetic heritage of anyone who would be present in Chester's *platea*. But the prior plays have affirmed the spiritual genealogy from Abraham to present Christians as a positively genetic connection, an affirmation made stronger and more local by the way that the cycle continually draws the spectators themselves into the action of the cycle as the literal biblical descendants of Abraham. With that dramatic conceit in place, Herod's defense of his bloodline looks, in dramatic time, like an attack against present-day Christians—regardless of the historical facts of the matter.

Herod's advisor does draw some attention to those historical facts, citing Herod's non-Jewish heritage ("kinge Herode that is nowe rayninge / is noe Jewe borne nor of that progenye, / but a stranger by the Romans made there kinge; / and the Jewes knowe non of ther blood descendinge / by succession to claime the scepter and regaltie," lines 277-281) as proof that Jacob's prophecy of the Messiah can be fulfilled (Jacob prophecied by playne demonstration, / sayde the realme of Juda and eke the regaltie / from that generation never taken should bee / until hee were come that most mightye is," lines 271-274). However, Herod's arrogance allows him to recast himself not as a new intruder, recently appointed by the Romans, but as the head of a bloodline whose lineage is long and legitimate enough to compete with that of the Jews:

That is false, by Mahound full of might!
That ould villard Jacob, doted for age,
shall withold by no prophecye the tytyle and right
of Romans hie conquest which to mee in heritage
is fallen for ever, as prince of high parentage (*Three Kings* lines 269-287).

Accompanied by an insult to the prophet Jacob as a "doted" old man (which resonates with prior plays' tendency to dramatize generational succession by staging the defeat of age by youth), Herod speaks of a title and right that has fallen upon him because of heritage and parentage. Though Herod's rantings are clearly staged as arrogant foolishness, they do commandeer the terms of the debate so that Herod's threat to the bloodline of Abraham looks less like a sudden intrusion of a new enemy and more like part of the ongoing competition between bloodlines that has characterized prior plays.

Fittingly, then, at the end of the *Innocents* play, Herod's violent and sudden descent into fatal illness comes as a direct result of the death of his son, whom the Second Woman was unable to protect from Herod's soldiers (making her another female who wavers in her duty to protect progeny, at *Innocents* lines 377-433). Herod repents, in a limited way, by realizing that his son's fate is divine vengeance for his crimes (lines 399-400). He delivers a surprisingly sentimental final speech to the Second Woman:

Fye, hoore, fye! God give the pyne!

Why didest thou not say that child was myne?
 But it is vengeance, as drinke I wyne,
 and that is now well seene...
 Hee was right sycker in silke araye,
 in gould and pyrrie that was so gaye.
 They might well knowe by this daye
 he was a kinges sonne.
 What the divell is this to saye?
 Whye weare thy wyttes soe farre awaye?
 Could thou not speake? Could thou not praye
 and say yt was my sonne?
 Alas, what the divell is this to meane?
 Alas, my dayes binne now donne!
 I wott I must dye soone.
 Booteles is me to make mone,
 for dampned I must bee.
 My legges roten and my armes;
 that now I see of feindes swarmes—
 I have done so many harmes—
 from hell comminge after mee (*Innocents* lines 397-425).

For all of his arrogant power, Chester's Herod is literally nothing without his progeny: as a direct result of his son's death, his body deteriorates. As a murderer of boys, Herod embodies the cycle's anxiety about threats to the genealogies it traces; Chester's Herod, as the eventual victim of such a threat, reveals that the promise of the future is what holds the bodies of the present together.

The present bodies in the *platea*, spiritual descendants of Abraham whom the play continually suggests are also genetic descendants, have been continually cast in the first half of the cycle as the real descendants of Abraham who are present in crowds at various moments in biblical history. The insinuation of an ongoing genealogical threat allows the cycle to separate the holiness of the bloodline of Abraham from the Jewishness of that same bloodline, a separation which is manifested in Mary's vision of the future (in which she sees the present-day spectators). So, by the time the cycle's biblical history progresses into the Cestrian-Christian present—in the *Antichrist* play—there is a strong sense both that the spectators have been present in the cycle the whole time, and that there is a corruption in the *platea* that must be purged. That purgation occurs as a prelude to the final division of God's people in the *Judgment* play.

In the *Antichrist*, the spectators in the *platea* are subtly cast in the action again. After the Antichrist is entombed early on in the play, the stage directions instruct his followers, the Four Kings, to exit from the "tumulo" (the tomb, or a hill) to the "terram" (the ground, line 149+SD). This direction strongly suggests that the Four Kings have crossed into the *platea*, a sensible location since their primary function for the duration of the play is to act as representatives of witnesses to the actions taken by the Antichrist, Enoch, Elias, and Michael. If that is so, then the witnesses they represent *are* the spectators who are present in the *platea*. Like the Citizens of the *Bethany/Jerusalem* play, who emerge from the *platea* and then speak as anonymous representatives for the crowd, the Kings' location in the *platea* confirms that they speak for the community. Elias' blessing—"God gyve you grace, old and yonge, / to knowe disceate in his doinge, / that you maye come to that liking"—is clearly directed beyond the Kings to the witnesses standing behind them. The "you" here is "old and yonge," not only suggesting a broad demographic of listeners, but also drawing attention to the diverse ages of the Cestrian community. The Kings, who represent the crowd, also

descend from the bloodline of Abraham that has grown throughout the cycle, now extending past the Passion (and thus including the Cestrian present); upon meeting Elias and Enoch, the First King remarks, “Of our blood the binne, wytterlye, / and wee binne of there kynde” (lines 303-4). When Enoch and Elias unmask the Antichrist and convert the Kings, then, they also seem to convert the crowd and cleanse it of bad belief.

That bad belief, located in the *platea* and at a time either contemporaneous with or later than the Cestrian present, is subtly characterized as Jewish when the Kings, before their cleansing, refer to “bookes of our lawe” (line 305). To follow the Antichrist is an issue that specifically concerns Jews, who are the only group of people known to medieval Christians who believe in the coming of a Messiah, but who do not believe that the Messiah has come yet. Those Jews are not present in Chester’s *platea*, but the first half of the cycle has imagined them in it, so that four Jewish Kings can emerge in the *Antichrist* play and speak on behalf of the spectators as their fellows. Mary’s prophecy in the *Annunciation/Nativity* play has primed the spectators for a divine judgment in which the Jews are “put behinde” (line 446)—that is, put behind the spectators themselves, who represent the uncorrupted (but always threatened) bloodline of Abraham. It is finally the *Antichrist* play, not the *Judgment* play, that ends up staging a theatrical conversion of the Jewish Kings and the spectators standing behind them, giving the community a sense of having been cleansed and renewed—without exerting any real change.

The Reason for the Season

The first half of the Chester cycle casts local spectators as the visible representation of the bloodline of Abraham, strongly suggesting that they are Abraham’s genetic descendants while severing that genealogy from its Jewish roots. Once that sense of familial descent is in place, the second half of the cycle, which introduces the ministry of Jesus and his Apostles, treats the transmission of ideas as synonymous with the generation of blood relatives. Once men have adopted the same complex of Christian beliefs, they become “brethren” or “brothers”—a notion of family not unique to the cycle, but often revisited in it. In the *Blind Man/Lazarus* play, believers are marked like living books, which suggests a palpable bodily connection that might as well be genetic:

But or we go hence, printe these sayinges in your mynd and harte;
record them and keepe them in memorye.
Contynue in my worde; from yt doe not departe.
Therby shall all men knowe most perfectlye
that you are my disciples *and of my familie* (lines 29-33, emphasis added).

Later, from the Cross, Jesus establishes John the Evangelist as the new foster son of Mary (*Passion* lines 325-332). Awaiting Jesus’ return, James describes the Apostles without Jesus’ guidance as “fatherless children,” (*Pentecost* lines 69-70). The bloodline of Abraham diverts into two streams: one that reaches its apex in Jesus, who is a spiritual father to all Christians; one that establishes the Jesus’ disciples as foster children and brothers and then disseminates ideas through them in a familial network.

That family, which will spread across the maps and history of Europe, begins at a singular inaugural moment, a “big bang” of belief to which all Christians can trace their source—the Pentecost. The Pentecost is the originary moment through which Christians, including the audience in the medieval present, can affirm their linkage to the blessed bloodline of Abraham, a linkage that has been affirmed throughout the cycle through continual engagement with the *platea*. Set up by that repeated affirmation of familial linkage, the Pentecost becomes a temporal and geographical locus

that marks the shared descent of the genealogy of believers present at the viewing of the Cestrian performance:

[T]hrough... vertue of they Holye Ghoste
that send shalbe to helpe you moste
in world where ye [shall] wend.
My wytnesse all yee shalbee
in Jerusalem and Judee,
Samarye also, and *eych countree*
to the worldes end.
Goe yee *all the worlde*, and through my grace
preach my word *in eych place.*
All that steadfast beleeffe hasse,
and fullye, save shall [be].
And whoso beleeveth not in your lore,
the wordes ye preach them before,
dampned shalbe evermore;
that payne may them not flee.
By this thinge ye shall well knowe
whoso leeveth steadfastlye in you
whersoever the tyde to goe (*Appearance/ Ascension* lines 65-84, emphasis added).

In his preparation of the Apostles for the upcoming Pentecost, Jesus repeatedly emphasizes that the Pentecost—much like the *locus-platea* performing area itself—radiates outward from an originary point. It will necessarily extend to Chester as well. It makes sense, then, that in Jesus’ reference to future Christians, Jesus should use the same language of separation and purity (“All that steadfast beleeffe hasse... whoso beleeveth not”) that, as I showed in the last section, characterizes so many of the cycle’s direct references outward to the spectators in the *platea*.

In the early sixteenth century, the occasion for the Chester plays shifted from Corpus Christi Day to Whitsun-week, the yearly liturgical celebration of the Pentecost. Critics have tended to explain that shift as a purely pragmatic phenomenon: as at York, the cycle grew too large to share a bill with the Corpus Christi procession, so it was moved and extended across three days.⁷⁹ Pragmatics may provide the simplest explanations for the original shift, but they do not explain away the persistence of the Chester cycle at Whitsun throughout the sixteenth century (until its final performance at Midsummer), nor the shifting liturgical resonances that the change in dates must have produced. In my reading of the Chester *Pentecost* play here, I argue that the Pentecost is a symbol that links biblical time to Cestrian time throughout the cycle by means of the scheduling of live performances. These performances continually constructed the cycle as temporal ritual, a communication across time that linked generations from the past through the future. Regardless of what the guildsmen’s pragmatic or artistic agendas may have been in presenting their performance in Whitsun-week, I argue below that the temporality evoked by the plays necessarily resonates with their placement in the liturgical year—and that, curiously, the latest of the extant manuscripts (James Miller’s British Library MS Harley 2124) amplifies that effect considerably.

The anchoring of the Whitsun cycle in Pentecostal symbolism becomes yet another way that the plays engage the present Cestrian moment in multiple temporalities.⁸⁰ A feast day is defined by its capacity to recur, the same way every year, and the cycle crystallized around that sense of repetition across time. A *Pentecost* play in a Pentecost cycle, simply by nature of its content, locates the present occasion in biblical history (because it enacts the event that the festival commemorates),

in the history of English Christianity (because the Pentecost was responsible for disseminating Christianity across the globe) and in local history (because it uses local performance to emphasize the holiday that has, in a specifically Cestrian tradition, occasioned that same performance across many generations). Moreover, in linking those temporalities together by means of a major Church holiday, the cycle’s depiction of the Pentecost also places the cycle performance in the universal temporality of liturgical time, which organizes all Christians’ experience of the passing year, and in which repetition creates the illusion of a practice that originates outside of human history.

The Chester *Pentecost* play conflates two episodes from Acts: the election of Matthias by the casting of lots and the Pentecost. According to Acts, the first episode is witnessed not only by the eleven Apostles but also by 120 of Jesus’ “brethren”—his disciples—while the second episode occurs in private, where the tongues of fire touch only the twelve Apostles. Lumiansky and Mills point out that Peter’s distinction between “men that nowe binne here” and “fellowes that aye with us were” (lines 33-34) suggests that his speeches are overtly delivered both to his fellow Apostles and to the crowd of Christians who have gathered to watch the lot-casting.⁸¹

In my reconstruction of the *mise-en-scène* of the *Pentecost* (see Table 4, below), I demonstrate that in order for the Chester *Pentecost* play to progress as written, Peter and the Apostles must begin the play on the lower level of the wagon, where they must sit or (more likely) kneel. The *Pentecost* dialogue, more than any other play in the cycle, is structured to feature a high number of players who each speak their short half-stanza in turn (see above for a discussion of that structure as community-based). With twelve Apostles filling the lower level of the wagon, there is nowhere for Peter to locate the imagined crowd of “fellowes that aye with us were” except in the *platea*. Peter announces that it is the crowd, having “seene [Jesus] powere, / hys miracles manye in good manere, / dyinge, rysinge, both in fere”—that is, the events depicted in the last nine cycle plays—who “maye best nowe beare witnesse” (lines 37-40).

<i>Dialogue, stage directions, speech headings</i>	<i>Physical requirements</i>	<i>Extrapolated stagings</i>
Lines 9-13: PETRUS: Lenge we styffe in our prayer... lenge we right here...	1a. The Apostles are praying.	1b. Peter <i>must</i> not be standing when he prays (see 2a). Peter <i>must</i> not be located in the <i>platea</i> here, then: if he is not standing, then he would not be visible to the gathered crowd in the street. ⁸² Peter <i>must speak from the lower level of the wagon</i> (see 6b). Based on 3a, 4a, and 5a, it is <i>likely</i> that he begins by kneeling, as do all the Apostles here, on the wagon.
Line 16+SD: <i>exurgens Petrus in medio fratrum et dicat</i> : (Peter says, rising in the midst of his brethren:)	2a. In order to rise , Peter <i>must</i> not be standing prior to this SD.	2b. If the Apostles were kneeling at 1b, as is most likely (see 3a, 4a, 5a), then they <i>must rise</i> during the 32 lines between 2a and 3a.
Line 48+SD: <i>omnes apostoli genuflectent</i> [MS B: <i>omnes populi flectent</i> ; H] (all of the Apostles genuflect [MS B: all of the people kneel])	3a. In order to genuflect , the Apostles <i>must</i> not be genuflecting prior to this SD.	3b. The Apostles <i>must rise again</i> during the 66 lines between 3a and 4a (see 4a).
Lines 113-4: PETRUS: Kneele we downe upon our knee / and to that lord nowe praye wee.	4a. The Apostles are about to pray and about to kneel . Apostles <i>must</i> not be kneeling prior to this SD.	4b. Note that “kneele,” “flectent,” and “genuflectent” are interchangeable. This makes it <i>likely</i> that all kneeling is genuflecting in this play. The Apostles’ kneeling means that they, like Peter, <i>must be on the lower level of the wagon</i> , since they can be neither in the <i>platea</i> (see 1b) nor on the upper level (see 6b).

Line 120+SD: <i>Tunc omnes apostoli genuflectentes cantent "Veni, creator Spiritus."</i>	5a. Immediately after 4a, the Apostles must genuflect and sing .	5b. 5a supports my extrapolations at 1b and 4b that lines can be delivered from a kneeling position.
Line 152+SD (only in MSS HmB): <i>Christ must speake in heaven.</i>	6a. In MSS HmB, Jesus <i>must</i> enter into a space higher than where the Apostles kneel.	6b. Since the Apostles must be located on the wagon (see 1b), "Heaven" must be above that level; since "Heaven" must be in easy "throwing" proximity to the Apostles (see 7a), it cannot be in the Rows. Thus, in MSS HmB (and probably in all versions), Jesus must enter onto the upper level of the wagon .
Line 236+SD: <i>Deus emittent Spiritum Sanctum in spetie ignis, et in mittendo cantent duo angeli... cantendo projecient ignem super apostolos. Finitoque Angelus in caelo dicat.</i> (God sends out the Holy Spirit in the form of fire, and during the sending two Angels sing... singing, they throw fire upon the Apostles. And finally, the [First] Angel speaks in Heaven.)	7a. In all MSS, the Angels must enter into a space higher than where the Apostles kneel, where they sing, speak, and throw fire on the Apostles.	7b. The Angels must enter onto the upper level of the wagon (see 6b). It is unclear how the fire effect worked: some critics have suggested red ribbons, but based on the <i>Antichrist</i> play's similar effect I would suggest a pyrotechnic effect.
Line 310+SD (only in H): <i>venient duae alienigenae</i> (two Foreigners enter)	8a. In MS H, the Foreigners enter and are silent during the Apostles' multilingualism.	8b. In MS H's version, the Foreigners must be in a space distinct from the Apostles and from "Heaven." They <i>may</i> enter onto a separate area of the wagon, but with twelve Apostles onstage it is unlikely that there could be enough room; it is <i>highly probable</i> , then, that the Foreigners enter into the <i>platea</i> .
Lines 359-64: ANDREAS: Yee, leeffe brother, kysse nowe wee / yche one another...	9a. The Apostles <i>must</i> have risen from kneeling by the time they give farewell kisses (in order to move among their fellows; kissing while kneeling would be absurdly awkward).	9b. There is no clear moment at which the Apostles rise in the 250 lines between 9a and 4a; however, they <i>must rise</i> at some point during those lines.
Line 366+SD: (all but H) <i>venient duo aligenae</i> (two Foreigners enter)	10a. Except in MS H, the Foreigners enter after the Apostles' final line .	10b. In all MSS except H, since the Apostles have cleared the main staging area by the time the Foreigners enter, the Foreigners may appear anywhere except in Heaven.

I have not included in this table Andrew's line, "Nowe, Peeter, brother, *goe we* and praye" (line 65, emphasis added), which Lumiansky and Mills take as evidence that "the twelve Apostles apparently withdraw from the others mentioned at [lines] 33-4 to another location."⁸³ If the text is read on its own without reference to performance, then the editors' reading here makes sense. But performance is an essential aspect of these plays; as I have been arguing, performance data must be taken into consideration when interpreting medieval dramatic texts in order to do justice to the various ways in which they make meaning. In this case, Andrew's "goe we" cannot mean that the Apostles leave to another distinct staging location—they have nowhere to go. A scene with so much kneeling cannot occur at street level and still be visible; the Apostles cannot move to the upper level of the wagon because that area must be reserved for "Heaven." In a scene with fewer actors, the scene might move from one area of the wagon stage to another without changing levels, but that arrangement would be nearly impossible for twelve performers already crowded onto a wagon stage small enough to maneuver in Chester's streets (especially the side streets that connected the third station to the fourth).⁸⁴ To move twelve players in a way that visibly demonstrates a shift from one geographic location to another—usually represented by a shift in level, as in the

Bethany/Jerusalem play, when the players' travel into Jerusalem is represented by a descent into the *platea*—would also be difficult at this moment in the dialogue. Furthermore, the Apostles must speak from a kneeling position before and after line 65, which makes it unlikely that they would exit from the lower wagon into the *platea*, leaving the audience staring at an empty stage area and straining to see and hear beyond the crowd. Andrew's suggestion to "goe" could easily use Middle English *gon* as an auxiliary, rather than transitive, verb—to "proceed to," to "begin to," or to "go and do something."⁸⁵ If not, it is counterbalanced almost immediately by Philip's speech, which argues against going anywhere: "[H]ee bade wee should not goe awaye / from Jerusalem to no cuntry / but there abyde, soothe to saye, / his heste from an highe" (lines 85-88). Peter, too, instructs the Apostles to stay put: "lenge we right here... tyll our lord, as he can us lere, / send us of heaven light" (lines 13-16).

A clarified interpretation of Andrew's "goe we" creates a dissonance between the biblical story being depicted by the *Pentecost* and the stage picture that is visible to the spectators. The Apostles cannot move from the sight of the gathered brethren in the *platea*, because the subsequent events must be dramatized in view of the audience. Lumiansky and Mills' reading of Andrew's line corresponds with a change of scene in the biblical source, from the public setting of the lot-casting for Matthias to the private gathering at which the Pentecost occurs. However, that change of scene cannot be enacted or even represented in performance—since the wagon stage is anything but private. The fusion of the lot-casting with the Pentecost transforms the once-private visitation of the Holy Spirit into a decisively public event. The lot-casting casts the spectators as its *ad hoc* crowd of witnesses for the legally binding decision of Matthias' acceptance into the Apostles, but then the play leaves that crowd in place as witnesses to the Pentecostal miracle (which occurs in private in the Bible). The Apostles have both remained in place and switched to a new scene; that scene thus becomes both intimate and public. Chester's fusion of a public witnessing with a private miracle allows the *Pentecost* to include the gathered "brethren" of Jesus in its scope.

By item 9b in Table 4, Peter has kneeled and risen at least four separate times in this short play; the Apostles have kneeled and risen in unison at least three times, most likely four. In historical context, Peter certainly represents papal authority in the cycle. However, he and his brethren also quite clearly represent Christian commoners here, mimicking parishioners' gestures during the liturgy by repeatedly kneeling and rising *en masse*.⁸⁶ When the Apostles genuflect and sing at line 120+SD, their song is "Veni, creator Spiritus"—the hymn that was also sung in the Whitsun liturgy that preceded the plays.

At item 7b, meanwhile, we cannot know whether the Angels produced pyrotechnics, threw ribbons, or both, or neither. But *emittent* and *projecient* make clear that the "fire" effect extends from an upper level toward a lower level.⁸⁷ That direction, toward which the Angels project their songs and their gazes, must also extend toward the street, where the audience stands.⁸⁸ It is likely, too, that the ribbons or sparks are likely to land in the *platea*, near the bystanders.⁸⁹ Just as Chester's fusion of public and private space allows bystanders to witness the Pentecost first-hand, all possible *locus-platea* stagings that can be drawn from the extant text physically imply the *platea* in the scope of the Pentecostal miracle. Read with that in mind, the Angels' blessings on the Apostles ("Rest well, all that binne here," line 239) easily count among the many blessings that the Cestrian players deliver upon the *platea*.

The Pentecostal miracle does extend to the spectators in the *platea*, because the Apostles' dissemination of belief is what allows generations of Cestrians to gather in celebration of those beliefs, manifested in the cycle. The versions of the *Pentecost* in Huntington Library MS 2 and Bodleian Library MS Bodley 175, which feature Jesus as a boy actor of Chester, add a further reminder of Chester's own progressing generations as a parallel genealogy to that of the believers, initiating at the Pentecost. Fittingly, beyond its constant repetition of the word "brethren" and its

attention to the Apostles' eventual ability to speak all languages, the *Pentecost* play offers frequent reminders of the genealogical and geographical scope of the miracle. Just as the staging of the miracle of fire must incorporate the spectators, the *Pentecost* dialogue thus extends its scope to “olde and yonge” (line 55), “in eych place” (lines 25-26), “[t]hroughout the world” (lines 207-8), “farre” and “nere” (line 240), “into all the world” (line 244). When Peter says his final farewell, he seems to direct his brethren specifically into a land that would be familiar to local spectators:

Nowe, brethren, I read all wee
goe ychone to divers cuntree
and preach to shire and to cytee
the fayth, as Christe us beede (lines 359-62).

Among the “divers cuntree” that the Apostles are to seek out, they should here look for “shire” and “cytee,” terms that the spectators would have recognized as more local than biblical.

As Matthew awaits the coming of the Holy Spirit, he provides another speech that connects the Apostles' future to the *platea*'s present. In doing so, he manipulates time in a way that neatly sums up the complex of temporalities at work in the *Pentecost*. Here, Thaddeus has just reminded the Apostles that Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit to baptize them; Matthew responds by looking ahead to the upcoming moment at which Jesus' promise will come true:

Yea, breathren, that tyme hee us behight
the Holye Ghoost should in us light,
 (i.e. Jesus promised, *behight*, the coming of the Holy Ghost)
that we might tell to eych wight
his deedes all bydeene
in Jerusalem and Judee—
where in world soever walked wee—
and Samarye, that men should see,
as after may be seene (lines 105-112).

Here, Matthew begins by referring to “that tyme,” whose reference is ambiguous. It seems to refer both to the promised event of the future (so that “that tyme hee us behight” means “the future moment that Jesus promised us [at which the Holy Ghost would come]”) and to the moment of prophecy in the past (so that “that tyme hee us behight” means “the moment back then, when Jesus promised us [that the Holy Ghost would come].” The latter, the moment at which Jesus delivered the prophecy, is doubly in the past because it is diegetically prior to the events depicted in the *Pentecost* and because it refers metadramatically to an earlier point in the cycle narrative, at lines 68-72 in the *Appearance/Ascension* play (which Matthew is paraphrasing quite closely: “My wytnesse all yee shalbee / in Jerusalem and Judee, / Samarye also, and eych countree / to the worldes end”). However, the syntax of the sentence changes the meaning of “in Jerusalem and Judee” from a site where the Apostles spread Jesus' word (as in the *Appearance/Ascension*) to a site where they witnessed his miracles, from which they will leave to walk elsewhere the world (as in the *Pentecost*). According to Matthew, Jesus prophecied at that past moment that the Holy Ghost would occur in the future (“the Holye Ghoost *should* in us light”). Dependent on that event is another future action (“that we might tell to eych wight”); that action of retelling will be a narrative repetition of events that have happened in the past (“that we might tell... his deedes all bydeene”). Dependent on that retelling is an act of seeing on the part of witnesses who are simultaneously placed in the present conditional (“that men should see”) and in the future conditional (“that it may be seene”), a powerful

metadramatic gesture toward the *Pentecost* play itself—toward the act of seeing on the part of the Cestrian spectators that takes place in the *platea*. That act of seeing is in the Apostles’ future, but in the community’s present. The performance of the *Pentecost* play during Chester’s celebration of Whitsun already powerfully combines biblical history, local genealogy and community tradition with liturgical time; the extant texts’ web of temporal terms, particularly in Matthew’s speech, plays upon that combination of temporalities. If the circumstances of performance are obscured or removed from a reading of the extant text, then the temporal resonances of Matthew’s speech are obscured.

Lumiansky and Mills call James Miller, the scribe of British Library MS Harley 2124, the “first editor of the Chester cycle,” strongly suggesting that the material unique to Harley 2124 was invented by Miller, not drawn from Chester’s live performance tradition. Then again, Miller’s inclusion of missing scenes and his treatment of the Chester *Trial* and *Passion* as one continuous play (a structure that may have dated from before 1422) suggests that Miller may have had access to exemplars that predated those shared by the other three scribes.⁹⁰ The role of Miller’s unique readings in Cestrian live performance cannot be known, but regardless of their point of origin, some of them amplify the temporal play of the cycle considerably. For instance, in Table 4 at items 8b and 10b, Harley 2124 differs from the Group Manuscripts in its treatment of the Foreigners’ entrance. All manuscripts require the Foreigners to stand in the *platea*, surely because they act as witnesses the action of the play from outside of the Apostles’ space (which is at once intimate and public), just as the present audience does. Harley 2124, however, makes the act of witnessing visible, by introducing the Foreigners into the scene far earlier. They still represent witnesses in general—especially witnesses from the “divers cuntree” where the Apostles will travel—but in Harley 2124 they are more visible and more present.⁹¹ For another example, where the *Pentecost*’s Thomas expects the appearance of the Holy Ghost “in seaven monethes” (line 129) in most manuscripts, Harley 2124 corrects the line to “in fyfty dayes”—that is, the four weeks of Pentecost that separate Easter from Whitsun, another reminder of the play’s present liturgical relevance.

Pentecost Sunday, before the Church designated it as the celebration of the appearance of the Holy Spirit to the Apostles, was a “Feast of Weeks” that commemorated the giving of the Torah to Moses.⁹² In all manuscripts, the *Moses/Balaam* play opens with the giving of the Torah to Moses; only in Miller’s Harley 2124 does the play close with a series of further prophets, all of whom, like Balaam, predict the advent of Jesus. The Harley 2124 *Moses/Balaam* epilogue, like most the *Pentecost* play, is one of the many sequences in the cycle in which multiple players present short speeches in turn. Here, eight prophets—Balaam, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Jonas, David, Joel, and Micheas—recite a prophecy from the biblical Latin, then gloss it with an eight-line English stanza. An Expositor emerges to punctuate each prophet’s speech with another eight-line English stanza. Balaam, who has been the star of the primary narrative of the *Moses/Balaam* play, sets the final sequence in motion by predicting that Jesus will descend from the people of Israel (lines 289-296). From there, the other seven prophets’ speeches sketch a metadramatic outline of the Chester cycle, previewing the major biblical events that other guilds will dramatize. After Micheas gives the eighth and final speech, the Expositor sums up the events that have been prophesied with an address to the audience, beginning with a direct extradiegetic reference to the prophets as players:

Moe prophetes, lordinges, we might play,
 but yt wold tary much the daye.
 Therefore six, sothe to say,
 are played in this place.
 Twoo speakes of his Incarnation
 another of Christes Passion
 the fourth of the Resurrection

in figure of Jonas.
 The fifte speakes expreslie
 how he from the highest heaven hye
 light into earth us to forby.
 The sixt shewes, you may see,
 his Goste to man send will he,
 more stidfast that they shalbe
 to love God evermore.
 Thus that—beleven—that leven we
 of Gods deedes, that had pittye
 one man when that he made them free,
 is prophesied here before (lines 401-432).

The Expositor only counts six prophets, though the epilogue includes eight. In the prior stanzas, three prophets—Balaam, Isaiah, and Ezekiel—predict the Incarnation; Jeremiah predicts the Passion, Jonas the Resurrection, David the Ascension and Judgment, Joel the Pentecost, and Micheas the location of the Nativity. It makes reasonable sense that the Expositor should leave off the first and last prophets in the list: Balaam’s speech is a transition into the epilogue from the main narrative of the *Moses/Balaam* play, while Micheas’ speech is an introduction into the following pageant (the *Annunciation/Nativity*). The Expositor only acknowledges, then, an outline that progresses through the cycle as follows: Incarnation, Passion, Resurrection, Ascension, Judgment, and Pentecost. The Pentecost, as prophesied by Joel, becomes the climax of the biblical cycle, both because the Expositor treats it as a climactic moment in his order of events and because he dedicates more lines to it than to other events. In the Expositor’s version of the Pentecost, God sends the Holy Ghost “to man” in general, rather than just to the Apostles, a revision of the scene that is later reflected in the staging and dialogue of the *Pentecost* play. His use of “thus” seems, too, to present the Pentecost in particular as the root cause of modern belief across generations. That notion is clearly reflected in Joel’s prophecy itself:

I, Joell, saie this sickerye,
 that my ghost send will I
 upon mankinde merciably
 from heaven, sitting in see.
 Then shold our childer prophesie,
 ould men meet sweens wytterly;
 yong se sightes that therby
 many wise shall be (lines 377-384).

Again, the Holy Ghost is sent to all mankind, not just the Apostles, and specifically to believers of all ages. Whitsun, for Joel, will be the moment that activates a cross-generational Christian capacity for dreams, knowledge, wit, prophecy: the “ghost” extends not to the Apostles alone (indeed, they are not even mentioned) but to “our childer,” “old men,” and the “yong.” The direct purpose of God’s sending his ghost at the Whitsun apparition is “that we ever may / on [God] have sadlie mynd”—not so that the Apostles may spread the word to us so that we may learn about God, but that *we* (i.e. the present hearers) may see God directly.

Thus, while it is confined to only one manuscript, this epilogue’s predictive summary of the cycle’s material contains some of the strongest evidence that the Chester cycle’s placement at Whitsun week influenced the development of its full structure. Knowledge of the multiple

significations of the Pentecostal festival may have prompted Miller to include—or perhaps to invent—a *Moses/Balaam* epilogue that presents the Pentecost as the climactic event in the cycle.

Multiple temporalities are at play in the Chester cycle: biblical history, generational and genealogical legacy, the local present, and the liturgical calendar. In the *Pentecost* play and in the Harley 2124 version of *Moses/Balaam*, the Pentecostal miracle becomes the core event around which those multiple temporalities coalesce. If the cycle has a refrain, it is its repetition of variations on Revelation 22:13 (“*ego sum alpha et omega, primus et novissimus*,” “I am the alpha and the omega, the first and the last”), God’s declaration of the timelessness of divinity, tying the cycle’s end and beginning neatly together.⁹³ The first lines in the cycle set that refrain in motion:

DEUS	<i>Ego sum alpha et oo</i> , [I am the alpha and the omega, <i>primus et novissimus</i> . [the first and the last.] It is my will it shoulde be soe; hit is, yt was, it shalbe thus... Prince principall, proved in my perpetuall provydence (<i>Lucifer</i> lines 1-23).
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In the second play in the cycle, God closely paraphrases those same lines (*Ego sum alpha et omega, I, primus et novissimus*. / I, God, moste of majesty, / in whom begininge none may bee; / enlesse alsoe, moste of postee, / I am and have binne ever,” *Adam* lines 1-4); in the final play, God speaks nearly the same lines again (“*Ego sum alpha et omega, I, primus et novissimus*. / I God, greatest of degree, / in whom begyninge non may bee, / that I am pearles of postee, / nowe appertly that shalbe preeved,” *Judgment* lines 1-4). Lumiansky and Mills write that the echo from the first play to the last would be lost over the three days of Whitsun Week; however, as I have been arguing throughout this chapter, the cycle draws much of its meaning from the fact that most of its spectators would have been present at periodic re-stagings of the same material throughout their lifetime—in which case the bookending “alpha et omega” lines would surely become familiar, a kind of opening and closing ceremony.⁹⁴ Meanwhile, further echoes of the refrain in the *Lucifer*, *Adam*, and *Judgment* plays can be found in the *Abraham*, *Annunciation/Nativity*, and *Three Kings* plays:

ABRAHAM	God, graunter of grace, that endinge ne begininge hase (<i>Abraham</i> lines 17-18).
MARIA	[A]s was from the begininge and never shall have endinge, from world to world aye wendinge (<i>Annunciation/Nativity</i> lines 109-111).
OCTAVIANUS	[G]odhead askes in all thinge tyme that hath noe begininge ne never shall have endinge (<i>Annunciation/Nativity</i> lines 329-31).
SYBBELL	[A] bab borne shalbe, blys to bringe, the which that never hase begining ne never shall ended be (<i>Annunciation/Nativity</i> lines 350-2).
HERODES	I am the greatest above degree

that is, or was, or ever shall be (*Three Kings* lines 180-1).

The repeated refrain, whose form and content are dedicated to tying ends together with beginnings, remind spectators that the cycle's narrative forms a series of loops in which characters throughout the cycle look across the plays, or out at the *platea*, to describe a past or future that is always lodged in the present. Balaam and Mary look out at the *platea* and see the future (*Moses/Balaam* lines 265-307, *Annunciation/Nativity* lines 429-52, see also above). Joseph looks backward to Moses while the Third Shepherd recalls events from the *Adam* play (*Shepherds* lines 516, 578-9). The Jesus of the *Appearance/Ascension* play predicts the events of the *Pentecost* play (lines 65-84, see also above); in the *Pentecost* play, the Apostles reiterate Jesus' prediction (lines 105-112, see also above).

The biblical source material is already a network of prophecies and fulfillments, but the Chester cycle cuts that material together so that time continually bends back onto itself. The prophets of the Harley 2124 *Moses/Balaam* epilogue are not the only characters to provide a metadramatic preview or review of the cycle; the cycle's prophecies, dreams, and recitations almost always treat events that later cycle plays will dramatize. In the *Adam* play, Adam recites the events depicted in the *Noah*, *Harrowing*, and *Judgment* plays (*Adam* lines 449-469); the Three Kings refer to events in the *Adam*, *Abraham*, *Moses/Balaam*, *Passion*, *Harrowing*, *Appearance/Ascension* (*Offerings* lines 140-179); various patriarchs emerge in the *Harrowing* to review the past "five thousand yeres... and fyve hundreth yeeke" of biblical history (*Harrowing* lines 1-88); the entirety of the *Prophets of Antichrist* play is a guide to events in the *Resurrection*, *Appearance/Ascension*, *Antichrist*, and *Judgment* plays.

The most powerful metadramatic moment comes in the final lines of the cycle, when the four Evangelists, from whose writing most of the cycle material is drawn, emerge to comment on what has just been performed. Like Matthew's other speech in the *Pentecost*, Matthew's final speech subtly braids together multiple temporalities. Below, I diagram the shifting verb tenses, moods, functions, and relation to the diegesis:

I, Mattheve, of this beare wytnes [present, performative, extradiegetic],
for in my gopell I wrotte expresse [past perfect]
this that my lord of his goodnesse
hath rehearsed here. [*Rehearsed* has multiple valences here. As *recited* by "my lord," it is diegetic and in the past imperfect tense. As *practiced*, it gestures outside of the diegesis (because the play was rehearsed). As *repeated*, it suggests the repetition of the play at multiple stations or on multiple Whit-Wednesdays.]
And by mee all were warned before [*before* = i.e. before the Judgment, both when Matthew composed his gospel and when Christians (both the audience and the Saved and Damned characters who represent and stand beside the audience) were exposed to that gospel.]
to save their soules evermore [a plan for the future]
that nowe through lykinge the benne lore
and damned to fyre in feare. [diegetic, past perfect]

Matthew, speaking to the *platea* across temporalities, reviews a cycle that takes as its most basic assumption that the future will continue endlessly, an uninterrupted series of generations of young and old Cestrians, each of whom participates as his ancestors did.

Across modern criticism of medieval drama, the primary obstacle to the study of the Chester cycle is the extant texts' unusual resistance to dating and periodization. There are certainly multiple layers of accretion and revision are present in the texts. It is probable that some of these layers predate the earliest record of biblical drama in Chester in 1422, while other layers are scribal

interpolations invented as late as 1607. It is sometimes possible to isolate a textual layer, a section of poetry that seems to have entered the cycle as a coherent unit; it is almost never possible to reliably date any element of the text in relation to any other.⁹⁵ The cycle's undatability is usually treated as a scribal accident, an unfortunate effect of Cestrians' failure to retain rehearsal texts or *regenall* copies of their cycle as their counterparts at York did.⁹⁶

If anything, this chapter should make clear that the Chester cycle's resistance to historicity is not accidental. The only date to which the cycle is anchored is Whitsun, a commemoration of the apostolic mandate to spread the Word to every city and shire as far as the ends of the earth. The continued performance of the cycle occurs on a holiday whose liturgical power relies, like the cycle itself, on recurrence across generations, regardless of the passage of history. Such a performance tradition cannot conceive of itself ever ending ("hit is, yt was, it shalbe thus"), until it actually, and quite suddenly, ends—when antiquarians must attempt to record it for another imagined Cestrian posterity. What emerges from a diachronic reading of the cycle is a cultural production of Chester between 1422 and 1607—not of any single date or set of dates between those two years, but of the entire span of years—during which the text and the performance data embedded in it were continually at play.

Chapter Three
Festive Piety: Food and Drink in the Chester Plays

Ten of the twenty-five Chester cycle plays feature eating, drinking, or something closely associated with eating or drinking (like an alewife) at the center of the action.¹ Over the three performance days of Whitsun week, then, these ten plays required guild players to display and use a series of food-related items at four stations through Chester’s main streets. Any biblical cycle must include food in some of its most important episodes—Eve will eat the apple, Christ will break bread—but the Chester cycle’s non-biblical scenes and embellishments, particularly the interpolations that do not appear in other medieval adaptations of the Bible, also tend to involve the consumption or exchange of comestibles. Outside of the ten “food and drink plays” I have listed in Table 5, the cycle contains multiple gestures toward offstage food and drink, dialogues about eating or hospitality, and extended food-based metaphors.² However, because my discussion here is primarily concerned with public staging, I limit my scope to those cases in which the extant play text necessarily calls for a visible food-related prop or character.

<i>Episode</i>	<i>Staged Food and Drink</i>
Play 2: Adam	The apple (Adam and Eve both visibly eat fruit, lines 241-56 + SD. “Apple” specified at lines 240, 245, 250).
Play 3: Noah	A container of Malmsey wine, along with visible drunkenness (The Good Gossips sing “And lett us drinke or wee departe... a pottell full of malnesaye good and stronge...” lines 225-36).*
Play 4: Abraham	Bread and a cup of wine (Messenger, Melchizedek, Abraham, and Lot exchange offerings, lines 57-108 + SD).
Play 7: Shepherds	Bread, onions, garlic, leeks, butter, green cheese, a pudding, a <i>jannock</i> , a sheep’s head soaked in ale, a <i>grayne</i> , curds, a pig’s foot, a gammon joint, another pudding, tongue, ale, liquor, flask, bottle, bowls, pan, pot, loin, <i>sose</i> , <i>somse</i> , flacket with spoon, nut-hook, + MS Harley 2124’s added pig’s foot, tripe, belly-meat, chitterling (The Shepherds’ supper, lines 101-50).*
Play 8: Three Kings	a <i>pigge</i> [pitcher] and cups of wine, visible drunkenness (line 381 + SD; Herod: “Have done and fill the wyne in hye; / I dye but I have drinke! / Fill fast and lett the cuppes flye...” lines 416-8).*
Play 15: Last Supper	Lamb, bread, chalice of wine (The Last Supper requires food and drink throughout the episode.)
Play 17: Harrowing of Hell	A damned alewife enters into Hell and gives information about how, in life, she adulterated her brew, lines 277-336.*
Play 19: Emmaus; Appearance to Apostles I	Bread (Jesus, with Lucas and Cleophas: “ <i>Tunc frangit panem</i> ”... “Eates on, men, and do gladlye,” lines 119-20 + SD); fish and honeycomb (Jesus and Apostles: “Rosted fyshe and honye in fere... Eate we then in good manere... <i>Tunc commedit</i> Jesus, et dabit discipulis suis,” lines 192-9+SD).
Play 20: Appearance to Apostles II	“Meate” (Jesus and Apostles: “Nowe eate we then for charitie... <i>Tunc commedet</i> Jesus cum discipulis suis,” lines 38-56 + SD).
Play 23: Antichrist	Bread (“Drynke” is also mentioned. Enoch and Elias: “Yf thou be so micle of might / to make them eate and drynke’... “Have here breadd both too,” lines 547-84).*

*Non-biblical embellishments.

I do not wish to make a unifying case that the entirety of the Chester cycle is fixated on or organized around feasting, though the thematic and literal presence of food and drink throughout the plays is remarkable. What concern me here are the resonances between the feasting staged by the Chester players and the unscripted festivity that surrounded them before, during, and after performances. The play texts reveal the marks and traces of this festivity, which function as a kind of fossilized record of Cestrian practice—a record that not only illuminates Cestrian culture, but also is essential to the understanding of the extant form and content of the plays. After a thorough

examination of public feasting both inside and outside the performances, I demonstrate that the cycle's use of food and drink is not always necessarily a function of the Eucharistic feast, whether as type or antitype. In contrast with the York cycle, for which the Eucharist undoubtedly forms the primary symbolic core, Chester's staged feasting is generated by, and prioritizes, a broad public commensality of which the sacrament is but one essential part, and within which religious symbolism can be articulated as popular practice. The performances establish continuity between Cestrian urban revelry and the teachings, tradition, and ritual of Church feasts by rendering the latter in the localized, familiar terms of the former: as the structure of the secular celebration is legitimized, religion's fundamental and central place in that structure is secured. The Chester cycle in performance maintains, through play, a conceptual space complex and free enough for revelers to negotiate, or even delight in, the antinomy of a medieval festival that is at once gluttonous and sacred.

The Shepherds' Supper in the Marketplace

On the night of the Nativity, the Painters' three Shepherds, Harvey, Hannkeynn, and Tudd, throw their supper together from the leftovers in their packs: "Laye forth, each man ilych," orders Hannkeynn, "what hee hath lafte of his liverye" (lines 105-6). Only forty-five lines pass, including the simple stage direction *Tunc commedent* ("then they eat"), before Hannkeynn ends the meal: "nowe our bellyes be full" (lines 101-50). The short scene passes quickly on the edited page, halting the action briefly to add color to the poetry, until the primary narratives of the play reemerge. But as a playable piece of drama, to be repeated at four wagon stations, the scene is a prop master's nightmare.

Within less than fifty lines, the three Shepherds unpack and eat "bredd," "onyons," "garlycke," "leekes," "butter," "greene cheese," "a puddinge," a "jannock" (a leavened oatcake), a "sheepes head sowsed in ale," a "grayne" (either a pig's snout or its groin), "sowre milke" (curds), a "pigges foote from puddinges purye," "gambonns" (gammon joints), another "puddinge" ("with a pricke in the end," provocatively), and "tonge."³ Tudd refers vaguely, three more times, to other "meate" that he has brought.⁴ Then the Shepherds drink "ale" and other "lickour" from a "flackett," a "bottell," and "bowles." In later lines, the Shepherds and their boy Trowle gesture to further items that must be visible onstage, though they haven't been mentioned aloud yet: a "pott" for more drinking, a "loyne" (with punning reference to Hannkeynn's own loins, line 189), "sose" (sauce, possibly, or just "a sloppy mess of food," line 204) and "sowse" (pickled pig parts, usually the feet and ears, line 204).⁵ All five extant cycle manuscripts contain all of those items, and British Library MS Harley 2124 adds another "pigges foote," a "panch-clowte" (tripe), a "womb-clout" (belly meat), and a "chitterling" (fried or boiled intestines).⁶

Table 6: The Painters' <i>Shepherds</i> Play and the Painters' Food Expenditures			
<i>MS Hm Dialogue, 1591</i>	<i>Guild Accts, 1568</i> ⁷	<i>Guild Accts, 1572</i> ⁸	<i>Guild Accts, 1575</i> ⁹
SECUNDUS PASTOR Here is (1a) bredd this daye was bacon, (1b) onyons , (1c) garlycke , and (1d) leekes , (1e) butter that bought was in Blacon, and (1f) greene cheese that will greese well your cheekes.	(1a) Item payd for bred to the playe (1e) Item payd for botter to the playe (1f) Item for Chesse	(1e) Item for bouttare (1f) Item payde for ij chessces	(1a) Item for cakes (1e) Item for bouter (1f) Item for ij chysse
TERTIUS PASTOR And here (2a) ale of Halton I have, and (2b) <i>whot meate</i> I had to my hyer; a (2c) puddinge may noe man deprave and a (2d) jannock of Lancastershyre.	(2a) See 9a-9c below (2c) Item payd for wosshyng puddynges (2c) Item to Rychard halewoddess wyffe for xv[i] hagays	(2a) See 9a-9c below (2c) Item pede to doosse wyfe to yarneste the hagoosscys (2c) Item payde to dosse wyfe for hagocyes (2d) Item for ij gannokes from Waryntone	(2c) Item for vj hagosses (2d) Item for a Ianokes
Loe, here a (3a) sheepes head sowsed in ale, and a (3b) grayne to laye on the greene, and (3c) sowre milke ...	(3a) Item for a Tuppess hed (3b) Item for a grone	(3a) Item payde for a topes yede	(3a/3b) Item for the topas hed and the groyne
PRIMUS PASTOR <i>[in Harley 2124 only:]</i> ...a (4a) piggis foote I have here, pardye, and a (4b) panch-cloute in my packe.	(4b) See 2c: "haggis" may refer to a savory pudding or to tripe	(4a) Item for a gambone a bacone & iiij fyte (4b) See 2c: "haggis" may refer to a savory pudding or to tripe	(4b) See 2c: "haggis" may refer to a savory pudding or to tripe
PRIMUS PASTOR <i>[in Harley 2124 only:]</i> A (5a) womb-clout , fellowes, now have I, a (5b) <i>lyveras</i> as it is no lack; a (5c) chitterling boyled shall be; this burden I beare on my backe.	(5a) Item for a bestes bely & calues fette	---	---
PRIMUS PASTOR ... and a (6a) piggess foote from puddinges purye .	(6a) See 2b, puddings	(6a) See 2b and 4a, puddings and pig's feet	---
TERTIUS PASTOR Abyde, fellowes, and yee shall see here this (7a) <i>hott meate</i> —wee serven yt here— (7b) gambonns and (7c) <i>other good meate</i> in fere, A (7d) puddinge with a pricke in the ende.	(7b) Item to [Rychard halewoddess wyffe] for bacon (7d) See 2c, puddings	(7b) Item for a gambone a bacone & iiij fyte (7d) See 2c, puddings	---

<p>PRIMUS PASTOR ...And this (8a) tonge pared rownd aboute with my teeth yt shalbe atamed.</p>	<p>(8a) Item for a Mydcalffe And Anox tonge</p>	<p>(8a) Item for a besstes tonge & iiij colfes fyte</p>	<p>(8a) Item for the leg loyne and tounge of velle</p>
<p>SECUNDUS PASTOR Now to weete our mouthes tyme were; this (9a) flackett will I tame, if thow reade us.</p> <p>TERTIUS PASTOR And of this (9b) bottell nowe will I bibbe, for here is (9c) bowles of the best. Such <i>lickour</i> makes men to live; this game may noewhere be leste.</p>	<p>(9b) Item spente at Iohan Cockes to borrow bottelles (9c) Item payd for mogges</p>	<p>(9a) Item spente goynge to borow bogyttes [leather pouches or bottles] (9b) Item spend at gettynge cattes an bottylse (9c) Item for xiiii yerthen mogges</p>	<p>(9b) Item for the brebynge [?] of the botell (9c) Item for xii erthen moges</p>
<p>PRIMUS PASTOR ...on this (10a) loyne thow may have good lugginge.</p> <p>GARCIUS Fye on your loynes and your <i>liverye</i>, your <i>liverastes</i>, (10b) livers, and longes, your sose, your sowse, your <i>saverraye</i>...</p>	<p>(10a) Item for a Mydcalffe [loin of veal] And Anox tonge (10b) Item for parbolyng of the garbyge [offal, variety meat]</p>	<p>(10a) Item for a lawne a velle</p>	<p>(10a) Item for the leg loyne and tounge of velle (10b) Item for the boylange and dressynge the garbyche</p>
<p>Note: Where terms refer to specific items, I have put them in bold; more generalized terms are in italics.</p>			

Modern Cestrians, whose 2008 community-based adaptation of their cycle interpolated stage business and technical spectacle wherever possible, still chose to reduce and simplify the Shepherds' meal. They cut the lines so that they mentioned only goat cheese, leeks, bread, and Welsh ale.¹⁰ The modern Tudd did not have to figure out how to pull eight food props out of his pack, including gammon joints and an ale-soaked sheep's head, not to mention his pan and the five ingredients for his sheep remedy, all of which he would then have to safely stow in time for the Shepherds' departure to Bethlehem. In the section that follows, I consider how—and why—sixteenth-century Cestrian players chose to stage such an extensive supper scene in the first place, taking the Painters' 1568, 1572, and 1575 performances as my test cases. Only then, with a recalibrated idea of what staged feasting looked like in sixteenth-century Chester, will I be able to consider that staging in the context of unscripted revelry.

In his *Dramatic Design in the Chester Cycle*, Peter Travis suggests briefly that sixteenth-century Cestrians would have used non-perishable mock-ups for the props in the Shepherds' supper. He is "convinced that the fun of these scenes was heightened by the use of special theatrical effects: by ludicrous, antinaturalistic stage properties for all the medicinal wares and foodstuffs."¹¹ In his endnotes, however, Travis acknowledges that he is working from a "hunch," unsupported by the Painters' record of expenditures for their final performance in 1575.¹² That record is one of three relevant expenditure records now available in *REED: Cheshire*.¹³ Table 6 aligns those records with the corresponding lines in the *Shepherds* play. The resemblance is undeniable.

Other Cestrian guilds' sixteenth-century expenditure records are equally saturated with feasting expenses, but demonstrate no apparent order or purpose behind their specific choices of food and drink. In 1568, for instance, the Smiths record heavy food costs, but they can only be spending their money on provisions for general feasting: their play, the *Purification/Doctors*, does not require any comestibles as props. For the dinner at their "generall rehearse," the Smiths buy items in bulk (2 s. 8 d. on cheese, 8 s. 10 d. on beef, etc.); the Painters spend a similar total amount, but it is divided into smaller charges (only 5 d. on cheese, 4 d. for a sheep's head, etc.) for a greater variety of items. The peculiarity of the Painters' menu, and the specific care that their bookkeeper took to record it, makes clear that there is intent, rather than coincidence, behind the correspondence between records and play. Meanwhile, the Painters included costs for the painting, construction, and purchase of various props in their Whitsun accounts, but no expenditures for any oversized fake food. Travis's hunch, in light of these records, is all but untenable.

Lawrence Clopper, in *Drama, Play, and Game*, also addresses the "quantity and variety" of the Painters' food in both dialogue and archives, but with a very different idea of their stagecraft: "at Chester it becomes a true carnival banquet when the Shepherds *distribute their excess to the audience*."¹⁴ The food, for Clopper's Shepherds, is not anti-naturalistic; when shared and ingested, it is more tangibly real than any of the action onstage. Yet Clopper's imagined staging, like Travis's, takes on a more tentative tone when it is explained in a footnote. Clopper connects the Painters' *Shepherds* play to the Bakers' *Last Supper* play, and to a clue in the Chester Late Banns about the staging of that play:¹⁵

The sharing is suggested by the fact that the Chester Painters purchased multiple items of the foods named in the Shepherds' list of foods and by the directive in the Chester Late Banns that the Bakers "caste godes loues abroad with accustomed cherefull harte." The latter hint [*sic*] at the use of bread as a token presented to the onlookers much as favors are thrown to the crowds at Mardi Gras.¹⁶

On the basis of their hypotheses about the staging of the supper in performance, Travis and Clopper produce dramatically different interpretations of the scene. Travis, pointing out that the Shepherds eat their cartoonish, exaggerated feast before they have seen the light of Jesus, argues that their supper of false food props draws attention to the false nourishment of the profane, pre-Christian world, soon to be exposed to the true light of Christ.¹⁷ Clopper, imagining a different staging entirely, naturally draws an opposite set of conclusions. For him, after the boy Trowle rebelliously wrestles his masters and takes their food, the excess food is distributed among the audience: that gesture demonstrates "the grotesque realism of carnival," a Bahktinian popular banquet that subverts authority and "provides a good example of topsy-turveydom."¹⁸ A carnival-oriented reading supports Clopper's suggestion that the cycles "may have arisen as a solution ... to clerical attempts to suppress and control play and game" and "that the biblical drama did not support a clerical educational agenda but a spirituality reflective of late medieval lay piety."¹⁹ That understanding of the cycle is directly opposed to Travis's, which assumes that an individual and theologically precise cleric—the "Chester dramatist"—is the artist behind the cycle's "dramatic design."²⁰ Two suppers, one very false and one very real, emerge from Travis's and Clopper's readings, and they shift the symbolic meaning of the entire *Shepherds* play.

Clopper is surely correct that the Bakers used real baked goods as audience favors during their *Last Supper* play; there is little else that the Chester Late Banns' reminder to "caste godes loues abroad with accustomed cherefull harte" could mean.²¹ After all, those players are *bakers*, and the areas in which they staged their play were at or near the markets in which the Bakers' guild sold its bread. The cycle, for the Bakers, is an opportunity for advertising: the spectators were all potential

customers. It is highly doubtful that the Bakers' players, with edible bread nearby and the clear direction to eat, would have mimed eating or used false props. When the Cestrian playing Jesus eats and drinks with the disciples ("*edit et bibit cum discipulis*," line 104+SD), then, he actually eats bread, during the dramatic action and in full view of Cestrian spectators, who share the bread with him, a powerful gesture that I discuss at more length below.

The case of the Painters' *Shepherds* play, however, is quite different from that of the Bakers' *Last Supper*. I must rule out Clopper's suggestion that the Painters' players passed their food among the audience in the same way that the Bakers' players distributed bread. Small baked goods make perfect audience favors: they are easily portable, and can be easily divided and equitably shared, all the while reminding Cestrians of the quality of the Bakers' workmanship. None of the Painters' foods fit those practical requirements. Most of the foods the Shepherds eat would require constant attention to carving, if not heating, in order to share (sheep's heads, puddings, pig's heads, veal loin, gammon, tongue) or would require many containers to allow for distribution (butter, curds, ale, liquor, *souse*). The Painters do account for purchasing mugs and borrowing bottles that could have contained liquid or semisolid foodstuffs, but the 1572 record specifies just how many *yerthen moges* (earthen mugs) three shillings would buy (see Table 6, item 9c): fourteen, perhaps just enough for the lead players (the three Shepherds, Trowle, Mary, and Joseph, leaving out minor roles) and for the "vijj pottarres" (*putters*, the men who pulled the wagon) whose wages are recorded for that year.²² Only tuppence was allotted for the bottles, and since these were borrowed, they could not be distributed to the audience without a great deal of confusion.

The Shepherds' only sharable foods are the *jannock* (oatcake) and the fresh bread, but according to the Painters' records, they spent very little on fresh bread (4 d. in 1568 and 1575) and even less on *jannocks* (2 d. for two *jannocks* in 1572, 2 d. for one *jannock* in 1575). In contrast, the Smiths spend 2 s. on bread in order to supply their "generall reherse" dinner alone, then 8 d. on bread for their players' breakfast.²³ The Painters' bread expenditure is hardly enough to supply four audiences in a day and still have enough left for use as a prop.²⁴ Trowle, meanwhile, steals a "cake" before the Shepherds finish it, and immediately withdraws from view (*et sic recedat*). There is little reason to imagine that Trowle would break apart and distribute the bread after stealing it for himself, nor is there any suggestion in the manuscripts that he would have done so. Meanwhile, the Painters' total expenditure on food, drink, and tavern costs "for whitson playes" in 1568 (a list that lumps together play-related costs as far back as the Banns and as far forward as Midsummer) is slightly less than the Smiths' food, drink, and tavern expenditures for the same period. If the Smiths, whose play texts provide for no edible props or passed favors, needed £1. 10 s. 1 d. just to feed their players, putters, guild producers and families, then the Painters' £1. 8 s. could not possibly have been enough to feed their companies *and* to circulate hot food among the gathered Cestrian audiences at four stations.²⁵

The Painters' total expenditure on food and drink, similar to or less than that of other guilds, is thus just enough to feed a guild. It is almost certain, then, that the Painters bought and used real food for props, but ate it *themselves*, in an open, theatrical, gluttonous display, with no plans for sharing it with the audience. They did not, however, reserve all of their food and drink for props. The three Shepherds certainly could not have eaten it alines. The Painters' drink expenditures, beyond those listed in Table 6, make clear in all three available years that the Painters, just like the Smiths, hosted a variety of public festivities oriented toward the performance in the days leading up to and immediately following their play. There was *ale* "when we dressed oure playes & when we made oure capes & cotes," *drynke* "vpon wytson Sondaye," a *shoute* "at the fyrste reherce" and "when the playe was donne," and so forth. The Painters also purchased "bryddes," "crabefysshes," and other foods that are never mentioned in their play.²⁶ In other words, in addition to their use of real

food and drink as props, the Painters found multiple extra-dramatic moments to publicly enjoy the comestibles that they bought.

The same economic sense that makes it unlikely for the Bakers to have used fake bread makes it highly unlikely for the Painters to have constructed and maintained comically exaggerated false food, when there was so much corresponding real food so readily available for guild feasts. Like the Smiths and other guilds at Whitsuntide, the Painters were required to spend a solid portion of their budget on actual food and drink for their holiday festivities; without food and drink shared publicly, the festivities would not exist. Included among the Painters' records of their official guild "Orders and ordinaunces," contemporary with the plays' production, are two rules that regulate guild members' participation in feasts. In the first, each new recruit to the guild is responsible for sponsoring one group dinner for his guild brethren and one drinking bout for his brethren's wives, within the first year of membership, "accordinge unto oulde use and custome."²⁷ In the second, stewards of the guild are prohibited from holding any "Priuate dinners breakfast or banquets" on their own; they must seek approval from the majority of the company, and if they fail to do so, they must contribute money proportionately to the Midsummer Show or Whitsun Plays.²⁸ In other words, the guild's basic structure regulated commensality, forcing certain members to relinquish the right to private meals in the interest of common access to their table. The fine attached to that regulation takes the recurring guild performances as interchangeable with the proper public feast, a strong sign that performing and feasting were, for the Painters, closely linked practices.

The most probable explanation for the correspondence between records and dialogue, and for there being very few food expenditures otherwise, is that the Painters thriftily, and playfully, used much of the same food for their ceremonial Whitsun and Midsummer meals as they did for their props. They started the rehearsal process by feasting and, because the action called for it, they continued feasting even as the play was underway.

For the *Shepherds* players to publicly consume their enormous portions of the Painters' feast, let alone to do so repeatedly at four stations throughout Chester, promises amusement for the eater and the spectator; such a display of excess would not be the last feat of gluttony to provide entertainment at a community festival. And there was little need to distribute food to fellow guildsmen in the audience because, as I prove at more length below, the other guilds were involved in their own holiday feasts.

The colorful theatrics of the Shepherds' supper, a gluttonous alliterative list of local or near-local foods (butter from Blacon, ale from Halton, a *jannock* from Lancashire) whose fun is in its size and variety, are as much at work in the Painters' play as they are in the Painters' unscripted but visibly structured bill of fare. Repeated from year to year in this holiday feast, alongside some of the more expensive delicacies we would expect for an affluent guild, there is a surprising amount of offal: the guildsmen, some of whom have played at speaking, singing, and wrestling as they imagine poor Welsh shepherds might, all role-play similarly in the way that they eat. It is as if a modern cast party, whose theme mimics its play's content, has become so broad, constant, and inclusive that it envelops and becomes indistinguishable from the performance. The grand guild feasts are theatrical in the same way as the Shepherds' supper—which is itself real food eaten by the Painters' players, and thus quite literally part of their public feast.

When an actor eats or drinks onstage in any play, and especially when he does so in a festive environment already characterized by feasting, his body is no longer just representing an act. The player is not only reflecting a public feast: he is enacting it, participating in it, with no break in the dramatic action. In other contexts, it might be argued that such an act could have had the potential to aggravate debates over sacramental simulation versus reality, whether in religious drama or religious ritual, that raged throughout the sixteenth century. That ground has been well covered, particularly in Sarah Beckwith's work on the "body of Christ as sacramental theater" at York, where

Eucharistic ritual was appropriately the central focus of a cycle that remained anchored to the Corpus Christi festival.²⁹ My contention here, however, is that the Eucharistic feast's presence at Chester's Whitsun festival, while still central to devotional symbolism, is reframed by the Chester cycle as part of a broader tradition of secular commensality.

In his search for dramatic design, Travis places the Eucharist at the definitive heart of the Shepherds' putative "mock" feast:

The innovation of these fascinating dramatic tropes can best be understood, I believe, if they are seen as displaced metaphors or physical profanations of qualities traditionally associated with the Eucharistic Host... the artistic mode by which the Chester dramatist disguises the eucharistic feast in the Shepherds' gross banquet.³⁰

But I am not convinced that the Painters' Shepherds' supper, nor the other nine food and drink plays, nor the spectacular feasts that accompanied guild rehearsals and performances, were "displaced metaphors" for the Eucharist. As Clopper has argued, the cycle took on its extant form, and much of its content, as a function of the shift *from* Corpus Christi Day *to* Whitsuntide.³¹ The body of Christ was always important to late medieval lay piety, and the Chester Shepherds' bread and sheep-meat might invoke it if they were taken on their own, but unless it is assumed *a priori* that any onstage eating would automatically bring the Eucharist to mind—particularly unlikely when so much offstage eating and drinking was underway—the Shepherds' cheese, onions, and pickled pig parts can hardly be understood as sacramental symbols.

When he sits down to his massive supper, Tudd proudly announces:
Abyde, fellowes, and yee shall see here
this hott meate—wee serven yt here—
gambonns and other good meate in fere... (lines 129-31)

R.M. Lumiansky and David Mills find "an echo of the salesman's pitch" in Tudd's "wee serven yt here": "Possibly this, like earlier addresses, is directed as much to the audience as to the company on stage."³² They explain the salesman's pitch by citing Clopper's unlikely suggestion that Tudd could share his food with the spectators.

The simplest explanation for Tudd's sales pitch, however, is in its location. Since the tenth century, the northwest's primary market for produce, meat, dairy products, and fish was located in Chester, a market that convened on Wednesdays and Saturdays.³³ As Lucian lauds it in 1195, the market center—where Chester's High Cross and Pentice would eventually be built—received ample foodstuffs and wine from England, Wales, Ireland, Aquitaine, Spain, and Germany, and an inexhaustible supply of fish from the River Dee just beneath the Cestrian walls.³⁴ Some non-comestible wares were also available for purchase, but Lucian's praise centers on the *copia... precipue victualium* ("the abundance... especially of victuals") and on the prospect of *precium porrigens, referens alimentum* ("putting forth payment, receiving nourishment in exchange").³⁵ The primary Cestrian markets for livestock, grain, cloth, and coal were smaller, farther from the center of town, and less densely packed; the market at the Pentice was concerned primarily with the immediately edible and potable.³⁶

As the market thrived at the center of town, Cestrians built temporary or permanent stalls, spouts, and shambles, adding further visible layers to the market, which extended itself well into the surrounding main streets, visibly reshaping the entire area with architecture that recalled the exchange of food.³⁷ In the first half of the sixteenth century, as the Chester plays were developing their mobile three-day Whitsuntide structure, the main site of the markets was also undergoing a

gradual shift: from the Pentice forum to the fairground in front of the abbey gates in Northgate Street.³⁸ During the height of the Chester cycle's development, then, the focus of the region's primary produce marketplace was split between these two sites.

The Northgate Street and Pentice sites were also the first two of the four stations at which the Chester plays were staged.³⁹ The clustering of storefronts and shambles at and between them must have been constant reminders of the areas' frequent use for the sale of comestibles. Whit-Wednesday, the final day of performance, would have coincided with a Pentice market day. There would have been little concern that the plays could interrupt, or be interrupted by, the exchange of food underway at their first two stations.⁴⁰ The guildsmen and civic authorities, during the shift to Whitsuntide, *chose* to relocate their plays to the market sites, and scheduled recurring Wednesday performances, knowing that the Pentice market had been active on that day for centuries. They set their plays directly within the literal space and time of the marketplace. In medieval Chester, the producers of the plays were also producers and vendors of all the items sold in the performance area. Guild business at the marketplace must have benefited considerably from the increased traffic of spectators, particularly the revelers who wished to watch the many hours of plays in succession, and who would require refreshment, as did the players, from the nearby tables, stalls, storefronts, and taverns.

Tudd delivers his sales pitch in the midst of a holiday festival, repeating it once in each of the region's primary market centers, and once in Watergate Street, near the port through which the market's imported goods were delivered.⁴¹ There is little reason why real hawking cries should have had to cease entirely while dramatized cries were underway, or why food traders would not take advantage of the sizeable pauses while the wagons moved between stations.⁴² It is with the traders, not the sacrament, that the symbolism of the Shepherds' supper most powerfully resonates. Lucian's praise of public food at the Pentice market predates the institution of the feast of Corpus Christi by sixty-nine years. The salesmen of the town center had been selling food for centuries in precisely the spots where Tudd yelled out "hott meate—wee serven yt here"; they had done so before the Corpus Christi movement began, and would continue past the Reformation. I contend that at Chester, thirteenth-century Eucharistic fervor would therefore have entered into a preexisting culture of the festive public consumption and exchange of foodstuffs, not the other way around.

The Shepherds' supper was as connected to public festivity as Clopper would have it, then, but it was celebratory, not subversive—Chester guildsmen, after all, were hardly disempowered. I agree with C. Clifford Flanigan's convincing argument that the limitation of Bakhtinian readings of medieval drama often lies in their unspoken assumption that popular ritual always unfolds in an antagonistic relation to established power structures.⁴³ As I continue to demonstrate below, the playful display of public gluttony powerfully affirmed the social structure of the Cestrian community, and the place of faith within it, through theatricalized displays of commensality that resonated with an array of rehearsal dinners, players' breakfasts, and drinks between wagon stations. The guilds' vigorous commensality was not disconnected from the dramatic revelry was not incidental to the dramatic design of the Chester play texts as we have received them; rather, it is a crucial element of the extant texts' form and content.

Guild Revelry

Preserved in the guild records of the Whitsun and Midsummer performances are not only hints about the materials used in the plays' production, but evidence of Cestrian festive practice behind, around, above, and between the dramatic action. *REED: Cheshire* contains the twelve extant sixteenth-century Chester guild expense accounts to enumerate play-related costs, beginning with the Cordwainers' 1550 accounts.⁴⁴ The Cordwainers' expenses include new planks for their wagon,

payment to the players and putters (the men who pushed the wagon), and costs for Mary Magdalene's coat and for painting the players' faces (including the gilding of God's face). Of the £3. 17 s. 6 d. that the Cordwainers spend in all, £1. 2 s. 8 d., or about 29% of the total budget, goes to food and drink.⁴⁵ Food and drink costs cover a comparably significant proportion of all twelve budgets. All but one of the play-expense records refer specifically to at least one meal subsidized by the guild; half of them mention two or more, usually one "generall Reyherse" dinner, probably on the night before the production, and a "players breykeffaste" on the morning of the production.⁴⁶

All twelve accounts include food costs alongside costume repairs and actor stipends, with no visible distinction between them in the lists. Various headings ("The expense to oure pley") or marginal notations ("whitson plays") establish that all of these expenditures are to be taken as production costs for the play. It was in the guilds' interests to pad their play expenses: a guild often submitted complaints to the city that the costs of its play outweighed the benefits, to pressure associated guilds for more assistance.⁴⁷ That said, the guild accounts are still the only extant commentary guildsmen made on their own productions. The generation of these itemized lists thus amounts to a kind of performance in itself, directed to fellow and future guildsmen who could then measure and replicate prior holiday festivities. The lists embody the conception that guild members had of what activities constituted those festivities. Food and drink were a major part of that conception, which encompassed not only the cycle plays' props but also the breakfasts, dinners, and rounds of drinks that occurred in conjunction with every performance.

The Smiths' accounts, for instance, survive in British Library MS Harley 2054. In the margin next to part of his record for 1554, the Smiths' bookkeeper writes "whitson plays." Of the £3. 4 s. 7 d. the Smiths spent on all items related to the 1554 "whitson playes," including preparations for their Banns, payment to players, and costs for the upkeep and decoration of their wagon, at least £1. 5 s. 1 d. (about 38.8% of the total budget) was devoted to food, drink, and tavern expenditures.⁴⁸ Here is the tally in full:

- Spent at Iohn plemers howse when master maior came to loke what harnise euery man had viij d.
- for ridinge the banes xij d. the Citty Crier ridd
- spent at potyng aute off Carriges at Richard barkers 4 d.
- we gaue at geting aute of the Carriag 4 d.
- we gaue for an axeyll tre to Richard belfounder vj d.
- for an other axelltre to Richard hankey iiij d.
- payd for dressing of the Carriage x d.
- for Ropes nelles pyns sope & thrid x d.
- for wheate ij s. ij d. for malt iij s. 4 d. for flesh ij s. x d.
- *for flesh at the breckfast & bacon ij s. 8 d.*
- *for 6 chekens x d. for 2 cheeses xvj d.*
- Item we gaue for gellinge of Gods fase xij d.
- *Item we gaue botord beere to the players 4 d. for bred in northgatestreet ij d. we drank in the watergate street vj d. at Iohn a leys x d. at Richard Anderton founderer xij d. at mr dauison tauarne xij d.*
- to the mynstrells in mane ij s.
- we gaue to the porters of the Caryegs ij s., for gloues xiiij d.
- we gaue to the docters iij s. 4 d.
- we gaue to Ioseph viij d.
- we gaue to letall God xij d. we gaue to mary x d. to damane x d.
- we gaue to the Angells vj d., to ould sermond iij s. 4 d.

- we gaue to barnes & the syngers iij s. 4 d.
- for more wheate 18 d. malte ij s. ij d. flesh 3 s. 4 d. a chese ix d.
- to Randle Crane in mane ij s. [...]
- spent at mrs dauison tauarne ij s. j d., for the charges of the Regenall xij d.
- to the skayneares iij s.
- for makinge of the Copes v s., for dressinge of the stands & Iauddases xij d.
- for gelding of the fane & for Carriages of the lightes xij d.

*in all iij li. 4 s. 7 d.*⁴⁹

As focused on feasting as the other eleven extant records, the Smiths' 1554 Whitsun account pays particular attention to specific locations and times ("breckfast," "in northgatestreat"). The record thus offers an apparent chronological organization from wagon station to wagon station: it appears to preserve a rough itinerary for the Smiths on the Tuesday of their performance. The charges incurred on Tuesday must have begun with "flesh at the breckfast"; the food charge preceding the breakfast (for wheat, malt, and flesh) presumably refers to a rehearsal dinner on a prior night.⁵⁰

Some refreshment is certainly necessary during a day of outdoor performance, but for only four performances (compare to York, where there were between ten and sixteen) of a very short play (only 334 lines) and little physical action, the Smiths' itinerary is clearly in excess of the necessary provisions. This is festive consumption, and the records locate it in the streets and in the communal space of the taverns.⁵¹ At the Smiths' players' breakfast (an event also attested in their 1568 record, as I mention above), they serve meat ("flesh"), bacon, chicken, and cheese. Only after that large meal can the boy Jesus' face be gilded, and the performance set in motion. Since the Smiths' play is second in a Tuesday order that had to accommodate nine plays (with four showings each), the Smiths' first performance must have happened relatively soon after their breakfast. And yet in Northgate Street, at the first wagon station, the players receive further refreshment: buttered beer and bread. Watergate Street was third out of four stations; the Smiths drink again there, and thus *between performances*.⁵² And then they make a trip to Davison's tavern. Following those items is a list of final reckonings for services rendered, a signal that the fourth and final performance has ended. But the bookkeeper accounts for more wheat, malt, meat, and cheese, along with another trip to Davison's tavern, before the final tally is made, calling an end to the Whitsun expenses. If that final meal and tavern trip did not occur as part of the Tuesday celebration proper, then they must have occurred soon after.⁵³

If the Whitsun expenditure records are any measure of similar practices at Chester, then guild producers, players and putters ate and drank all day on the day of their performance, and on the night before.⁵⁴ The twelve extant play-related expenditure records represent four of the participating guilds—and all four guilds usually hosted two or more official meals during Whitsuntide. If even half of the twenty-four participating Cestrian guilds did the same, then twenty-four meals would be hosted within the four days of Whitsuntide; if all the participating guilds hosted two meals each, then there would be forty-eight official meals within the space of four days, happening in quick succession with the performances themselves. In other words, a Cestrian at play tends to stay at play, regardless of whether he is in character or costume.⁵⁵ That festive custom was surely part of the reason for volunteering for the plays in the first place. Watching fellow Cestrians try to remember their lines by the fourth station, after multiple bouts of drinking during the performance day, may have been part of the fun of the spectacle.⁵⁶ In fact, the understandable thrill of onstage drinking continues to inspire Cestrians: Robin Goddard, director of Chester's modern community revivals, complains that though he "insisted that the actors in both 2003 and 2008 use water in the prop bottles" for the modern *Shepherds* play, he still has "strong doubts that the bottles contained water," rather than liquor, after the show opened.⁵⁷

Some light is shed here, in the broader tradition of guild commensality, on why the spectacle of the Shepherds' supper pivots not on the promise of food shared for free, but rather on the guilds' public display of their own eating and drinking in and around the town's market center.

Ethnographer Anna Meigs has argued that the social function of public feasting is not limited to food exchange, nor to conspicuous consumption as a marketing tool for exchange, but instead that "food and *eating* (and the rules associated with both) are understood as means that unite apparently separate and diverse objects and organisms, both physiologically and mystically, in a single life."⁵⁸ The open performance of commensality is thus, for any community, a most basic element of social cohesion and identification:

Through his or her continual acts of food exchange, both as producer and consumer, the individual is constituted as part of a physically commingled and communal whole... Food has a distinctive feature, one that sets it off from the rest of material culture: it is ingested, it is eaten, it goes inside. In a small-scale society, moreover, it is and is understood to be the product of the labor of known individuals, the output of their blood, their sweat, their tears. As output of one person and as input into another, food is a particularly apt vehicle for symbolizing and expressing ideas about the relationship of self and other.⁵⁹

Acts of public food exchange (at the markets) and ritual consumption (at ceremonial breakfasts and dinners; during the course of the plays' staged feasts) were continual in Chester, unfolding at the geographical and social center of its small-scale society. That society organized its markets, where "the labor of known individuals" was displayed, through the same system that it used to produce its plays: the guilds.⁶⁰ In such a society, a Cestrian's ability and willingness to publicly consume local (or locally traded) foodstuffs must have been essential for his or her sustained inclusion in secular systems of trust and exchange. Familiar local players, engaging in the public acts of feasting featured in the Chester cycle, thus affirmed their inclusion in Chester's community.

Witnessing Food: Fish, Honeycomb, and Bread

Caroline Walker Bynum's important work on medieval food symbolism is focused on Eucharistic piety, but some of her stories of asceticism prove Meigs's theory by its contrapositive: just as inclusion in a community requires commensality, the refusal of commensality will result in exclusion. Outside of the convent walls, secular communities expressly distrust anyone who will not eat, or, more commonly, anyone who restricts his or her eating to the Eucharist:

Catherine of Siena insisted that her inability to eat was an infirmity, not an ascetic practice at all... A witness in the canonization proceedings of an extreme ascetic, John the Good, testified that John sometimes, in the presence of all, "ate more than any other brother and more quickly," in order to prove that his abstinence was under his control. Columba of Rieti, who was criticized both for abstinence and for frequent communion, defended herself by eating a grape before witnesses to squelch rumors that she lived only on the eucharist.⁶¹

Especially in Columba of Rieti's case, eating food in front of one's community—food that is required to *not* be the Eucharist—is necessary to maintain inclusion, or at least to prevent persecution or ostracism. Nor were Columba's distrustful neighbors particularly un-Christian in their suspicion: they may have found support for their behavior in Luke's descriptions of Jesus' appearance to the Apostles after the Resurrection. In Luke 24, Jesus has already appeared to the disciples at Emmaus, who only recognize him when they all break bread together. Then, when Jesus

appears to the Apostles at Jerusalem to confirm the disciples' report, the Apostles do not believe their eyes.

[S]tetit Iesus in medio eorum et dicit eis: Pax vobis: ego sum, nolite timere. Conturbati vero et conterriti existimabant se spiritum videre. Et dixit eis: Quid turbati estis, et cogitationes ascendunt in corda vestra? Videte manus meas et pedes, quia ego ipse sum; palpate et videte quia spiritus carnem et ossa non habet, sicut me videtis habere. Et, cum hoc dixisset, ostendit eis manus et pedes. Adhuc autem illis non credentibus et mirantibus prae gaudio, dixit: Habetis hic aliquid quod manducetur? At illi obtulerunt ei partem piscis assi et favum mellis. Et, cum manducasset coram eis, sumens reliquias dedit eis. Et dixit ad eos: Haec sunt verba quae locutus sum ad vos, cum adhuc essem vobiscum, quoniam necesse est impleri omnia quae scripta sunt in lege Moysi et prophetis et psalmis de me. Tunc aperuit illis sensum, ut intellegerent Scripturas.⁶²

Unlike the Doubting Thomas of John 20, the Apostles of Luke 24 are not satisfied to “*palpate et videte*” (“handle and see”) Jesus’ body. Even Jesus must eat, and then share, the apostolic community’s food before they will believe that his resurrected body, not an unnatural phantom, stands before them.

Both the Chester and York cycles, along with the Towneley and N-Town plays, include a Doubting Thomas scene. While York features two Thomas-centered plays, however, the Chester Saddlers’ Thomas gets only a short scene in a play that includes longer depictions of Emmaus and the fish-and-honeycomb episode. York and Towneley do include the fish-and-honeycomb scene in their plays, but only as a brief prelude to the main event: Jesus appears and eats for ten Apostles, then disappears again before Thomas arrives; the Apostles’ initial doubt prefigures Thomas’ more important and longer story. N-Town simply ignores the fish-and-honeycomb episode. But Chester includes it *twice*, in all five of its extant full-cycle manuscripts.

The first iteration, in the Saddlers’ *Emmaus/Appearance* play, occurs between the Emmaus episode and the Thomas episode, except with far fewer lines devoted to Thomas than at York or Towneley, so that there is little sense that the Apostles’ disbelief prefigures Thomas’. Immediately after Luke and Cleophas return from Emmaus to report to the Apostles, Jesus appears. Peter is convinced that he sees a ghost, so Jesus says “Handle me, both all and one”; even after doing so, Andrew still does not know “what he ys,” so Jesus eats and shares fish and honeycomb with them. Thomas, who enters after the feast, is convinced much more quickly.

The next play, the Tailors’ *Appearance/Ascension*, opens with a scene that at first glance corresponds reasonably to John 21, in which Jesus appears to his disciples at the sea of Tiberias, and shares one last meal of fish with them before ascending. In place of that episode, however, the Tailors’ players reiterate Luke 24 (see Table 7), in which Jesus must prove by eating that he is not a ghost.

Table 7: Luke 24 in the Saddlers’ <i>Emmaus/Appearance</i> and the Tailors’ <i>Appearance/Ascension</i>	
Play 19: <i>Emmaus/Appearance</i> (The Saddlers) PETER A, what ys hee that comys here to this fellowshippe all in fere as hee to me nowe can appeare? A ghooste methinke I see. [...]	Play 20: <i>Appearance/Ascension</i> (The Tailors) JESUS And leeves this, both all and one, that ghoost hath neyther fleshe ne bonne as yee may feele mee upon on handes and on feete. [...]

<p>JESUS Handle me, both all and one, and leeve well this everychone: that ghooste hath neyther fleshe ne bonne as you see nowe on mee.</p> <p>ANDREAS A, lord, mych joye is us upon! But what he ys, wott I ney can.</p> <p>JESUS Nowe sythe you leeve I am no man, more sygnes you shall se. Have you any meate here?</p> <p>PETRUS Yea, my lord leeffe and dere, rosted fyshe and honye in fere, therof we have good wonne.</p> <p>JESUS Eate we then in good manere. Thus nowe you knowe without were that ghooste to eate hath no powere, as you shall see anon.</p> <p><i>Tunc commedit Jesus, et dabit discipulis suis.</i></p> <p>JESUS Brethren, I towld you before when I was with you not gayne an howre, that nedelye both lesse and more must fulfilled bee. In Moyses lawe as wrytten were, all other prophettes as nowe weare, ys fulfilled in good manere of that was sayd of mee. For thys was wrytten in prophecye: that I must suffer death nedelye and the thyrd day with victorye ryse in good arraye and preach remission of synnes unto all men that his name doth mynne. Therefore, all you that bee herein thinke on what I saye.</p>	<p>PETRUS A, what ys this that standeth us bye? A ghoost meethinke he seemeth, wytterlye. Meethinke lightned mych am I this spryte for to see.</p> <p>ANDREAS Peeter, I tell thee prevelye I dread me yett full greatlye that Jesu should doe such maystrye, and whether that this be hee.</p> <p>[...]</p> <p>JESUS I see well, brethren, sooth to saye, for any signe that I shewe maye yee be not steadfast in the faye, but flittinge I you fynd. Moe signes therfore yee shall see. Have you ought may eaten bee?</p> <p>SIMON Yea, lord, here—meate innough for thee, and elles we were unkynd.</p> <p>JESUS Nowe eate we then for charitie, my leeve brethren fayre and free, for all thinges shall fullfilled bee wrytten in Moyses lawe. Prophetes in psalmes sayden of mee that death I behoved on the roode-tree, and ryse within dayes three to joye mankind to drawe and preach to folke this world within pennance, remyssion of there synne; in Jerusalem I should begynne, as I have donne for love. Therefore, beleeve steadfastlye and come ye with mee to Bethanye. In Jerusalem yee shall all lye to abyde the grace above.</p> <p><i>Tunc commedet Jesus cum discipulis suis.</i></p>
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The two scenes repeat the same content, but their wording differs enough to make clear that neither scene is simply an erroneous copy of the other. The most significant difference between them is that Play 20 does not specify that fish and honeycomb are served, and that it adds a broader invitation to commensality, perhaps suggesting a love-feast, in Jesus' "Nowe eate we then for charitie."⁶³ The two scenes are clearly redundant duplicates of the same biblical source in Luke 24, and occur in immediate succession, in two pageants meant for the same day of performance. Mills interprets this repetitive disruption in the cycle's master narrative as a scribal fusion of two independent cycle productions. It "may be assumed," he writes,

that the directions in the original indicated the transfer of the morning appearances from Play 20 to Play 19 in such a way as to confuse the scribes of the extant manuscripts, and that the transfer of the appearance to the disciples from Play 19 to Play 20 led to unwarranted duplication.⁶⁴

Mills elsewhere characterizes the Cestrian scribes as conscious agents in the preservation and revision of their cultural heritage.⁶⁵ Rather than slavishly reproducing a massive “unwarranted” confusion in their exemplar, it seems likely that these antiquarians actively chose to repeat what must have been an important scene in their memory of what a performed cycle looked like, or should look like. There is no precedent in the five meticulously revised Chester cycle manuscripts for a plot inconsistency of this size. While Lumiansky and Mills enumerate a number of instances of redundant alternative passages, the cases are all very minor, usually affecting staging practicalities; the duplication of the fish-and-honeycomb scene stands out as “[a] similar problem, but on a larger scale.”⁶⁶ Even James Miller, the alert, fastidious scribe of Harley 2124, who tends to offer correctives to errors shared by the other four manuscripts and whom Lumiansky and Mills acknowledge as “the first editor of the Chester cycle,” would have to have been fooled by this error.⁶⁷

Mills’s theory that Cestrians transferred the same scene from one play to another does not explain why the scene should have been entirely rewritten in the process. But whatever the cause of the scene’s repetition, someone at Chester has taken special care with the scene. If there was indeed an error during the late shuffling of content between plays, then during the various final revisions of the Chester productions, the players made sure to keep the Luke 24 scene intact. If one guild did not stage it, then the other was sure to—and hence the duplication. If the antiquarian scribes purposefully preserved the scene twice, then it was important enough to them that they chose to preserve both versions, despite the interruption in continuity. Perhaps, to take an even simpler solution, the players actually staged the scene twice on the same performance day, because the importance of the scene merited an encore.

The plays, as written, guarantee above all that both the Saddlers’ and the Tailors’ players, if only in the scribes’ antiquarian memory, get the important chance to eat publicly, to assert their membership in the community of Christian onlookers, just as Jesus himself did in Luke 24. It is that system of commensal witnessing and proof that demands the conspicuous theatricality of Chester’s eating and drinking.

In the Chester Dyers’ *Antichrist* play there is a passage that does not correspond to any known source, nor to any prior depiction of the Antichrist legend.⁶⁸ In it, Enoch presents another case in which a potentially unnatural subject must prove its incarnate place in the natural order:

Bring forth those men here in our sight
that thou hast reysed agaynst the right.
Yf thou bee so micle of might
to make them eate and drynke,
for verey God we will thee knowe
such a signe yf thou wylt shewe,
and doe thee reverence on a rowe
all at thy likynge (lines 545-52).

The passage mirrors the test-by-eating of Luke 24, as it is dramatized in the Saddlers’ and Tailors’ plays. The Antichrist, who has supposedly brought dead men to life, must show that he has not done so by unholy or unnatural means. He agrees to Enoch’s terms, sure that the test will prove

him “worthye of deitee” (line 559). But Elias announces that he will bless the bread “with [his] hand / in Jesus name... the which ys lord of sea and land / and kinge of heaven on hie,” then he makes the Sign of the Cross over it (lines 565-76). The blessed bread terrifies the Antichrist’s minions, exposing the entire fraud:

Alas, put that bread out of my sight!
To looke on hit I am not light.
That prynt[te] that ys uppon hit pight,
hit puttes me to great feere (lines 577-80).

Richard K. Emmerson suggests that “[t]he reference to the ‘pryntte’ makes it clear that Elijah has challenged them with the bread of the Eucharist,” and that the scene was “probably added to underscore the cycle’s celebration of Corpus Christi.”⁶⁹ While there is certainly Eucharistic power at work here, I am not sure that Elias’ bread should be taken literally as the Host. Words about the extent of God’s power, followed by the Sign of the Cross, were never sufficient to transubstantiate the Eucharist, nor would medieval spectators, familiar with the weekly ritual, have interpreted them as such.⁷⁰ They would be equally familiar with the typical, everyday grace that could be said over any dinner throughout the year: *Cenam sanctificet qui nobis omnia prebet* (May he bless this dinner who provides everything to us), followed by the Sign of the Cross—a short blessing that, set to verse, might look similar to Elias’.⁷¹ The Sign of the Cross is the performative gesture that punctuates the dinnertime grace. The performative gestures necessary for transubstantiation are entirely absent in Elias’ blessing.

The *prynt* does not necessarily signify the Eucharist. Early English speakers commonly used *prynt* figuratively, as we use “impression,” so the word could quite easily be an alliterative metaphor for Elias’ Sign of the Cross.⁷² Or, to take a more literal possibility, it would be unsurprising for fresh-baked bread at holiday-time to be decorated with some kind of imprint, as in the later tradition of hot cross buns on Good Friday: this may be a faint clue to what the *godes loues* of the Bakers’ Play looked like.⁷³ What matters here is that an outwardly non-Eucharistic blessing of a meal—the Antichrist seems to understand it as such—takes on Eucharistic power anyway. The *prynt* may be as common as the cross on a bun, but the Antichrist’s minions see it as a manifestation of the light of Jesus, as if the bread might as well be the Host itself. The scene was, as Emmerson suggests, surely added to celebrate Corpus Christi. That celebration, however, is not necessarily in the creation of the Eucharist, but more likely in the way the episode’s signifiers slide between sacramental bread and daily bread, reducing the conceptual distance between the two.

In his 1572 list of “absurdities,” Christopher Goodman complains of “Elias blessing bread with the sign of the Cross,” but does not overtly refer to the sacrament.⁷⁴ Goodman’s issue with the blessing is most certainly due to its Eucharistic resonance, but even he treats it as an unspoken subtlety, writing down only what he precisely sees, with the assumption that the Archbishop will pick up, as he did, on the implication. His writing, in its attempts to separate objective events from interpretation (because the events are “absurd” enough on their own), thus helps modern readers discern between implied staging and actual staging. Had the Dyers presented the Host literally in the 1572 production or any production in Goodman’s memory, he would certainly have referred to the sacrament directly in his description, as he does for three other episodes in the cycle.⁷⁵

It is vital to observe here that, before the bread is blessed, Enoch, Elias, Antichrist, and all their witnesses take it as a granted communal assumption that a public act of non-sacramental eating is the final proof of humanness, and thus a necessary gesture for inclusion into any human community, beyond which no further proof is needed (to “stynt all stryffe,” line 560). The Antichrist’s surety that his “men” can eat human food qualifies that communal gesture by making

clear that simple commensality, without Christian practice, is not a sufficient test. However, that qualification only makes sense in relation to a basic cultural assumption that bread of any kind could function as proof against manifestations of the unnatural or unholy. Without that assumption, Enoch's initial suggestion of bread-as-test, and the Antichrist's agreement to it, would be nonsensical to its audience. And if any passage in the Chester cycle must have been culturally legible to Cestrians, it was this one, which was an invention of fifteenth- or sixteenth-century Chester, so specific to its time and place that Cestrians interpolated it, to synthesize other sources' apocryphal stories of the Antichrist into a familiar and recognizable setting.

By investing ordinary bread with sacramental power, the Dyers' *Antichrist* does insist upon the power of the Eucharist. In doing so, it defines that power in terms of a communal, commensal system of proof set up by prior plays, in which the ability to publicly eat normal food is necessary for inclusion in the community. The *Antichrist* play, coming just before the finale of the entire cycle, looks back on the Cestrian tradition of witnessed commensality. Through that tradition, the Eucharist—along with other, less sacred Whitsuntide feasts—is legitimized and raised up by the basic unifying power of food. Just as the Corpus Christi play form entered into the already bustling Cestrian marketplace, the plays reframe the Eucharist as the ultimate example of food's broader social-commensal function, which implicitly validates the gluttonous but pious celebrations of Chester's secular feasting.

The Chester cycle features not only the Bakers' *Last Supper* play with real shared bread, but also the Barbers' *Abraham* play, in which an Expositor tells the audience directly that Melchizedek's offering of bread and wine prefigures the Eucharist (lines 113-44). To suggest that the Eucharist is absent from all of the Chester cycle's food and drink symbolism would be absurd. But to subordinate all of its food and drink symbolism to the Eucharist would be equally reductive. Ritualized public acts of eating, as Meigs shows, are a global practice, and Eucharistic ritual is only one manifestation of that basic social phenomenon. Among her examples of food rituals, Meigs discusses tribal sacrifice, in which believers "share a common meal with the deity and in so doing... establish a bond of common life."⁷⁶

Food's power to commingle and unite surely governs and shapes Eucharistic ritual, especially as it is represented through the story of the Last Supper. More overtly than Elias' grace, the Bakers' reimagining of Eucharistic bread as party favors, to be thrown playfully into a crowd of gathered neighbors, is an act that blends secular feast with sacred ritual. As I mention above, their sharing of bread crosses from representation to real action: not the real action of transubstantiation, but simply the real action of eating together. The gesture renews a sense of living commensality in the Last Supper story and in the ritual formed around it, breaking down its routine structure and rendering it playful, tactile, olfactory, gustatory, bodily, and communal—in short, human. In Chester, the sacrament reaches its most understandable, familiar form because the cycle weaves it into the broader festival tradition of Cestrian food exchange and consumption, from which the plays draw their cultural significance and power.

Herod and the Gossips

In the Waterleaders and Drawers' *Noah* play, after Noah's wife fails to secure admission into the ark for her Good Gossips, the Gossips celebrate their doom with a final display of conspicuous overconsumption, three stanzas which British Museum MS Additional 10305 introduces as "THE GOOD GOSSIPES SONGE."⁷⁷ The interpolation of a drinking song is unique to Chester; Travis excises it from his reader's text because it "mocked" the otherwise sincere plays, and was "foreign to the comic joy of the pre-Reformation dramatic productions."⁷⁸

The fludd comes fleetinge in full faste,
 one everye syde that spredeth full farre.
 For fere of drowninge I am agaste;
 good gossippe, lett us drawe nere.
 And let us drinke or wee departe,
 for oftetymes wee have done soe.
 For at one draught thou drinke a quarte,
 and soe will I doe or I goe.
 Here is a pottell full of malnesaye good and stronge;
 yt will rejoyse both harte and tonge.
 Though Noe thinke us never soe longe,
 yett wee wyll drinke atyte (lines 225-36).

The Gossips and their lyric can be best understood in terms of their physical location in relation to the performance, which is relatively easy to determine. The ark, which needed to be large enough to allow for eight actors to participate in slapstick physical comedy inside and upon it, and which had to have room to display painted images of the forty-eight different species that they name, would have to take up the entire wagon.⁷⁹ Any action that took place outside the ark would thus have to occur in the *platea*.⁸⁰ When the Gossips sing or speak their drunken lyric, then, they do so out in the festival market, among the Cestrians who are or will soon be drinking, eating, or buying and selling foodstuffs nearby. All but Noah's family are barred from the ark; on the ground, a visibly Cestrian crowd of revelers await the flood.⁸¹ When Noah's Wife insists on remaining on land with the damned, she asserts that she will not leave "this towne" (line 200), a line that asserts the locality of the *platea*. She and the Gossips speak for Chester.

The Cestrian Gossips know what is coming, as do the local sinners whom they represent, and they embody a "Let us eat and drink, for to morrow we shall die" lifestyle that St. Paul would surely criticize.⁸² The revelers stage their own symbolic punishment, but on their own terms. They interpolate themselves into the action temporarily, by means of a drinking song, sung in unison, for which, like many of the vocal non-liturgical songs in the cycle, "a preexistent tune probably was used, well known to players and audience."⁸³ And when the punishment comes, it passes over painlessly, if not amusingly: a psalm is sung, then Noah shuts the window to the ark, "and for a little space within the bordes hee shalbe scylent" (line 260+SD); then Noah emerges and all is well. All manuscripts agree that "the[y] sing" (line 252+SD) when the flood comes, and MS Harley 2124 identifies the hymn as "Save me, O God." Richard Rastall argues convincingly that this rendition of Psalm 69 would have been vernacular, and probably similar to John Hopkins's 1561 version:

Save me, O God, and that with speed,
 the waters flow full fast:
 So night my soul do they proceed
 that I am sore aghast.
 I stick full deep in filth and clay,
 whereas I feel no ground:
 I fall into such floods, I say,
 that I am like be drowned.⁸⁴

As Rastall points out, the Gossips' "the fludd comes fleetinge in full faste" and "for fere of drowninge I am agaste" clearly play upon the later psalm, though they do not directly parody it. In its context in *Noah*, the "I" of the psalm is the drowning sinner in the *platea*, not the saved; if Noah

and his family joined in on the singing, they still sang on behalf of the masses in the marketplace. The interplay between folk song and pious hymn conflates the Gossips' sinful overflow of wine (a quart in one gulp) with the flood that cleanses that sin; public Christian revelry is at once pleasure and penance. By shaping its revelry according to biblical terms, by enacting a symbolic punishment for its worldly excess that celebrates and encourages more of the same, Chester's *Noah* begins to resolve the inherent contradiction of a gluttonous, but sacred, holiday.

As for Herod, late medieval tradition commonly attributed his tyrannical madness to drunkenness.⁸⁵ The Cestrian Herod is certainly mad, and in the Vintners' *Three Kings* play he confirms that an overabundance of wine is at least partially to blame for his tyranny: "[Jesus] doth mee soe greatly anoye / that I wax dull and pure drye. / Have done and fill the wyne in hye; / I dye but I have drinke! / Fill fast and lett the cuppes flye" (lines 414-8). Herod's boisterous call for wine ends the play, which comes second to last in the Whit-Monday schedule. And though drunkenness is embodied by a mad tyrant, that tyrant's fearsome crime and punishment are deferred until Tuesday morning, which opens with the Goldsmiths' *Innocents* play. Herod's drinking, like that of his Cestrian counterparts, is a bit of harmless madness at the end of the day, as painful and sinful as it may feel the following morning. The capacity of the *Three Kings* play for cautionary polemic is limited by the guild that produced it: no one could take too seriously a call for sobriety on the part of the Vintners' Guild.

In short, in the festive context of Whitsun, Herod's cups and the Gossips' quarts have everything to do with reconciling Cestrian festivity with lay piety, but nothing to do with the Blood of Christ: their significance is not dependent in any way upon the Eucharist. Granted, the polysemy of theater, or any work of art, has the capacity to express both weighty theological significance and light public festivity in a single gesture. But a sacramental reading here would necessarily exclude wine's more ancient role, its festive role. It would miss the point. It would reduce Herod and the Gossips to pat antitypes, simply because, like all Cestrian revelers, they drink. The same forced logic would find Eucharistic significance in Robin Goddard's modern Cestrian actors as they smuggled real ale onto the stage. Even if the sixteenth-century Good Gossips were not already drinking real wine in their scene—though there is no reason why they shouldn't have done so—their drinking song paid tribute to the fellow guildsmen who, if they were anything like the guilds of *REED*, were already drinking festively along or near to the wagon route. That playful meaning is crucial to the extant texts.

Festive Piety

In Northgate Street alone, within a two-minute walk of the St Werburgh's market, there were at least three establishments actively serving ale in the 1530s: the Pied Bull Inn (at the head of King Street), the Cross Keys tavern (adjacent to St Werburgh's), and the Eagle and Child tavern (up in Shoemakers' Row, offering a perfect view of the High Cross market).⁸⁶ The Cooks, Hostellers, Tapsters and Innkeepers' guild, when they presented their *Harrowing* play on Whit-Tuesday in front of the abbey gates and the Pentice, would thus have performed in immediate view of the businesses that they controlled—and of the patrons of those businesses. In the play, after Jesus releases the saved, one "Mulier" emerges and speaks, in the voice of a local alewife, one of the sinners whom Jesus left behind:

Woe be the tyme that I came *here*...
Sometye I was a taverner,
a gentle gossippe and a tapster,
of wyne and ale a trustie bruer,

which woe hath me wrought.
 Of kannes I kept no trewe measure.
 My cuppes I sould at my pleasure,
 deceavinge manye a creature,
 thoe my ale were nought...
 Tavernes, tapsters *of this citye*
 shalbe promoted *here* with mee
 for breakinge statutes *of this contrye*,
 hurtinge *the commonwealth...*,
 with all typpers-tappers that are cunninge,
 mispendinge much malt, bruyng so thinne,
 sellinge smale cuppes money to wyne,
 agaynst all trueth to deale.
 Therefore *this place* nowe ordayned ys
 for such yll-doers so mych amyssse.
Here shall they have ther joye and blys,
 exalted by the necke...
 Thus I betake *you*, more and lesse,
 to my sweete mayster, syr Sathanas,
 to dwell with him *in his place*
 when hyt shall you please (lines 277-324, emphasis added).

The monologue is an essential point of contact between the historical time of the cycle narrative and the festive time of Chester, contact without which the cycle text is left bereft of its defining dramatic design.⁸⁷ It embodies medieval drama's characteristic interplay between scripted and unscripted festivity and fits into a broadly defined but symbolically coherent citywide celebration.

There are two *heres* in the Mulier's monologue.⁸⁸ She is both in Hell ("*this place* nowe ordayned ys / for such yll-doers so mych amyssse / *Here* shall they have ther joye and blys") and, like the Gossips, in Chester ("Tavernes, tapsters *of this citye*... breakinge statutes *of this contrye*"), where she speaks directly to the audience ("I betake *you*"). The seriousness of her crime, like the Gossips' in *Noah*, is belied by the weakness of her punishment as it is staged. She damns crooked Cestrian tapsters like herself—who are in earshot, or are soon to be, at the Cross Keys, Pied Bull, and Eagle and Child—to remain exactly where they are. The humor of her accusations relies on the visibility of familiar Cestrians in the performance. The producers and players were recognizably members of the Tapsters' guild, and so the scene allows the taverners to poke decidedly harmless fun at themselves, but also to affirm that, in Chester, there are universally acknowledged rules of proper brewing. As the guild performer playing the alewife recites a list of rules that his character has broken, his performance also testifies to his own mastery and memorization of those rules.

At the beginning of the *Harrowing*, Satan sits in a high-seat before a *felomshipe* gathered indoors. He gloats: "A noble morsell ye have mone; / Jesu that ys Godes Sonne / comes hither with us to wonne. / One him nowe ye you wreake. / A man hee ys fullye, in faye, / for greatly death hee dread todaye, / and these wordes I hard him saye: / "My soule is threst [thirste] to death" (lines 97-108). Manuscripts B and H clarify the final line's somewhat confusing reference with a quote from Matthew 26:38: "Tristis est anima mea usque ad mortem"—that is, "My soul is *sorrowful* even unto death."⁸⁹ Satan's mistranslation of *tristis* for *thirst* may be a sign that his Latin is poor, a clerical playwright's joke. Or it may have been the guildsmen and copyists who, after generations of performance, substituted a more familiar word for the Latin, spelled as *threst* in Lumiansky and Mills'

base text and as *thirste* in the other four manuscripts.⁹⁰ Satan uses Jesus' complaint as proof that Jesus is a man, not a god: in that context, *thirst* makes the most sense.

From there, the demons' dialogue continues to evoke eating and drinking. The demons refer to their situation twice more as a "fellowshippe," a term that suggests guild ceremonies.⁹¹ In Satan's final boast, he claims responsibility for torturing Jesus through a *dinere*: "Aysell and galle to his dinere / I made them for to dight... Nowe ys he dead, right so through mee" (lines 130-4). The Third Demon says that Jesus took Lazarus out of Hell "maugre our teythe" (line 151). Satan refers to the patriarchs as "my prysoners and my praye" (line 222). In this Hell, where Jesus is a potential morsel, the patriarchs are prey, and Lazarus is saved from teeth, demons exact their torture by devouring the damned (who have probably entered through a hellmouth). Such a Hell is the perfect setting for an alewife, whose scene cleverly transposes the torture of demonic gluttony onto the gluttonous enjoyment of the Cestrian alehouse.

The *Harrowing*, as a point of connection between real time and dramatic time, also falls at the most appropriate time of day. Like Whit-Monday, Whit-Tuesday included nine plays overall, each performed at four stations in succession, with significant pauses between plays for the tricky job of moving the wagons. Even if the Whit-Tuesday plays began immediately after the ceremonial breakfasts, they would have been a full-day event.⁹² It is no wonder, then, that the final plays of Whit-Monday and Whit-Tuesday center on a stage effect that produced light from within darkness: on Monday, the star of the nativity; in the *Harrowing*, the final Tuesday play, *lux in inferno materialis aliqua subtilitate machinata* ("light in Hell, by means of some subtle device," line 1+SD). For the effect to be visible, let alone impressive, it must have been implemented, at the earliest, as the sun began to set behind Market Hall and the Rows.⁹³ And so, after the Mulier's monologue on her crooked life, the demons welcome her to a new kind of festivity, providing the final stanza of the day:

Welcome, deare darlinge, to endles bale.
Usynge cardes, dyce, and cuppes smale,
with many false othes to sell thy ale—
nowe thou shall have a feaste! (lines 332-6)

Nowe thou shall have a feaste: players from the Cooks, Tapsters, Hostellers and Innkeepers' guild speak this final line to festival-goers at all four stations, at once closing and opening festivities. Through the alewife epilogue, the *Harrowing's* metaphoric conceit—Hell as tavern, demons as gluttons—concludes with a perfectly-timed pivot between daylight performance and evening festivity on Whit-Tuesday. From there, the recreation would move fully indoors, in the form of multiple "general rehearse" dinners for the next day's show and return trips to Davison's tavern.

The taverners' play encompasses the immediate time of day (sunset, the onset of night and the need for artificial lights) and its real location (as a transition from street festival into tavern feasting). It localizes its own real setting within biblical time and space by introducing a recognizably Cestrian character and allowing her to speak from both the Cestrian tavern and from Hell, which itself looks like a tavern. And through its demonic tavern, the play also locates itself in a distinctively homiletic and literary tradition. The tradition is extant in Dan Michel's *Ayenbite of Inmyt*, in which activities appropriate to a church are amusingly reversed in the tavern, the "scole of þe dyeule": the upright lose their ability to walk, the sane become mad, and men lose their ability to speak, hear, or see correctly.⁹⁴ John Bromyard and the anonymous homilist of MS Additional 41321 provide similar descriptions of taverns.⁹⁵ The tavern and all the activities that occur within it are infernal reversals of the Church and its sacraments, particularly the Eucharist, as holy wine and bread give way to drunkenness and gluttony. In the *Harrowing*, Satan's presentation of Jesus as a "noble morsell" is an anti-Eucharistic move that relies for its meaning on secular revelry.

Ralph Hanna has placed the *Harrowing* within a broad trend of “medieval antitavern invective” that arose “in response to a variety of circumambient social discourses”: “the misbehaviors, the covert adulterations of product, also typical of Langland’s Rose or the alewife of the Chester *Harrowing of Hell* [are] representations that speak... to abiding suspicions of victualing as a profession.”⁹⁶ The alewife admits that she has deceived customers by selling them smaller measures than were promised, that she illegally masked the weakness of her beer by adding hops, that she adds ashes and herbs that mar her malts, that she waters down her brew and hides the extra malt, and that she sells badly fermented wine that causes sickness (lines 289-320).⁹⁷ Chester’s alewife epilogue does, as Hanna argues, draw its material directly from a generalized suspicion of victuallers’ adulteration of their goods. Gerald Robert Owst also shows convincingly that a very broad swath of medieval poets and homilists, including Langland, use invectives that exploit (or perhaps exacerbate) that generalized suspicion in order to drive listeners away from taverns.⁹⁸

However, those poets and homilists, at least as far as we know, were not brewers or taverners themselves, nor did they write to an audience of tavern-goers and revelers. It would be absurd to consider that Chester’s Cooks, Tapsters, Brewers, and Innkeepers’ players would take up such a charge in any seriousness. These players are more like Chaucer, who can simultaneously lampoon antitavern invective, celebrate the fun of drinking, and criticize excessive gluttony—by filtering his tale through a Pardoner whose hypocritical piety is unserious in the extreme, who preaches on the tavern as the “develes temple” filled with the “verray develes officeres” while he drinks and eats within one.⁹⁹ The Pardoner’s three revelers, like the Cestrian players, begin drinking at breakfast.¹⁰⁰ The Chester alewife, who owes Satan her allegiance, works well as one of the “develes officeres,” an inverted priest: rather than administering wine that is more than wine, she sells ale that is less than ale.

Both texts admit that the tavern is Hell and invite their listeners in anyway. The symbolic power of such satires is more complex than simple reversal or parody. Like Chaucer, the Cestrian *Harrowing* players wink at their audiences from within a nominally pious conceit, encouraging revelry without breaking from doctrine, gesturing at a practical street-level lay piety that reconciles local festive tradition with Christian imprecations against sins of the body. The *Harrowing* is no more an anti-Christian work than the *Canterbury Tales*, nor is it carnivalesque in any real anti-establishment way. Rather, it is playful: even as it pays due respect to the power of Jesus’ pure light as he releases sinners from the “develes temple,” it relishes the irony that Cestrian taverners are presenting that image. That sense of play goes far beyond devotional analogies with the Eucharist. A Cestrian holiday festival seems to have been much like modern Mardi Gras—to return to Clopper’s cognate for the Chester Bakers’ bread-sharing—a complex of cultural practices and symbols within which the reversal of the Lenten fast is only a small, though defining, part.

Lay believers enjoyed worldly gluttony and revelry under the auspices of a Church feast; the feast day drew its schedule and its significance from a belief system that disallowed such behavior.¹⁰¹ Steven Justice defines medieval belief as “a complex of intellectual and voluntary practices, irreducible to the propositions they are meant to maintain... a set of practices cultivated systematically with the goal of habituation.”¹⁰² The humor of the *Harrowing*, like the real feasts that are enacted throughout the Chester cycle, does precisely that kind of symbolic work, embedding in local habits (that is, in the recurring performance of the plays) a narrative that makes guild gluttony continuous with biblical history.

Public drama, at the secular and religious center of civic festivities, opens up a playful conceptual space within which religious contradictions can be reconciled. Sarah Beckwith has argued that the York cycle, for instance, allowed guildsmen to work through contradictions between Eucharistic belief and practical sense.¹⁰³ I propose that, at Chester, believers negotiated the paradoxes of sacred gluttony and festive piety by incorporating them into a play cycle that both

decried and celebrated conspicuous consumption as a proof of humanness, reaffirming the Eucharist's continuity with essential secular feasts, while simultaneously enacting and deferring the divine punishment that might restrain human appetites. The Chester food and drink episodes allow the Cestrian laity to enter into taverns with a clear conscience, despite the familiar homiletic warnings against them—to show their Whitsuntide devotion *in* their revelry. Cestrian players at once confess and celebrate their gluttony, by presenting the central spectacles of excess in a worshipful but comic shape. Staged festivity, at once in Hell and in Chester, provides the conceptual space for two incompatible truths—that feasting in excess is sinful, and that such excess forms the core of guildsmen's observance of holidays—to coexist for the duration of the festival.

Chapter Four
Tourism and Hospitality at Chester's Port

A crowd of foreign traders continually passed in and out of the port at Chester's Watergate.¹ The Watergate was the western entry into Chester's walls and the site of its harbor, about nine miles upstream from where the River Dee empties into the Irish Sea. Though the harbor began to silt over by the late fifteenth century, it remained the main point of embarkation on Britain's northwest coast for France, Spain, and ports along the Irish Sea through 1625.² Curving around the southern and western gates of the city, the River Dee also formed the border between England and Wales. Throughout the late medieval period, despite the instability of Welsh-English relations, Chester took on a culturally, ethnically, and linguistically hybrid character.³ As David Mills puts it, there was enough traffic through the port and border to constitute a "transient population" in Chester, on their way from or to England, Wales, Ireland, France, and points beyond: mariners, merchants, and travelers looking for economic opportunity or on their way to visit family, soldiers, magnates, justices, royal administrators, and clergy. In short, while late medieval Chester often asserted its provincial identity in opposition to London, it also relied for its commercial success on its cosmopolitan role as a gateway to the rest of Europe.

The third wagon station for the Chester cycle's performances was in Watergate Street.⁴ Watergate Street extends straight from the busy Watergate to the High Cross at the center of Chester, the location of the second wagon station at which the cycle was performed—about a six-minute walk.⁵ Since Watergate Street is so short and straight, and since the street is built on flat terrain, the third wagon station is likely to have been closer to the harbor than it was to the city center, in order for there to be any point in holding separate performances at the two stations. With the harbor so close to the third station, cycle performances must have been easily accessible, if not visible, from Chester's crowded concourse of foreigners.

In Chapter Two I argue that the plays provided an occasion for the community to see itself; on the other hand, Mervyn James has suggested that the plays provided "an occasion on which the urban community could effectively present and define itself in relation to the outside world."⁶ In Chapter Three I emphasize the importance of the marketplace setting in the festivals' commercial symbolism; James points out that the plays "brought a brief flurry of enhanced commercial activity to the urban markets," a crowd that was enhanced by an "influx of strangers" into those markets.⁷ If the marketplace setting of the plays makes them commensal from the perspective of fellow community members, then, it also makes them commercial from the perspective of visitors. David Mills goes so far as to argue that the plays' "primary" purpose was commercial:

The simple commercialism of the occasion remains a constant. Citizens had to bear the production costs and, if those costs were to be recouped, had to attract crowds in order to boost trade income. For them, the customer came first... Despite the claims made supporters of the Plays for religious edification, social cohesion, and customary practice, economic self-interest was the main justification for such civic customs in the eyes of the citizens. Hence, the attraction of crowds to spend money was the primary concern.⁸

Pointing out that a late redaction of Rogers's *Breviary* describes the plays as "all being at the Cittizens charge, yet profitable for them, for [both] all bothe farr and neere came to see them," Mills suggests that "[t]here is an outlay [and] also a return. The Plays can be seen as a tourist attraction, bringing trade into the city."⁹ In Chester's records, Mills discovers some evidence of such tourism: Blanche Webb and her sister traveled six miles from Backford for express purpose of seeing the plays; Howell Willin, on a journey to Wales, took a detour through Chester specifically because he wished

to view the plays. As Mills points out, this evidence not only attests to the effectiveness of the cycle as a tourist attraction, but also to the fact that news of the cycle's upcoming performance spread beyond the city walls.¹⁰

Mills forms his argument about commercialism by using evidence from advertisements for, historical records of, and especially opposition to the cycle performances—essentially, every textual resource except the plays themselves. As my prior chapters demonstrate, the play texts' clear engagement with community-based values and rituals cannot bear out Mills's argument that their commercial concerns were "primary," to the exclusion of "social cohesion" and "customary practice."¹¹ Rather, the guilds of Chester, which formed the social and religious infrastructure of the community, were also definitively mercantile organizations. It only makes sense that such a community would produce a cycle that inscribes real local practice into repeatable dramatic ritual, thereby creating social cohesion among neighbors, while *also* acting as an effective tourist attraction, satisfying those neighbors' need to draw in money from outsiders. What I attempt to achieve in this chapter is the adjustment to our vision of the cycle texts that comes with an understanding of the importance of the audience members who entered Chester through its harbor, and their effect on the way that the local community envisioned itself by means of the cycle.

While locals almost certainly constituted the vast majority of the audience, the importance of non-locals must have been more than proportional to their actual number. The growth of the guilds and their cycle was dependent on the boom of Chester's economy, which relied on international trade. When visitors entered through the Watergate, even if their business only kept them in town one night, they became pure consumers. The Chester freemen had the exclusive right to sell guild-made goods within the city walls. Chester's innkeepers and victuallers, meanwhile, could only benefit from drawing in visitors and giving them a reason to stay. A play cycle orbiting the market center of town, drawn across three days, would lure these ideal customers within the city walls—where they could only buy, not sell—and encourage them to stay a while before they passed through to their next destination.

The cycle dialogue often emphasizes its visible and audible presence in the *platea*, so that each of the places it depicts—be it Judea, Bethlehem, Jerusalem, or Hell—seems squarely located in Chester. Appropriately, just like in Chester, there are "transient populations" passing continually in and out of those places. Characters in the cycle are often *en route* to or from somewhere: they travel across Noah's Flood, out of Bethany, into Jerusalem, toward Emmaus; they are exiled from Heaven to Hell, from Eden into the wilderness, from Bethlehem to Egypt; they climb five mountains (Moses, Abraham and Isaac, Balack and Balaam, the Three Kings, Jesus tempted by Satan). After the Pentecost, as I discuss in my second chapter, the Apostles scatter through "eych countree / to the worldes end" (lines 71-72)—a world whose vastness is foregrounded at the beginning of the cycle, with the display of a *mappa mundi* in the *Adam* play.¹² Perhaps the inherent mobility in the biblical stories has something to do with the English cycle players' general tendency to put their stages on wagons.

The Chester cycle, as I argue below, often presents its travelers in ways that show the influence of the city's port and border. I focus on the last four plays presented on the Monday night of Whitsun Week—the *Annunciation/Nativity*, the *Shepherds*, the *Three Kings*, and the *Offerings*. In these plays, travel toward Bethlehem becomes so central to the cycle story that it is the characters' progress across distance, rather than time, that connects one play to the next. Unlike the other plays in the cycle, which occur in chronological order, the plays of the Nativity sequence depict simultaneous events, tied together by the appearance by the star of Bethlehem as seen from three different locations. The star prompts the Three Kings and the three Shepherds to travel to Bethlehem, following the same star at the same time. Those journeys come after Mary and Joseph's journey into Bethlehem in the *Annunciation/Nativity*, which is set in motion by the journey of

Octavian's Herald from Rome into Judea for the census; in Rome, Octavian also sees and reacts to the star.

David Mills and others have already argued convincingly that the Shepherds begin their journey in mountain pastures that resemble Wales, then travel into a Bethlehem that is conspicuously superimposed upon Chester.¹³ Colored by puns on local foods and patronymic names, the play's portrayal of rough shepherds who wander mountain pastures is hard to miss as "an affectionately humorous view of the local Welsh shepherds by the 'townies' of Chester."¹⁴ If the *Shepherds* play is part of a sequence of plays about travel, and if that play aligns the journey into Bethlehem with the commonly-traveled path across Chester's western border, then it is fair to ask what other commonly-traveled paths are implied during the other plays in the sequence.

The present chapter points up the differences and contradictions between the cases I describe in Chapter Two, in which the community views various parts of its own social body, and the cases I describe below, in which the community refers to its social body as a distinct object *in toto*. That latter act of reference requires a perspective that can see beyond the local, to what is not the local, against which the community-as-object may be defined. In my first section below, I argue that if the Shepherds recall the Welsh peasants in the mountains outside Chester, then it is hard not to see the Three Kings as echoes of the visitors who accumulate at Chester's harbor. The fact that Chester's Continental visitors are as visible in its *Three Kings* and *Offerings* plays as Chester's Welsh neighbors are in its *Shepherds* play demonstrates that Chester's transient population was a significant presence during the development of the cycle. With that in mind, in my second section, I examine how the gaze of these non-locals influences the way that the Chester cycle performs its own Cestrianness. Moving from depictions of travelers to depictions of hosts, I argue that this non-local gaze provokes in the cycle an artificial construction of provincialism that disguises an otherwise cosmopolitan culture from medieval tourists and modern readers. In my third and final section, I bring that sense of Cestrian cosmopolitanism to bear on representations of Rome in the *Annunciation/Nativity* and *Pentecost* plays, suggesting that they may owe more to Chester's Continental sympathies than to its Catholic recusancy.

The Three Kings

Among the marked contrasts in the Nativity sequence between the local Shepherds and the foreign Three Kings is the length, or apparent length, of the journeys that they take. Even though the *Shepherds* play implies that the Shepherds travel to Bethlehem from the Welsh hills, the dramatic timing of the play ensures that their journey is completed quickly—a marked contrast to the Three Kings, the length of whose journey is underscored throughout their plays, which depict them as distinctly foreign and sometimes link them subtly to the Continent. It follows, as I show below, that the Three Kings stand in for those foreigners who have found their way to Chester from afar, just as the Shepherds represent visitors from the nearby Welsh hills.

After singing an English vernacular lyric (noted in the manuscripts as a "hilare carmen" including the lyrics "troly, loly, loly, loo"), the Shepherds and their boy (Trowle) announce their intentions to travel:

PRIMUS PASTOR	Nowe followe we the starre that shines, tyll we come to that holy stable. To Bethlem boyne the lymes; followe we yt withowt any fable.
SECUNDUS PASTOR	Followe we hit and hyes full fast; such a frende loth us were to fayle.

Hic vadunt versus Bethlem.
TERTIUS PASTOR

*Launche on! I will not be the last
upon Marye for to mervayle.*

*Stynt nowe; goe no moe steppes,
for now the starre beginneth to stand.
Harvye, that good bene our happes
we seene—by our Savyour fonde.*

Hic apparet Angelus et dicat:

Sheppardes, of this sight
be ye not afright... (lines 448-465, emphasis added).

In order for the Second Shepherd's "Launche on!" to make sense, he cannot actually begin moving toward the star until after he says it. His companions seem already to have moved forward, because the Second Shepherd is worried about being left behind ("I will not be the last," line 459). Almost immediately after the Second Shepherd starts moving, the Third Shepherd issues the order to stop ("Stynt nowe; goe no moe steppes," line 460), noticing that the star (presumably held by the guide Angel) has ceased to move (line 461). That order is directed at "Harvye," the Second Shepherd (who is named at line 45), making it clear that his journey (which is the same journey taken by all the Shepherds) is short enough to occur between "Launche on!" and "Stynt nowe," a space of time and distance only represented by the stage direction "*Hic vadunt versus Bethlem*" (line 459+SD). Most of Chester's other stage directions, when they call for movement from one location to another, employ some form of Latin *eo* ("go, walk, ride"); the stage direction after line 459 is Chester's only use of Latin *vado* ("go, rush, hurry, walk"), which brings with it the further implication that the Shepherds' travel is quick.¹⁵ After "Stynt nowe," there is still some traveling to do to arrive in Bethlehem proper, but the dialogue makes clear that the distance is not far:

Hic apparet Angelus et dicat:

GARCIUS

Sheppardes, *of this sight*
be ye not afright,
for this is Godes might;
takes this in mynde.
*To Bethlem nowe right,
there yee shall see in sight
that Christ is borne tonight
to cover all mankynde.*
To Bethlem take wee the waye,
for with you I thinke to wend,
that prince of peace for to praye
heaven to have at our ende.
And singe we all, I read,
some myrth to his majestee,
*for certayne now see wee it indeede:
the kinge Sone of heavon is hee.*
Sym, sym, securlye
*here I see Marye,
and Jesus Christ fast bye
lapped in haye* (lines 464-483, emphasis added).

PRIMUS PASTOR

The first “sight” in the Angel’s speech is not of Jesus himself, but of the star, because Jesus has not become visible yet (“there yee *shall* see in sight,” line 469). Both the Angel and Trowle (Garcus) refer to Bethlehem as a place at which the Shepherds have not yet arrived (lines 468 and 472). However, no sooner does Trowle take “the way” to Bethlehem (line 472) than he arrives, close enough to “see wee it indeed: / the kinge Sone of heaven is hee” (lines 476-9). The First Shepherd can now see the details of the manger: Mary, Jesus, the hay (lines 481-3). Throughout these speeches, the Shepherds and Angel mark their progress by what they are able to see, though the Shepherds’ comic impatience allows them anachronistically to know the details of the manger scene before they see it (“I will not be the last /upon Marye for to mervayle,” lines 458-9), further collapsing the apparent length of their journey. From line 459 (“Launche on!... *Hic vadunt versus Bethlem?*”) to line 478 (“certayne now see wee it indeede”), the Shepherds thus seem to cover very little ground between their vaguely British pastures and Bethlehem proper.

The Angel’s instructions for the Shepherds to go “to Bethlem” make it clear that they are not within the borders of the town of Bethlehem at the beginning of their journey. In contrast, the Three Kings’ Angel instructs them to go “into the land of Judee” (*Three Kings* line 91), placing them not just outside the town, but outside the region entirely:

ANGELUS	Ryse up, yee kinges three, and commys <i>anone</i> after mee <i>into the land of Judee</i> <i>as fast as yee may hye...</i>
PRIMUS REX	Lordes, hye wee heathen <i>anone</i> . Nowe wee binne bydden theder gonne, <i>I will never byde</i> —by my bonne— tyll I at him bee (<i>Three Kings</i> lines 89-100, emphasis added).

Their journey is also hurried (“as fast as yee may hye,” “anone”), but the implication here is not of comic impatience but of necessity, because the trip is so long. The First King’s protests against taking rests (“I will never byde... tyll I at him bee”) suggest that the trip would, under less urgent circumstances, include rest stops. Later dialogue reaffirms the Kings’ foreign origins:

HERODES	These kinges be come a farre way to seeke a child, I hard say, that should be borne in this cuntraye my kingdome to destroye (<i>Three Kings</i> lines 237-40).
PRIMUS REX	I saye certayne this is hee that we have sought in farre countree (<i>Offerings</i> lines 132-3).

The Shepherds can cover their ground by foot, but the Three Kings enter on horses (“fellowe, take this coursere,” line 41; “*Hic descendunt de equis,*” line 48+SD). When they learn their destination, they realize that even horses will not get them there quickly enough:

SECUNDUS REX	Yea, syrs, I read us everychone dromodaryes to ryde upon, for swyfter beasts be there none. One I have, ye shall see.
TERTIUS REX	A dromodarye, in good faye,

will goe lightly on his way
an hundreth myles upon a daye;
such beasts nowe take wee (lines 101-108).

Dromedaries are “swyfter” than horses because they can go for extended distances without slowing down—another sign that the Three Kings’ journey will be a long one. As the Third King puts it, dromedaries can travel “an hundreth myles upon a daye,” a hint that the journey will be far more than one day and one hundred miles long.

After the First King expresses his wish that “that child would shorten well our waye” (*Three Kings* line 110), another nod to the length of the journey, the Three Kings set out on their dromedaries. In contrast to the Shepherds’ hurried “*vadunt versus Bethlem*” (*Shepherds* line 459+SD), the Kings’ stage direction is “Then goe downe to the beastes and ryde abowt” (*Three Kings* line 112+SD)—“abowt” calls for generalized movement without any particular direction. For the Kings to ride “abowt” makes some diegetic sense: unlike the Shepherds, the Kings quickly lose sight of the star, so that they find themselves on the way to Herod’s castle. But a dromedary (or a horse dressed as one, as is likely in this case) also provides for a spectacle. The Kings’ riding must occur in the street, since neither a horse nor a dromedary could be easily moved on and off the wagon (hence the stage direction “go *downe* to the beastes”). By becoming lost on the way to Judea, the Kings have created an impromptu procession in the streets of Chester, an opportunity for the unusual sight of a dromedary to be put on parade. Long after Chester had stopped producing its plays, it retained that kind of spectacle in its Midsummer Show. City expense accounts for the Midsummer Show call on two separate occasions for “the 4 beastes... the Antilope flowerdeluce vnicorne & Camell”; elsewhere, an order calls for “ffoure Ieans, won vnicorne won drombandarye, won Luce, won Camell,” and other beasts.¹⁶ The introduction of the Kings’ dromedaries into the cycle is not essential to the drama; rather, it slows it down, since three horses must be handled at the beginning of the play, then replaced by (or dressed as) dromedaries. When the Kings “ride abowt,” then, a bit of parading enters into the play, extending the perceived duration of the journey and drawing a great deal of attention to the means by which that journey is made.

When they first enter the cycle, Chester’s Three Kings have already come from far places for their meeting at the “Mounte Victoryall” (*Three Kings* line 30). Later, the First King implies that the difference among the Kings’ three offerings to Jesus stem from the differences among the customs of the Kings’ home countries (“of mee have hee shall... Gould, or I passe / For *in our land is the manere* / to approche noe kinge neare / but dayntye giftes rich and deare / after his dignitie,” (*Offerings* lines 38-44). From the mountain, the Kings watch for the star from Balaam’s prophecy, a meeting that occurs “devoutlye once in the yeare” (*Three Kings* line 15). As Lumiansky and Mills observe, the length and frequency of the Kings’ watch varies widely from source to source. Only Chester mentions a yearly watch.¹⁷ It is a reminder that the cycle audience in Chester, who have convened to celebrate an annual holiday, are also gathered to witness the miracle of the star and the Nativity. The Nativity sequence has already strongly located Bethlehem in Chester—it is the place where the characters come to *see* the Nativity—and it has already hinted that the Shepherds represent those who have come from the rural areas just outside Chester’s city walls. By association, the Three Kings work well as those very visible audience members who have come to Chester from outside the country.

It is not only the length of the Three Kings’ journey that links these characters to Chester’s transient population, but also the direction of that journey. Chester’s Kings follow a star that shines “in the east in noble araye” (*Three Kings* line 129), seemingly consistent with Balaam’s Old Testament prophecy of the star depicted in Chester’s *Moses/Balaam* play.¹⁸ However, Balaam’s prophecy is delivered from within Judea. Traditionally, the Kings come from the east themselves—Chester’s

play heading refers to them as the “Trium Regum Orientalium” (*Three Kings* line 1+SH), and Herod’s Doctor places their origins in “Tharsis and Arabye” (*Three Kings* line 340); later on, on his way home, the First King confirms that the Second King is from Tarsus (*Offerings* line 241). The Arabian Peninsula extends eastward from Bethlehem; Tarsus is almost directly to Bethlehem’s north. If the cycle specifies the Kings’ origin as east (or north) of Bethlehem, then they should technically be following a star that, to them, appears in the west or south. It may be unreasonable to expect perfect geographic consistency from a medieval drama cycle, but the inconsistent placement of the prophecy of a star “in the east” in the *Three Kings*’ story allows the traditionally eastern kings to embark on an eastward journey.

That eastward journey follows a route that starts from many coasts, then enters Bethlehem via a gate. The Kings begin “from sundrye coasts” (*Three Kings* line 321) to their meeting at the “Mounte Victoryall” (*Three Kings* line 30); from there, they follow the star in the east, detouring through Herod’s castle, until they enter Bethlehem. At Bethlehem, when an Angel warns the Kings not to go back the way they came, he refers to “the gate” they had entered through (*Offerings* line 231). Just as the Shepherds’ descent from mountain pastures suggests that their origin is Wales, the Kings’ itinerary parallels that of the non-locals. Those visitors, too, have traveled along a trade route that leads from many coasts (i.e. the ports in Ireland and the Continent with which Chester traded), and then entered the city eastward along the River Dee through a gate (Chester’s Watergate). Esau’s prophecy in the *Three Kings* play, spoken by Herod’s Doctor, seems in that context to refer directly to non-local witnesses:

DOCTOR

‘Ambulabunt gentes in lumine tuo et reges in splendore ortus tui.’ Esaui sexagesimo.

Esawe... prophiced that kinges witterlye
and folkes of strange natyons and from sundrye coasts—
that princes death to magnifie, which of might is moste—
should walke in great light; and brightnes should apere,
as did unto these kinges in a bright starre shininge clere.
(*Three Kings* 318-324).

Prior dialogue about the kings’ origins makes clear that they are to be counted among the witnesses “of strange natyons and from sundry coasts,” but the Doctor’s insertion of Esau into the *Three Kings* play gestures toward another, more generalized group of “gentes” or “folkes,” Christians who have also traveled from far away to walk in the light of the star. That gesture—repeated here in both Latin and English—can easily encompass the non-local witnesses at Chester, in the audience upon whom the light of the prop star also shines.

It is in the way that Chester’s guildsmen express the *Three Kings*’ royalty and adoration that the guilds’ concern with Chester’s transient population becomes most apparent. The two guilds responsible for the *Three Kings* and *Offerings* plays are, respectively, the Vintners’ and Mercers’ guilds, the two Cestrian guilds with the most vested interest in Chester’s port; below, I focus on the Vintners’ interpretation of the *Three Kings*’ royalty, then on the Mercers’ interpretation of their adoration.

While Chester’s markets offered local fish, wool, metals, and most of the materials necessary to the other guilds’ crafts or trades, wine was among the products only available through importation.¹⁹ It is likely that the Vintners conducted their primary trade through Chester’s harbor with Continental wine-sellers. When the Vintners’ *Three Kings* see the star appear, their characteristic royalty is foregrounded with a French code-switch:

	<i>Tunc apparebit stella.</i>	
PRIMUS REX		<i>A, sir roy, si vous ploitt,</i> (A, sir king, if it please you.) <i>gardes sus sur vostre teste.</i> (Look up above your head.)
SECUNDUS REX		<i>Une esteile issi est</i> (There is a star there) <i>que syr vous reploiste.</i> (which shines upon you.)
TERTIUS REX		<i>Aloies, soit luy une semblant</i> (Behold, there is there an image) <i>de une virgin portant</i> (of a virgin, bearing,) <i>come le semble, de une enfant</i> (as it seems, a child,) <i>em brace apportement.</i> (carrying it in her arms, <i>Three Kings</i> lines 65-72). ²⁰

Outside of the *Three Kings* play, French speeches occur three other times during the Chester cycle (four in British Library MS Harley 2124), each time in formal greetings between royal or noble characters.²¹ Later in the *Three Kings* play, a formal greeting is precisely the cause of French code-switching:

PRIMUS REX		<i>Syr roy, ryall and reverent,</i> (Sir king, royal and revered,) <i>Deu vous gard, omnipotent.</i> (May God preserve you, all-powerful.)
SECUNDUS REX		<i>Nos summes veneus comoplent,</i> (We have come here together) <i>novelis de enquire.</i> (to ask after news.)
HERODES	<i>Staffe.</i>	<i>Bien soies venues, royes gent.</i> (Welcome, noble kings.) <i>Me detes tout vetere entent.</i> (Tell me all that you intend.)
TERTIUS REX		<i>Infant querennes de grand parent</i> (We seek a child of high parentage) <i>et roy de celi et terre.</i> (and king of heaven and earth.)
HERODES		Syrs, avise you what you sayne! Such tydinges makes my harte unfayne (<i>Three Kings</i> lines 153-60). ²²

Here, French is the language of formal greeting among kings, a formality that breaks abruptly when Herod realizes what the Three Kings seek.

Some nineteenth-century critics considered the unusual frequency of French passages in the cycle to be evidence that the entire Chester cycle was a translation from a French original, but in

1925 Albert Baugh seems to have put those hypotheses to rest by favoring “the more reasonable explanation”:

that the French language was the language of the upper classes in England, or had recently been, when the Chester plays were presumably written. Since all the French passages are put in the mouths of kings and magistrates, the French is merely a sign of their princeness.²³

Modern textual criticism has rightly removed any idea of a French original for the entire Chester cycle from scholarly discussion. However, Baugh’s observation of the fact that French language can signify royalty in English poetry does not mean that French language only signifies royalty, or that it is the only way to represent royalty. Baugh presents a series of examples from other English biblical drama to remind his reader that “the Chester plays are not alone in containing such passages,” but the list of comparable passages he provides is meager—it makes Chester’s inclusion of five or six passages of French seem more remarkable, not less. The Coventry Shearmen and Tailors’ play gives one eleven-line French speech not to a monarch but to Herod’s Herald, as part of a public announcement that also includes English and Latin.²⁴ The York Cycle and Towneley Plays each include only a line or two of very basic French (York’s Herod: “[B]eene-venen, in bone fay, / Ne plesew et a parle remoy?”; Towneley’s Pilate: “*Dew vous garde, monsenyours!*”), outside of the occasional “belamy” or other Anglicized but still recognizably French loan-word that tends to be spoken by high-class characters.²⁵ Notably, Chester’s Third King also employs “belamy” when he greets Herod’s Messenger (*Three Kings* line 123), while none of the Chester cycle’s other characters use the term. Beyond these examples, Baugh can only point out royal characters’ more frequent practice of speaking in Latin, which he connects to the rarer royal French: “For princely persons to speak a passage in a language not comprehensible to the vulgar would seem to have been a tradition in the early drama.”²⁶ However, characters of all classes in all English drama speak or sing in Latin. Since the cycle’s actors were drawn from the same “vulgar” class as its local audience, and since that community’s economy was built on international trade, it is safe to assume that Chester’s Vintners and their audience (whether locals or foreigners) had enough command over French to understand the elementary dialogues in their play. Before it sours, the greeting between Herod and the Three Kings suggests that a proper welcome should be conducted in French, while at the same time demonstrating (because it is Cestrian players who speak the lines) that the citizens of Chester are capable of speaking and understanding that welcome.

The Chester cycle tends to reserve French not only for its royal characters, but also specifically for formal greetings involving those characters. However, in the first French example, the Kings are not greeting anyone—their code-switching stands out against the other French in the cycle because it serves no social purpose in the world of the play. Instead, it is a sign of heightened emotion on the Kings’ part, a response to the appearance of the star that communicates how affected the Kings are by what they see. During the rest of the *Three Kings* play, each King tends only to speak on behalf of all Three Kings at once (“Syr, wee see the starre appeare,” First King at line 213; “Wee see never non soe clare,” Second King at line 217; “By prophecye well wotten wee,” Third King at line 221, etc.). If they address each other, the Kings speak generally to all Three Kings at once (“wee kinges of [Balaam’s] kynde, / I read wee take his wordes in mynde,” lines 25-6). The Kings’ first French dialogue is the only moment when they acknowledge each other as individuals in the *Three Kings* play (there are other moments in the *Offerings* play, which I discuss later on). Upon seeing the star, the First King does not describe it; rather, he locates the star with respect to the body of his companion, and in doing so ensures that the Second King also look at it: “A, sir roy, si vous ploitt, / gardes sus sur vostre teste.” “Sur” is used in the sense of “above” here, though its more common meaning, “upon,” suggests that the star’s light shines is upon the Second King’s

body. In response, the Second King, having located the star “issi”—“there” above his head, where the First King had pointed to it—brings the First King’s attention back down to his own body by noting that the star also shines upon him (“vous reploiste.”)

The First and Second Kings’ shift into awe and excitement comes with their shift into French. For the Three Kings, French is not only the language of royalty, but also the language of affect. A royal register is as appropriate for moments of heightened personal emotion as it is for moments of formal greeting; the effect is of characters who are true kings, consistently royal to their core. That effect forms a stark contrast with Herod, who puts on royal French in his formal greeting, but who is shocked back into English upon discovering the news of the star, just as that discovery provoked the Kings to switch English to French. As the language to which the Kings revert during a sudden burst of emotion, French looks like their mother tongue. By making all kings’ royal register also the Three Kings’ emotional or familiar register, the Vintners’ play of the *Three Kings* also heaps on extra opportunities for the Three Kings to speak French, on two separate occasions (or three, if “belamy” counts). That code-switching makes them look royal in the broader genre of early English poetry, but it also makes them look Continental in performances in close proximity to the northwest’s primary port of embarkation for France.

It is the Mercers’ *Offerings* play, the final performance on Whit-Monday, that actually depicts the Kings’ adoration at the manger. In keeping with their guild’s occupation, the Mercers’ players express adoration by showing off the quality of their merchandise—that is, the Kings’ offerings, which are the primary subject of this play. No other extant medieval biblical drama dedicates a separate play to the Kings’ offerings; the offerings usually form one episode in a more general play about the Kings’ adventures.²⁷

At Chester, before the Kings enter the manger, the Third King challenges his companions to prepare for the gift-giving with an *ad hoc* exegesis of the symbolism of their gifts, looping through each possible significance attributed to them in medieval hermeneutics. While an extended theological exposition—occupying 108 of the play’s 263 lines—might seem a lackluster finale to Monday’s performances, the patterning of those lines does create drama.²⁸ The Third King initiates the exegesis with a surprisingly sporting “What present best will for him fall / cast we here amongst us all” (lines 33-4), in which the use of *fall* and *cast* as terms of playful, chance-based competition turns the comparison of gifts into a kind of game. Some of the Kings’ early descriptions of their offerings do sound vaguely like boasts, a reminder of the ludic and festive environment of the plays, similar to the wrestling match in the *Shepherds* play and the dice game in the *Passion*.²⁹ In those early descriptions, it is unclear whether each King means that his own gift is most fitting to a particular aspect of Christ, or simply that it is *best*:

PRIMUS REX	And for a kinge Gould cleane and cleare is moste commendable (lines 45-46).
TERTIUS REX	And myrrre is best my offeringe to bee: to anynte him, <i>as thinkes mee</i> (lines 56-57, emphasis added).
PRIMUS REX	Syth hee shall be kinge... gould therfore witterlye is beste, <i>as thinkes mee</i> .
SECUNDUS REX	And syth hee hath in him godhead, <i>methinkes best</i> —as eate I bread— incense to give him <i>through my reade</i> (lines 68-74, emphasis added).

The Kings qualify their claims with “as thinkes mee,” “methinkes best,” and “through my reade” (i.e., “according to my counsel”), hinting that beneath their respectable theological discourse a competitive game is on.³⁰ From there, however, the game moves from the mundane to the spiritual:

- Lines 36-47: The First King on gold for temporal kingship
- Lines 48-51: The First King on gold for monetary value
- Lines 52-55: The Second King on incense to ward off the stable’s smell
- Lines 56-59: The Third King on myrrh to anoint the baby’s body
- Lines 60-63: The Third King praises all the Kings’ gifts as befitting to Jesus’ “manhoode and deitie.”
- Lines 64-71: The First King on gold for temporal kingship
- Lines 72-79: The Second King on incense for divinity
- Lines 80-87: The Third King on myrrh for bodily suffering
- Lines 88-95: The First King sums up the value of gold for temporal kingship, incense for divinity, and myrrh for bodily suffering
- Lines 96-103: The Second King on gold signifying love, incense signifying prayers, and myrrh signifying bodily death
- Lines 104-119: The Third King on gold signifying godhead, incense signifying devotion, and myrrh signifying cleanness

At lines 60-63, and then in all the lines following line 88, the Kings become less concerned with the value of their own gifts and more with the values behind the three gifts taken together. At the same time, their glosses move roughly from the practical (money, smell) to the temporal (kingship, suffering) to the anagogical (love, cleanness). The *Offerings* play attaches the act of playful performance (in the Kings’ competitive boasting and hints at casting dice) to their sense of the meaning of their gifts; as the Kings’ ideas about their gifts mature from low to high, the play itself looks more holy as well.

That play’s central matter is the Three Kings’ impressive offerings from the East. As the Kings’ interpretations of those commodities evolve gradually from the worldly to the spiritual, it is the very idea of the monetary value of tangible commodities that seems to be justified as an appropriate celebration of divinity. The putative divinity to be found in worldly wealth had to be an issue of controversy for the Mercers’ Guild, which was responsible for importing lavish goods through the port. The Early Banns that advertised the Chester cycle were concerned less with the action of the Mercers’ play than with their stage design, known for its display of wealth:

The mercers wor^{ship}ffull of degre
the presentation that haue yee
hit fallyth best for your see
by right reason & skyle
of caryage I haue no doubt
both within and also without
it shall be deckyd yat all the Rowte
full gladly on it shall be to loke
with sondry Cullors it shall shine
of veluit satten & damaske fyne
Taffyta Sersnett of poppyngee grene³¹

The *Offering* play lacks any energetic movement, comedy, or high drama, so it makes sense that the spectacle of this final Monday performance would be located in another aspect of the play—in this case, in the lavishness of the set. The Mercers covered their pageant in velvet, satin, damask, taffeta, and sarsenet (a fine silk material) with green piping, materials that at once suggest the Kings’ royalty (because of their high price) and their Eastern origins—and thus, trade through the port, particularly via the Continent.³² Thus, the Mercers’ had an especially commercial motive in staging their *Offerings* play—it offered them an opportunity to display their imports, which it was their business to sell. The Late Banns draw even more attention to the financial posturing that drove the Mercers’ staging, and in doing so emphasize a paradox inherent to the matter of their play:

And you *worthie* mercers, thoughe costelye and fyne
 ye tryme up *your* Cariage as custome euer was
 yet in a stable was he borne that mightie kinge deuine
 Poorlye in a stable betwixte an Oxe and ane Asse³³

The Late Banns thus explicitly gesture to the problem that the lesson of the Jesus’ impoverished birth, which reminds Christians that worldly wealth is disconnected from spirituality, is undermined by the fact that the spectacle of the *Offerings* is bound up in worldly wealth. Given that the Late Banns were composed at the height of the Reformation, it is unsurprising that they should be more directly concerned with any combination of worldly ornament and religious observance. Still, the contradiction also haunts the dialogue of the play itself, if more subtly. The Three Kings notice at the beginning of the *Offerings* play that the stable is at once inappropriate and appropriate to Jesus:

SECUNDUS REX	[H]igh hall see I non here. To a child of such powere this howsinge standeth lowe.
TERTIUS REX	Nowe wott I well, withouten were, without pryde hee will apere to make men meeke, in such manere an example us to shewe (lines 17-24).

The Third King acknowledges the difference between the “high hall” of earthly royalty and the meekness of Jesus, but then he initiates the glossing of gifts, a dilation that makes material riches the focal point of the play. He decides that “though hee lye in an oxe stall, / his might is never the lesse” (lines 35-6)—an insufficient justification for the giving of lavish gifts, considering that it is the Third King himself who pointed out that Jesus’ “powere” (line 18) lies in his ability to demonstrate meekness by example (lines 23-24).

That contradiction is made visible in the Mercers’ wagon, on which the supposedly “lowe” stable is located, because it is decked with sundry colors of fine imported fabrics. The Banns’ emphasis on that decoration suggests that the Mercers’ wagon, though it depicts a scene of impoverishment, is more heavily adorned than any other wagon. Indeed, because their trade is in importation, the Mercers cannot present an actual picture of poverty onstage without compromising their commercial interest in the cycle. As the play’s dialogue continues, the Kings’ glosses gradually raise the value of those visible commodities from the worldly to the divine. In doing so, the dialogue incorporates the imported material goods from Chester’s port (and the Cestrians in charge of importing them) into a staged gift-giving competition, which has the capacity to impress outsiders by displaying local wealth and to welcome them into a community-based ritual that transforms economic competition into collective adoration.

The Kings have created a tone of collective inclusion throughout the plays, not only in their unshakeable courtesy (even to Herod), but also in the way that they seem to speak as three manifestations of the same personality. That latter aspect of their characters only becomes apparent when, in the Kings' final speeches, it disappears: the Kings refer to each other by name for the first time only when they bid each other farewell ("Jasper," line 240; "Balthasar," line 242). In nearly every other case, named characters in the Chester cycle name each other or themselves early on, presumably so that audience members can know who they are.³⁴ To reverse the usual formula creates a poignant moment of individual sentiment, much like the Kings' shift in tone upon first viewing the star. Those who arrived into town together as a collective dramatic unit ("The Three Kings") now separate individuals, who can deliver blessings independently, and who can now go their separate ways.

Those blessings, as Lumiansky and Mills have pointed out, do not make logical sense; even though they will change their route to avoid Herod, the Kings all still come from the same direction and should logically make the majority of their return journey together. I propose that the questionable narrative sense of the farewell speeches is secondary to their dramatic impact, framed by poignant revelation of the Kings' names, which resonates with Chester's role as a port where travelers come together and then disperse. Taking into account the fact that the Kings have so much in common with Chester's own temporary visitors, it is not difficult to see the value of ending Monday's performances with a farewell blessing specifically directed at travelers from different lands, one that emphasizes their common Christian faith:

PRIMUS REX

*Farewell, syr Jasper, brother, to you,
kinge of Tharsis most worthye.
Farewell, syr Balthasar; to you I bowe.
I thanke you of your companye.
Hee that made us to meete on playne
and offered to Marye in her jesayne,
send us saffe and sound agayne
to the land we came froo.*

SECUNDUS REX

*You kinges, I saye you verament:
syth God of his grace you hyther sent,
wee will doe his commandement
whatsoever may befall.
Therefore stand we not in doubt
for to walke our land about,
and of his byrth that wee maye moote
both to great and smale.*

TERTIUS REX

*Farewell, syr kynges, both in fere;
I thanke you both of your good chere.
But yett my witt in a were but yet in doubt
lest Herode make us some trayne plot.
Hee that shoope both sea and sand,
send us saffe into our land.
Kynges to, give me your hand;
farewell and have good daye! (Offerings lines 240-63, emphasis
added)*

As I point out in my second chapter, most of the Chester plays end with a farewell or a similar blessing that the players direct simultaneously to each other and to the gathered audience. The Kings' final speeches also clearly serve that double duty. The Third King's final "farewell and have good daye," placed at the very end of a day's performance, must be taken as a valediction on behalf of the players in general, decisively breaking the conceit of the *Offerings* play and drawing the focus onto the festival-goers gathered in the *platea*.³⁵ The lines I have emphasized above read as a sentimental valediction, a travelers' blessing, that could easily catch the ear of any non-locals in the audience, who already see themselves favorably reflected in Chester's portrayal of the Three Kings.

In all, the presence of foreign visitors in Chester, especially French ones, had enough of an effect on the development of the Chester plays to constitute a major theme in its Nativity sequence, through the depiction of the Three Kings. I close this section by examining the ways that prior critics' questions about French influence links back to, and can be largely settled by, questions about the process of the cycle's collective authorship, which I bring up at length in the Introduction to this project.

In his 1925 article, "The Chester Plays and French Influence," Albert Baugh sums up and critiques all prior writing regarding possible French influences on the Chester cycle. He debunks the logic of the majority of nineteenth-century claims, but still concludes that some French influence on the cycle is "probable," though not "proved."³⁶ That measured verdict was enough to settle the debate. Peter Happé, the most recent scholar to perform a sustained comparative study of the English cycles and their Continental counterparts, cites only Baugh; Happé acknowledges that

[t]here has indeed been a persistent thread in studies of the [Chester] cycle suggesting direct French influence, but this has proved difficult to substantiate beyond the fact that Chester has a number of episodes not found in other English cycles, but traceable in various French examples.³⁷

In their notes to the EETS edition of the cycle, modern editors Lumiansky and Mills defer to Baugh's article on the subject of French cognates.³⁸

Baugh attributes the extant Chester cycle to the "work of an educated cleric," a "Chester dramatist"; consequently, Baugh's model of sources and influence assumes that, if there is any French influence in the Chester plays, that influence occurred all at once.³⁹ Happé is closer to the mark:

It does not appear that the cycle was performed annually and many decisions had presumably to be made when each performance was proposed... Though there is something to be said about the earlier, now submerged version of the cycle and how it might have contributed to the revised form, the relatively late date of the latter means that there is a possibility that its author could also have drawn on other models from elsewhere. This would include the French *Passions* which were generated in quantity from about 1450, as well as the by-now well-established and famous cycles at Coventry and York.⁴⁰

However, Happé still refers to a singular reviser: "the author seems to have been master in his own house," despite his possibly being "influenced by the previous [version of] Chester Cycle, by the successful English models, and by material from the Continent."⁴¹ Throughout this project, but especially in my introduction and second chapter, I have argued for a model of collective authorship and revision, a gradual accretion of textual changes involving generations of Cestrians and multiple copies of plays that were disseminated and revised separately among guilds during rehearsals. Happé hints at such a model when he alludes to the "many decisions" that "had presumably to be made

when each performance was proposed.”⁴² If that model holds, then it no longer seems necessary to pinpoint a moment at which French source material did or did not enter into the cycle. At every performance of the cycle, from what Happé calls the “submerged” fifteenth-century version through the final performance in 1575, there was surely a small but significant fraction of Chester’s audience that *was* French. If a main goal of the cycle’s was to draw revenue inward from outsiders, then it seems most likely that the concerns of these French onlookers would have a continual influence on the gradual composition and revision of the extant cycle. The Cestrians’ playing with foreignness in the *Three Kings* and *Offerings* plays, particularly in ending the Monday performances with a travelers’ blessing, seems a testament to the Continental influence on the plays in performance, not just at the scribe’s desk. Revisers, whether they were officially rewriting a scene or adjusting it during rehearsal, would likely be familiar with a broad array of English and Continental models, either from the hearsay of non-local visitors, or from their own trading or other journeys outward from the port. Christopher Goodman, the sixteenth-century Cestrian most known for his effect on the plays—because his complaints led to their prohibition—spoke out after having returned to Chester from a Protestant education in Geneva.⁴³ His case is an indication of the ease with which Cestrians, sailing back and forth from the Continent, could apply Continental values to their local arts and enact large-scale changes to the way they were performed.

In other words, regardless of the source material employed at any given moment of revision, among innumerable moments throughout the history of the cycle’s performance, French influence could easily reach the Chester plays by means of its bustling port, a site of international exchange specifically targeted by the location of the wagon stations. Freeing the question of French influence from the burden of proving a singular moment of borrowing allows Baugh’s points to take on new relevance. For instance, after reviewing the “deadly evidence of parallel passages” presented by prior scholars, Baugh concludes that the similarities between passages are most often attributable to the fact that the passages share a common source—that is, the Bible. The remaining parallels only appear significant when the mass of French biblical drama is considered *en masse*, so that parallels can be found from multiple sources and stitched together into a “mosaic.” Of H. Ungemach’s comparative study of French parallels, Baugh writes, “In the hunt for parallel passages he seems to have lost sight of the original purpose of his quest—to find a *source*.” Baugh does not consider, however, that long civic performance traditions can be in dialogue with each other about ways to represent the same biblical material, without one text taking precedence as a “source.” For a city with strong economic ties to France and with a performance tradition that spans two centuries, it is hard to imagine how such a dialogue could be avoided. Thus, the mass of evidence collated by Baugh, while it does not prove that the cycle poets referred to any specific source, confirms that the cycle tradition took shape with Continental concerns in mind.

Bad Hosts

Jane Desmond, in *Staging Tourism: Bodies on Display from Waikiki to Sea World*, describes a sharp divide between different performances of hula in Hawaii. There is the hula that Hawaiians perform for themselves, a “[t]remendously popular... ongoing part of daily island life—a visible part of public culture danced in bars, at weddings, on the stage and in the aisles at pop music concerts.”⁴⁴ Then there is the hula that tourist companies sell to outsiders, geared toward “mainland images of sweetly smiling hula girls”:⁴⁵

[I]n the symbolic economy of tourism, Hawai’i becomes a place where Hawaiians live and do Hawaiian things, like hula. History cannot coexist with [these] mythologizing processes... Hawaiians are... being situated outside contemporary time in a double ideological move that

claims that the past (as historical change) never existed and the past (as an eternal present) has never changed.⁴⁶

That latter, commodified version of hula is comparable to David Mills's vision of Cestrian performance, in which Cestrians manufactured a nostalgic myth of authenticity, manufacturing an imagined traditional past for their cycle: "Chester used ceremonial and custom to create and sustain a myth of its past, of which the plays are a part."⁴⁷

My arguments that the plays were community-based expressions of real street-level culture—by, of, and for the people of medieval Chester—might seem to be at odds with Mills's readings, which insist that the sense of local tradition surrounding the plays was inauthentic and often based in commercialism. Desmond's work on hula makes clear, however, that two variations on the same performance tradition, one commercial and the other community-based, can coexist in close proximity to each other. But where they coexist, there is necessarily a risk that the gaze of outsiders will shift the community's perception of itself. For the remainder of this chapter, I explore how the Chester texts manifest that kind of slippage. Locating its biblical settings in Chester, the cycle generally represents travelers to those locations in a favorable light, as with the Three Kings in the examples I cite above. In contrast, the hosts and locals depicted in cycle—that is, the characters who stand in for the Cestrians who foreigners might meet during their stay—are generally depicted as discourteous, uneducated, and mean-spirited. These depictions do not interfere with the real community-based ceremonies present throughout the cycle, because those ceremonies are legible only within a local context of familiarity and conviviality—giving them little reason to distinguish local concerns from non-local ones. Outward representations of localness, in opposition to foreignness, occur independently of the community-based symbolism in the cycle, often in entirely different scenes; in these cases, the plays are always subtly disdainful of whichever character is local.

For instance, in Chapter Three I discuss at length the final monologue spoken by the Alewife in Chester's *Harrowing*. That speech perfectly demonstrates the way that a single utterance can carry different messages, depending on whether the hearer is an insider or outsider. For the native Cestrian community, the Alewife's play upon traditional commensality is central to the festive piety of the local holiday. Simultaneously, however, the Alewife's confession of all of the rules of hospitality she has broken would appear to an outsider as a depiction of a rude and recognizably Cestrian host. She is local, one of the "[t]avernes, tapsters *of this citye*," on whom visitors were dependent for room and board, and who are guilty, as is she, of swindling their guests—and she represents the Innkeepers' guild in their play. Thus, as I show below, the community of Chester represents itself and its concerns in terms of two conflicting models of the local. There is the intergenerational ceremony and celebration held at the center of an authentic festival every few years by a populace that happens to be savvy and multilingual; there is also an outward show of local color, most often taking the form of rudeness and poor hospitality, that conspicuously removes or reverses any trace of multiculturalism.

Hospitality is, by the end of the cycle, the primary criterion by which God decides the fate of Christian souls. In the *Judgment* play, Jesus reminds his audience that he was only ever a visitor to their world, and he reveals that their salvation relies primarily on their courtesy and kindness as hosts. Those who are saved earned their fate because they gave Jesus "meate" while he was on earth (lines 457-458), gave him drink when he was thirsty (line 461), clothing when he was naked (line 462) and—the final item in the list of their good deeds—they gave him "harboring" when it was cold (lines 463-464). Those who are damned are punished for their failure to be hospitable, in nearly the same words ("When I was hungrye and thyrstie both, / and naked was, you would not mee clothe... nor of your meate to gyve me somee, / nor mee to your harbour nome / never yett in wyll were yee." lines 621-628). Since the Judgment evaluates the conduct of all characters backward

across time, Jesus' terms of salvation and damnation retroactively casts the entire cycle, which depicts its many travelers' journeys as a series of failures or successes in hospitality on the part of local residents. The actors themselves are implicated as hosts, because they *are* the native community, and clearly should possess the necessary knowhow to perform the proper steps of courtesy and hospitality.

The only local host in the cycle who does proceed with courtesy is the "Pater Familius" at whose home the *Last Supper* play takes place. Jesus sends Peter and Philip to "[g]oe into the cittie" (line 17) and find a local host who will show them "a fair parlour" (line 29). They receive correct directions from the Pater's Servant, who takes them to his master's house. The Pater welcomes them warmly, if briefly:

Loe, here a parloure all readye dight
with paved flores and windowes bright.
Make all thinges readye as you thinke right,
and this have you shall (lines 53-56).

Proper hospitality is also demonstrated in the *Emmaus/ Appearance* play by Luke and Cleophas, but in this case the hosts are themselves foreigners, not locals: they invite Jesus to a "castell... herebye" (line 103) at Emmaus—not to their own home. Like the Three Kings, they are an example of the many foreign travelers that the Cestrian locals present in a sympathetic light. They properly attempt to exchange "[t]ydinge and tales" with Jesus, who is also a traveler, appearing "*in habitu peregrino*" ("in the dress of a pilgrim," line 32+SD)—a prefiguration of his later speeches in the *Judgment*, which save or damn souls based on whether they received him properly. When he declines their invitation to supper, they insist, in a display of aggressive courtesy:

LUCAS	Syr, you shall in all manere dwell with us at our suppere, for nowe night approcheth nere. Tarrye here for anythingel!
CLEOPHAS	Nowe God forbyd that we weare so uncurtysse to you here for, saffe my lovely lord of lere... Sytt downe, syr, here I you praye and take a morsell yf you maye, for you have walked a great waye (lines 104-114).

Luke and Cleophas' sense of hospitality also creates a scene of commensality, in the same convivial spirit as the scenes that I discuss in Chapter Three.

Except in the case of the *Last Supper's* Pater Familius, every example of local hospitality depicted in the Chester plays is an utter failure on the part of the host. Unlike Luke and Cleophas, Simon is a local host in his own house in the *Bethany/Jerusalem* play, in which Jesus chides him for his rudeness: "Into thy house here thou me geete; / no water thou gave mee to my feete" (lines 101-102). Jesus is greeted well upon his arrival as a foreigner in Jerusalem, but is well aware of how inhospitable Jerusalem will become to his arrival ("they be unlevon / to keepe Christes commen / and Goddes owne visitation, / donne for mankyndes salvation; / for the have no devotyon, / ne dreiden not his dome," lines 219-224). Both missteps in hospitality predict the eventual damnation of those who are unwilling to offer Jesus harboring in the *Judgment* play.

Jesus is not the only traveler in the cycle who meets with inhospitable locals. For instance, the second French exchange in the *Three Kings* play ends abruptly:

SECUNDUS REX	Nos summes veneus comoplent, [<i>We have come here together</i>] novelis de enquire. [<i>to ask after news.</i>]...
TERTIUS REX	Infant querenues de grand parent [<i>We seek a child of high parentage</i>] et roy de celi et terre. [<i>and king of heaven and earth.</i>]
HERODES	Syrs, avise you what you sayne! Such tydinges makes my harte unfayne (<i>Three Kings</i> lines 153-60).

Herod, the host, shifts to English as soon as his maddening anger sets in. In contrast to the Kings' sentimental shift into French at the appearance of the star, Herod's break into English signals his break from courtly conduct, where his boasting, berating and less-than-diplomatic plotting begins. It prematurely deflates the formal language of greeting and the exchange of tidings ("novelis," "tydinges"); it is a failure of hospitality.

In the *Shepherds* play, Trowle characterizes himself as a local with the capacity to be a guide to foreigners; he makes it quite clear that travelers unfamiliar with the local terrain will receive as little diplomatic courtesy from him as the Three Kings do from Herod:

Yf any man come mee bye
and would wytt which waye beste were,
my legge I lifte up wheras I lye
and wishe him the waye easte and west where.
And I rose where I laye,
me would thinke that travell lost.
For kinge ne duke, by this daye, ryse I will not (lines 180-187).

The sedentary Trowle cannot be bothered to give directions, or even to stand up to greet a traveler, even a king or duke—he will only brusquely move the lost wanderer along by gesturing with his leg to the east or west. There was no real danger of being lost in the simple, open, Roman grid of Chester, but Trowle's laziness superimposes a wilderness upon the city. Similarly, as soon as the Three Kings descend from Mount Victoryall into the *platea*—the performance area located most powerfully in the Cestrian present—they lose sight of the star (*Three Kings* lines 219-20).

Trowle's apathy toward visitors is reversed at the end of the *Shepherds* play. After the Shepherds have received their blessing from Jesus, they set out on their own journeys. Robert Barrett has interpreted that resolution as a final exiling of the Welsh presence in Chester, but the Shepherds seem genuinely to have turned over a new unselfish leaf ("I read wee us agree / for our mysdeedes amendes to make, / for soe nowe will I").⁴⁸ It is hard to interpret their religious journeys as unsympathetic. Rather, they create a perfect contrast to Trowle's earlier proposal to treat travelers rudely:

PRIMUS PASTOR	And I an hermitte to prayse God, to praye,
---------------	---

to walke by stye and by streytt,
 in wildernes to walke for aye.
 And I shall noe man meete
 but for my livinge I shall him praye,
 barefoote one my feete.
 And thus will I live ever and aye (lines 669-676).

By uprooting themselves, the Shepherds provide an opportunity for another travelers' blessing, similar to the one that ends the *Offerings* play, incorporating the audience into its valediction:

TERTIUS PASTOR	To that blys bringe you great God, if that thy will bee. Amen, all singe you; good men, farewell yee.
GARCIUS	Well for to fare, eych frend, God of his might graunt you; for here now we make an ende. Farewell, for wee from you goe nowe (lines 689-696).

At the moment at which the Shepherds become sympathetic to travelers, they cease to become locals—they will wander beyond Wales, bound not to their provincial home but to common Christian brotherhood. At this final transition, they seem less like Cestrians' Welsh neighbors (who would not, it seems, even stand up to give directions to a foreigner) and more like the savvy visitors who come to Chester from farther lands.

The Blind Man of the *Blind Man/Lazarus* specifically begs alms of his local neighbors, in terms that foreshadow the coming Judgment in their request for charity:

PUER (<i>ducens Caecum</i>)	If pittie may move your jentyll harte, remember, good people, the poore and the blynd, with your charitable almes this poore man to comforte. <i>Yt is your owne neighbour and of your owne kynd.</i>
CAECUS	Your almes, good people, for charitie, to me that am blynd and never did see, <i>your neighbour borne in this cittie;</i> helpe or I goe hence (lines 36-43, emphasis added).

It is Jesus, not a neighbor but a traveler—whether in the *Bethany/Jerusalem*, *Emmaus/Appearance*, or *Judgment* play—who steps forward to offer help in the *Blind Man/Lazarus* play. Eventually, characters do emerge who are marked as “Primus Vicinus” and “Secundus Vicinus” (“First Neighbor,” “Second Neighbor”) in their speech headings, and who refer to each other only as “neighbour” (lines 81 and 85). It is these Neighbors who angrily report Jesus' work to the Pharisee authorities, setting his persecution into motion. In the same play, when the time comes to return to Bethany to raise Lazarus, the Apostles warn Jesus against the hostile locals, but Jesus expands John 11: 9-10 into another travelers' blessing, in which he assures his companions that any place they travel together will be safe, regardless of the circumstances:

Wott you not well this is vereye,
 that xii houres are in the daye

and whoeso walketh that tyme a waye
 trespasseth not, the sooth to saye?
 Hee offendeth not that goeth in light;
 but whosoever walketh abowte in night,
 hee tresspasseth all agaynst the right,
 and light in him is non.
 Whye I saye this, as I have tight,
 I shall tell you soone in height.
 Have mynd on hit through your might
 and thinkes well thereupon.
 To the daye myselfe may likened be,
 and to the xii houres all yee
 that lightened be through followinge mee
 that am most likinge light.
 For worldes light I am verrey,
 and whoesoe followeth me, sooth to saye,
 hee may goe no [thester] waye,
 for light in him is dight (lines 337-356).

This speech is another of the blessings that would stand out to Chester's transient population, about to embark in one direction or the other, hopefully in the safety of day. It is scribe James Miller whose reading "thester," in the penultimate line, is considered by modern editors Lumiansky and Mills to be correct, though the other three scribes do not share the reading. To travel with the light of Jesus (in person or in faith) is to never travel a *thester* way. *Thester* was a rare word by the sixteenth century, but the other three scribes have no trouble with it when it appears in their copies of the *Adam* play, so it is unlikely that they miss "thester" in the *Blind Man/Lazarus* play because they do not recognize the word. In both plays, context makes the word's meaning clear—dark, without light. Still, scribes Edmund Gregorie, William Bedford, and George Bellin end Jesus' blessing quite differently:

For worldes light I am verrey,
 and whosoe followeth me, sooth to saye,
 hee may goe no Chester waye,
 for light in him is dight (lines 353-356).

"Chester" stands in for *thester*, or *thester* for Chester. Since the scribes knew the term *thester* perfectly well, it seems likely that the word was switched out during the rehearsal or performance process. Whether this variance happened during performance or inscription, the context and meaning remain: wherever you travel, if you keep the light of Jesus with you, you'll never really be in *Chester*. Mills and Lumiansky's explanation, that "Chester waye" may signify the "mortal way (i.e. to the coffin or grave)," makes the terms of the metaphor all the more diminutive of Chester—especially in a pageant that depicts an exclusionary, suspicious community of characters known only as "Neighbors."⁴⁹ It is only the transient population, the visitor (in this case Jesus), who lets light into the local: an otherwise closed, dark system of distrust and inhospitality.

It is in the pejorative depiction of locals, by locals, that my argument about about hospitality comes together with my arguments on Frenchness in the cycle. The French episodes in the *Three Kings* and *Offerings* plays demonstrate that Chester's players were able to communicate in French, as might be expected from guildsmen in a major port city—at least when they choose to portray

characters who are marked as foreigners. The scribes of the plays demonstrate similar facility with French, since those scenes remain extant in relatively clean copies that do not vary much from each other. It is surprising, then, that in the remaining French instances, all examples of courtly greetings, the French is nonsensical. Below, I include Pilate’s opening to the *Resurrection* play as it appears in Manchester Fragment MS 822.IIC2 and in Huntington Library MS 2, which was inscribed a century later; a very similar speech also appears when Pilate offers his greeting in the *Passion*:

<i>Manchester Fragment (15th C):</i>	<i>MS H Resurrection (16th C):</i>	<i>MS H Passion (16th C):</i>	<i>Translation:</i>
Per vous, syr Cayphas, et vous e vous, syr Annas, et syn disciple Judas qu’a le treason fuyt et grande luyes de lucyte, a moy parfite delyvere, nostre dame fuit juge, per lore roy escrete.	Per vous, sir Cayphas, et vous e vous, syr Annas, et sum disciple Judas ou le treison fuite; et grande lucas de lucite a moy perfoyte deliverie, nostre dame fuit judge, per loer roy estreite. (lines 1-8)	Per vous, syr Cayphas; dye vos, syr Annas et sum desepte Judas; vel atres in fuit. <i>(probably a corrupt form of “la tresin fuit”)</i> (lines 134-135)	By you, sir Caiaphas; and you and you, sir Annas (or “God you, sir Annas”) and his disciple Judas (or “deceiver Judas?”) who did the treason; and great lights of brilliance to me perfectly revealed; our lady was judge, to praise the noble king. ⁵⁰

These lines simply do not make much sense. Pilate rambles impenetrably about lights and judges, and he greets Judas in both the *Passion* and the *Resurrection*—though Judas is, amusingly, present in neither play. The editors’ assumption that this nonsensical French is due to scribal corruption implies that Chester’s guild players, or its scribes, knew too little French to catch accidental errors—especially in the case of the *Resurrection* play, for which there is not much variance across a hundred years. Notably, the difference between the two versions of the French speech *in the same manuscript* is more pronounced than that between two versions separated by a century: it is hard to see that difference as a simple case of scribal corruption, since the worst case of corruption by far occurs in two cases written by the same scribe at the same time. The centrality of French trade in Chester’s economy, and the presence of good French elsewhere in the cycle, should be enough evidence that scribal corruption does not adequately explain these cases. Produced by multilingual guildsmen, in a harbor town well-accustomed to the presence of foreigners, these mishandlings cannot just be endearing accidents by provincial Englishmen who did not know any better; on the contrary, they conspicuously take on the appearance of such accidents. The botchings themselves must be treated as a meaningful dramatic move. Passers-by see Cestrians tripping over language they cannot understand; the community plays down its multilingualism. It is a fairer bet that the silly French spoken here is meant to make its speaker, a comic tyrant, look silly. But declaiming bad French also makes the actors look as bumbling as their characters—further perpetuating the notion that the imagined Cestrian local is a backwards provincial. French is confirmed by the Three Kings as a vehicle for the exchange of greetings and tidings across linguistic and cultural boundaries. In the mouth of Pilate, admittedly a less sympathetic character than the Three Kings, the language of boundary-crossing becomes itself a boundary, a language which none can understand.

In all of the cases in which the cycle’s depiction of localness is visible in opposition to foreignness—especially in the “thester”/“Chester” line in the *Blind Man/Lazarus* play—Cestrians seem to take care to present locals negatively. At first, this phenomenon seems to contradict the idea that Cestrians’ interest in foreign visitors as spectators was commercial, since the plays continually hint that foreign customers will find their local accommodations lacking. However,

Desmond makes clear that paying tourists tend to look to local performance for *difference*: difference which manages to maintain the appearance of a closed, preserved culture (and thus folk authenticity) while still making the visitors feel good about themselves. A French trader or traveling English aristocrat will not be particularly thrilled to hear a Cestrian speak French with skill (he can see this at home or at the harbor); the charm is in watching the ostensibly isolated, quaint locals trip over mocked-up French, while tarrying in an imaginary, inhospitably backward town. To borrow Desmond's terminology: *in the symbolic economy of tourism, Chester becomes a place where Cestrians live and do Cestrian things*, not things that draw attention away from the city walls. Real local concerns are played up in this local drama, but never anything that hints at Chester's real status as a multicultural port; only the visitors, not the hosts, are presented positively.

Latinity and Rome

If Chester's multiculturalism should appear anywhere, it is in their *Pentecost* and *Annunciation/Nativity* plays. The former centers on the multilingualism granted by the Holy Spirit to the Apostles. The latter, which initiates the Nativity sequence that depicts global perspectives on the birth of Christ through a series of journeys, takes place largely in Rome and frequently gestures toward the full scope of the Roman Empire. However, in both plays, the cycle's powerful visible presence in the local setting of Chester is displaced by its tendency to de-emphasize Chester's cosmopolitanism. Commercial multilingualism, a testament to the skill of the guilds, is replaced with Church Latin, which moves the focus from the local to the universal. The *platea*, meanwhile, is transported to Rome—a symbol that may just as likely be a sign of Chester's Continental sympathies as its recusant politics.

The Whitsun festival, which occasioned the cycle's sixteenth-century performances, commemorates the divine gift of multilingualism to the Apostles, which allowed them to create the universal Catholic community that collected in the *platea* to witness the plays. In the York *Pentecost* pageant, the primary concern of the dialogue is the Holy Spirit made manifest; but the Chester Fishmongers fixate on the miracle of multilingualism that the Spirit grants them. The miracle is reiterated frequently across the play:

DEUS	[T]o speake and expresse all languages that ever yett was they shall have cunnyng (lines 228-230).
ANGELL	...yee shall have understandinge of every lond speakinge, whatsoever the saye... (lines 257-259)
THOMAS	...of all languages well I can, and speake them at my will (lines 282-283).
PHILIPPUS	And I that never could speake thinge save Ebrewe as I learned yonge, nowe I can speake at my likinge all languages, both lowe and hye.
MATHIAS	All languages that ever were (lines 288-291) upon my tonge binne light (lines 298-299).
TADDEUS	[A]ll languages farre and nigh my tonge will speake nowe aright (lines 306-307).
PRIMUS ALIENIGENA	A, fellowe, fellowe, for Godes pittie, are not these men of Gallilee?

Our language the can as well as wee,
as ever eate I bread! (lines 376-379)

But something is missing from Chester’s depiction of the core miracle of the *Pentecost*: the lines above are all in English. Philip does not actually speak Hebrew before the fire appear; his language does not change after it appears. Multilingualism itself falls outside the stageable vocabulary of the play, though it would surely be an easy miracle to stage at Chester. It would certainly be a far less difficult effect to stage than the tongues of flame which are called for in the script. The players gesture repeatedly in the direction of multiple languages, but the miracle itself is unspeakable.

What is not immediately apparent in the *Pentecost* play is that the Apostles do, in a way, speak *bilingually* when the Spirit touches them. Their composition of the Creed in English verse is intercut with the corresponding Latin lines. The role of Latin is not clear at first—characters have spoken Latin throughout the cycle, and the stage directions direct the Apostles to sing in Latin (*Tunc omnes apostoli genuflectentes cantent ‘Veni, creator Spiritus’*) earlier in the same pageant, before the Spirit descends, so it is counterintuitive to read the Latin as the Pentecostal miracle. But the composition of the Creed is the only action between when the Apostles announce their capability for multilingualism, and the Alienigenae’s report on the miracle.

The sole purpose of these “Alienigenae”—sympathetic “Foreigners,” as compared to the cruel “Vicini” of the *Blind Man/Lazarus* play—is to enter at the very end of the play, to witness and comment positively on the miracle (their counterparts at York are villains, Jews who mock and threaten the Apostles).⁵¹ The Foreigners are outsiders by definition, but as nameless witnesses to the miracle that are eager to go and see more, they parallel the actual spectators in the Cestrian *platea*. Staging logic makes it likely that they enter from the *platea*, so that it looks like they emerge from and speak for the crowd.⁵² Their report, based on Acts 2:9-11, contains a clue that the interlineal Latin of the Creed is meant to be spoken aloud (it is not always, and the distinction is not always clear), adding necessary sense to the First Foreigner’s “[A]re not these men of Gallilee? / Our language the[y] can as well as wee” (lines 377-378). The subtle implication is that “our language,” for the Foreigner, is the Latin of the Creed.

Table 9: Foreigners’ Speeches in the <i>Pentecost</i> Play, Lines 375-386, and Acts 2:9-11	
<p>PRIMUS ALIENIGENA Of all languages that binne hereby that come to <i>Mesopotamye</i>, <i>Capadocie</i> and <i>Jurye</i>, the jangle without weene— of the <i>Ile of Pontus</i>, and <i>Aseye</i>, <i>Fryzeland</i> and <i>Pamphilye</i>, <i>Egypt</i>, right into <i>Lybie</i> that ys byesyde <i>Syrene</i>.</p> <p>SECUNDUS ALIENIGENA Yea, also men of <i>Arabye</i> and of <i>Greece</i> that ys thereby herden them prayse full tenderlye God of his great grace.</p>	<p>ACTS 2:9 ...et qui habitant <i>Mesopotamiam</i> et <i>Iudaeam</i> et <i>Cappadociam</i> <i>Pontum</i> et <i>Asiam</i></p> <p>ACTS 2:10 <i>Frygiam</i> et <i>Pamphiliam</i> <i>Aegyptum</i> et partes <i>Lybiae</i> quae est circa <i>Cyrenen</i> et <i>advenae romani</i></p> <p>ACTS 2:11 <i>Iudaei</i> quoque et proselyti <i>Cretes</i> et <i>Arabes</i> audivimus loquentes eos nostris linguis magnalia Dei</p>

The Foreigners have already mentioned before these speeches that the Apostles speak “our language”; the subsequent list of nations and languages should not, therefore, include the name of

whatever language that the Foreigners see as their own. Two items from Acts are deleted in the list of nations in the Chester Foreigners' speeches, which otherwise reproduces the biblical list with relative precision (with some locations reordered for rhyme). The "Iudaei" from Acts 2:11 is left out of the second part of the list, where it is expected alongside "Arabye" and "Greece," but since Judea has already been mentioned ("Iudaeam" in Acts, "Jurye" in the Chester play) it is unsurprising that the people of Judea ("Iudaei,") should not appear again in Chester's translation.

That leaves the "advenae romani," visitors (a term synonymous with *alienigenae*) from Rome. It makes sense, then, that the Foreigners should hear the Apostles' recitation of the Latin Creed and express their shock that "our language" has been spoken. It is the Apostles' capacity for Latin, both a universal language and cultural property of the Romans, whose performance supplants the miracle of multiple languages. Latin acts to bind Christians together under a single language, especially from the *platea*, where the Foreigners stand with the spectators, all of them bearing witness to the miracle. The Latinity of all of the Chester plays is retroactively implicated in that miracle, creating a third model of cross-cultural exchange, dependent on the liturgy—though this is a model from which the Welsh Shepherds, the only characters who sing in the vernacular and who visibly struggle with Latin, are excluded.

The *Pentecost* thus subtly casts the Foreigners, and by association the *platea*, as Roman. The Chester *Annunciation/Nativity* play, which initiates the sequence of travel-oriented plays that include the journeys of the Shepherds and Three Kings, also locates itself in Rome. In Chester's version of the *Annunciation/Nativity*, Mary and Joseph's story is almost eclipsed by Octavian, Augustus Caesar of Rome, who calls the census and hears the Sybil's prophecy of Jesus' birth. Baugh points out that the story of Octavian and the Sybil appears in no other early English dramatization of the Nativity, but that the same story is extremely popular across French dramatizations, which suggests that French influence on this Chester play was especially high. Appropriately, Octavian's opening speech includes more French lines:

For I halfe multiplyed more
the citty of Rome sythe I was bore
then ever did any before,
syth I had this kingdome.

For what with strenght and strokes sore,
leadinge lordshipp, lovely lore,
all this world has bine yore
tributarye unto Rome.

Segneurs, tous si assembles a mes probes estates!

(Lords, all assembled here at my noble council!)

Jeo posse fayre lerment et leez, et mette in languoure!

(I can make [people] miserable or happy, and cast [them] into despondency.)

Vous tous si prest ne sortes

(None of you should leave here)

de fayre intentes ma[l]volentes,

(intending to perform evil deeds)

car je su soveroyne ben sages et de mande emperoure.

(for I am the sovereign full of wisdom, and the lordly emperor, lines 201-213).⁵³

Here, Octavian has just been introduced by his Herald: "Make rowme, lordinges, and give us waye / and lett Octavian come and playe," an interruption of the Annunciation scene that clearly addresses the audience directly. Since no other characters enter except Octavian, he must deliver his

introductory speech out to that same audience in the *platea*, as he gestures repeatedly to “all this world” (lines 189 and 195). Unlike Herod and Pilate, Octavian’s boasts are not that far from the truth—he *has* at least gained control of most of Continental Europe. Having located his audience of Roman citizens in the *platea*, his multilingual address to them works well as a reminder that Continental visitors are still present, making Chester’s urban center representative of “all this world.” Octavian continues his speech for a few more French lines, which modern editors have treated as irretrievably corrupt:

Jeo si persone, nulle si able; jeo sa tent fayre et leable.
En tresoroce ne treasagyle, mes de toyle plerunt.
Destret et sage sua en counsell—ami, ou dame, et ou pusele.
De clare et sanke mater frayle, un teell n’est paas viva (lines 214-217).

This French is also botched, but in a different way from Pilate’s speeches. In Pilate’s case, the French is relatively easy, using recognizable words, but those words make no sense when they are translated. In Octavian’s case, the words themselves appear impenetrable. British Library MS Harley 2013 leaves these four lines out entirely; among the other manuscripts, variant spellings are unusually high (only two or three words per line are spelled similarly in all manuscripts). Still, I resist the modern editors’ assumption that this language was “never intended to convey precise meaning to an audience, but only the flavour of an upper-class register.”⁵⁴ I have already argued that, in performance near Chester’s port, a French-language has multiple significances, whether or not it is spoken nonsensically. For good measure, I offer the following rough translation:

No person is so capable as I am;
I know how to do so many praiseworthy deeds,
[No person is] so very happy, nor so very quick, but of the star (i.e. of Bethlehem) they shall
weep.
Discreet and wise I am in [giving] counsel, a friend both to lady and to maiden.
By the pure and holy mother—another such [ruler] does not live.⁵⁵

Regardless of the literal meaning of Octavian’s speech, his address to the audience marks him as doubly Continental: he speaks French and he is from Rome (at a time when Rome included the entire Continent).

However, Octavian’s Herald immediately draws attention back to “this towne” (line 275), and the ensuing banter between master and servant locates the *Annunciation/Nativity* more visibly in Chester than most of the other plays in the cycle do. Octavian playfully sends his Herald to the “highest horse besydes Boughton” (line 279), which Lumiansky and Mills recognize as a reference to Chester’s gallows, located at Boughton Heath “some two miles to the south-east.”⁵⁶ The Herald’s response, which suggests that Octavian ride that “horse” himself, is “insolently reductive of Octavian’s rank,” since only common criminals were sent to the gallows.⁵⁷ That reference is the most localized in-joke in the Chester cycle that is still perceivable by modern scholars. Nearly every other internal reference that links the cycle to Chester only name-checks a nearby location, and few of those locations are as close to Chester as Boughton Heath. To understand the Boughton Heath joke, let alone to be amused by it, requires an intimate familiarity with local culture that no outsider could have. In the Boughton Heath joke, then, which playfully reduces Octavian’s high rank to the low standing of a common criminal, Rome takes on a Cestrian feel—but one only perceivable by Cestrians.

Critics have already noticed that among English biblical dramas, Chester is the most partial to Rome. It pays unusual attention to Octavian, and also features a surprisingly sympathetic Pilate and an overt reassignment of Jesus' crucifiers from Roman soldiers to Jews. There are also scattered references to Rome and Italy throughout the cycle. Some critics have interpreted these references as evidence of recusant sympathies in the Chester cycle. However, a discussion of Chester's affinity to Rome and to Roman themes must also take into account the influence of Continental audiences on the performances. Where Baugh suggests that Latin is present in cycle dialogue because it was "a language not comprehensible to the vulgar," and where Lumiansky and Mills dismiss French as "never intended to convey precise meaning," I argue that the Chester cycle's affinity for these languages increased its understandability as a tourist attraction, engaging the full breadth of its cosmopolitan audience.

Town Clerk William Newhall, in keeping with Henrician ideals of profitable recreation, proclaims that the cycle's primary purpose is "for the commewelth & prosperitie of this Citie."⁵⁸ Antiquarian David Rogers, resisting those Henrician ideals, presents the preservation of old traditions as part of "the continuall honor wealthe and good estimation of this anchiente Cittie."⁵⁹ Both visions of the cycle are driven by local concerns, but over two hundred years of production, one wonders how much of Chester's simulated self-effacement before its tourists eventually became a force of habit. If it led to real, unsimulated self-effacement, Chester's tourism may have led Chester to internalize its own myth of provincialism, eventually turning traditional performance into the frontier of Reformation-era polarization that I describe in Chapter One. Under the gaze of outsiders, or the gaze of Cestrians like Christopher Goodman, whose eyes were on the Continent and not each other, the distinctly local practice of the cycle thus embody the city's embarrassment as much as its pride. I propose that this phenomenon grows out of an inherent contradiction in community-based performance. It is only when a community's generalized *habitus* solidifies into an expression of something distinctly local that it becomes visible as a community-based performance. That solidification requires that the community refer to itself as a distinct object in its local art, though such a reference only makes sense to those who can see beyond the community in order to define it against something else. The very existence of community-based performance inherently requires the perspective of an outsider, though the gaze of outsiders threatens the authenticity of any community-based practice. The Chester plays embody this contradiction as they present a vision of the local that is disdainful and displacing, even as they engage in a set of local practices that are celebratory and powerfully present.

Conclusion

I have devoted a great deal of this dissertation to reconstructing staging, including staging conditions—and at Chester, where daylight illuminated the noisy and dense two-story city center that crowded in around and above the performance area, the city center was itself absorbed into the playing area and frequently used as a dramatic signifier. Still, each of my chapters above has begun and ended with the text on the page. I have started with a critical question generated by the text, then found an aspect of Cestrian public practice with which that question resonates, then used that new information to flesh out a picture of Cestrian street performance, and finally returned to the text armed with the cultural and practical terms necessary to carry off an informed reading. Because of my own experience and training as a theater practitioner, I simply have difficulty conceiving of the written components of any dramatic text in isolation from production conditions or staging. If those matters are left out of textual analysis, then the text in question ceases to be dramatic. Dramatic performance requires a real physical environment and real bodies; a dramatic text, even if it is not historically linked to any performance record, always implies an imagined performance. The text's reason for being is to prescribe or describe that performance, even if that performance never existed or could never exist. That does not mean that a dramatic text cannot be interpreted and critiqued on its own merits; it only means that it is absurd to read a dramatic text in isolation from any consideration of dramatic practice. To do so is to evacuate the dramatic text of its most basic means of communicating symbolically and aesthetically. The aesthetic and symbolic impact of the cycle as a whole, then, relies on the texts' ability to cue gestures and *mises-en-scène* with respect to its physical environment, just as easily and reliably as it cues spoken poetry. This dissertation's readings of the Chester plays, by means of the performance data that the plays themselves encode, should make fully clear just how much of medieval drama's signifying power is bound up in its physical presences: at the festival, in the street, in the city, in the market, near the port, via the bodies of the players. If the Chester plays are viewed in isolation from the practical world of performance that they themselves imagine, then the layers of crucial poetic meaning that I discuss throughout my dissertation are rendered invisible.

The Chester cycle's scripted action engages playfully, and in manifold ways, with the unscripted practices that surrounded it. Cestrian locals took part in forms of ludic recreation that resisted the early modern; their cycle depicts (and in depicting, constitutes) that resistant play. Recurring holidays marked Cestrians' passage through youth, generations, years; their cycle, weaving multiple temporalities into its recurring performance tradition, makes the community's changing bodies and histories visible to itself. At holiday time, Cestrians feasted and imbibed together; their cycle not only frames that commensality as an expression of social cohesion and a working through of the paradox of festive piety, but it also depicts a series of festive occasions at which real comestible props were consumed publicly in the marketplace, fusing the holiday feast together with the holiday dramatics. Both Corpus Christi and Whitsun occurred in the weeks when that marketplace was busiest, so that the plays also served to attract outsiders into Chester via its port; Cestrian drama, even as it embodies local memory, presents an outward face to foreigners that ensures they will enjoy, and so extend, their stay. In each of these cases, no poet, reviser, or scribe works in isolation. Rather, the revelers who perform in and watch the cycle actively and continually exert developmental influences on the form and content of the plays.

It is the idea that the practical world provides the tools for close analysis of art, rather than the distractions from which art must be separated, that allows the modern reader to unmoor the cycle from any specific year, while still attaching it to a real historical tradition. That sense of diachrony allows the cycle to be read for what it was and is: the work of a community of performers in collaboration—or, at times, in contention. The text becomes a work of art that is experienced

through active recitation, not just passive spectatorship. In Chester, where nearly all of the community was at least indirectly involved in the plays, no spectator could really be called passive anyway. To excavate Cestrians' active influence in the development of their play texts, finally, allows the modern reader access to an older way of seeing the form and content of early drama, a way that provides for a close analysis that can comprehend the open-ended space and time of street theater as medieval participants played and understood it.

References

INTRODUCTION

¹ Elizabeth Baldwin, Lawrence M. Clopper, and David Mills, eds., *Records of Early English Drama: Cheshire, including Chester* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), xxviii.

² *Ibid.*, xxxiii-xlviii.

³ Medieval Cestrians performed their play-cycle for the last time in 1575 (though some plays were omitted), but they presented the *Shepherds* pageant, outside of the context of the cycle, in 1578. See Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills, *REED: Cheshire*, xlviii and 182.

⁴ R.M. Lumiansky and David Mills, eds., *The Chester Mystery Cycle Vol. 1* (Oxford: Oxford University Press/Early English Text Society, 1974), xii-xxvii.

⁵ *Ibid.*, ix-xii.

⁶ David Mills, *Recycling the Cycle: The City of Chester and Its Whitsun Plays* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 179-198. See also R.M. Lumiansky and David Mills, *The Chester Mystery Cycle: Essays and Documents, with an Essay "Music in the Cycle" by Richard Rastall* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983), 57-76.

⁷ Peter Happé, *Cyclic Form and the English Mystery Plays: A Comparative Study of the English Biblical Cycles and Their Continental and Iconographic Counterparts* (New York: Rodopi, 2004), 240.

⁸ On the "Regynall," see V.A. Kolve, *The Play Called Corpus Christi* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966), 20.

⁹ See Lawrence M. Clopper, "The History and Development of the Chester Cycle," *Modern Philology* 75.3 (Feb. 1978), 242 for some cases in which the guilds' records include independent expenditures for the updating and upkeep of their rehearsal manuscripts.

¹⁰ When I examined Peniarth 399, I discovered that horizontal striations in the coloration of the vellum suggest that this ten-folio manuscript may have been kept rolled up, while deterioration along a central vertical fault, worsening in the backmost folios, suggests that it was kept folded—both signs that the manuscript was unceremoniously stored or transported, and thus that it was created for a functional use (like rehearsal). Lumiansky and Mills also hypothesize that the manuscript was used as a rehearsal script, though they do not provide specific reasons. See Lumiansky and Mills, *Chester Mystery Cycle Vol. 1*, xii.

¹¹ See my section on "Textual History and Collective Authorship," below.

¹² Mills, *Recycling the Cycle*, 188.

¹³ Clopper, "The History and Development of the Chester Cycle," 219-20.

¹⁴ Peter Happé, *Cyclic Form and the English Mystery Plays: A Comparative Study of the English Biblical Cycles and Their Continental and Iconographic Counterparts* (New York: Rodopi, 2004), 240.

¹⁵ Mills, "Some Theological Issues in Chester's Plays"; Mills, "Some Precise Cittizins"; Richard K. Emmerson, "Contextualizing Performance: The Reception of the Chester Antichrist." In *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies (JMEMS)* 29.1, Special Issue: "The Cultural Work of Medieval Theater: Ritual Practice in England, 1350-1600" (1999): 89-119.

¹⁶ Lawrence M. Clopper, *Drama, Play, and Game: English Festive Culture in the Medieval and Early Modern Period* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), especially 25-107. See also Kolve, *The Play Called Corpus Christi*, 11-19; John Coldewey, "Plays and 'Play' in Early English Drama," *Research Opportunities in Renaissance Drama* 28 (1985), 182.

¹⁷ OED s.v. “festival, *adj.* and *n.*”

¹⁸ Mills, *Recycling the Cycle*, 34.

¹⁹ Debates over the scholarly use of contextual and non-literary material have characterized twentieth-century literary criticism in general: as Stephen Cohen puts it, “the institutional history of literary studies over the last hundred or so years can be characterized as a series of agonistic oscillations between the discipline’s two mighty opposites, form and history. From positivist (now ‘old’) historicism to New Criticism to New Historicism.” See Stephen Cohen, “Introduction,” in *Shakespeare and Historical Formalism*, ed. Stephen Cohen, (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), 1-30.

²⁰ In my research for this dissertation, I have come across twenty-six Mills sources in total.

²¹ Among the sources in the bibliography to this dissertation, every source on the Chester plays published after 1998, not to mention every conference paper that I have heard (or delivered), quotes the book—usually liberally.

²² Of Mills’s ten chapters, only Chapter Eight, “The Past in the Present: The Text of the Whitsun Plays” puts the words of the plays at center stage; it begins with a disclaimer which focuses primarily on context, sometimes mining the actual lines of the plays for their content, but not their aesthetic form: “It is my purpose in this book to set Chester’s plays in a wider context of civic celebration, religion, and politics, to present them as a cultural artifact. But the plays differ from Chester’s other celebratory activities in being textually controlled and having the potential for mimetic action. The ownership of the text and the control of the information it conveys become increasingly important and controversial as the sixteenth century progresses. *To understand at least something of the controversies that arose, we need to look at the character and content of the version of the plays that has survived...*” (Mills, *Recycling the Cycle*, 153, emphasis added).

²³ Peter Travis, *Dramatic Design in the Chester Cycle* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), *iii*.

²⁴ Travis introduces his book as an attempt to take the “most important next step” naturally following from Kolve and Woolf’s studies. Travis, *Dramatic Design*, *xi-xii*. See also Kolve, *The Play Called Corpus Christi*, and Rosemary Woolf, *The English Mystery Plays* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972).

²⁵ Travis, *Dramatic Design*, 1-69.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 66-8.

²⁷ Martin Stevens, *Four Middle English Mystery Cycles: Textual, Contextual, and Critical Interpretations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 258-322.

²⁸ When I make this point, I do not count concordances, annotated editions of the Chester text, or collections and digests of primary sources on Cestrian performance. Please see the attached bibliography for examples of each.

²⁹ Mills, *Recycling the Cycle*, 3-19.

³⁰ Theresa Coletti, “Reading REED: History and the Records of Early English Drama,” in *Literary Practice and Social Change in Britain, 1380-1530*, ed. Lee Patterson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 252.

³¹ Theresa Coletti and Gail McMurray Gibson, “The Tudor Origins of Medieval Drama,” in *A Companion to Tudor Literature*, edited by Kent Cartwright (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 228-229.

³² See, for instance, David Mills, “Some Theological Issues in Chester’s Plays,” in *Bring Furth the Pagants’: Essays in Early English Drama Presented to Alexandra F. Johnston*, ed. David N. Klausner and Karen S. Marsalek (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 212-29. See also David Mills, “‘Some Precise Cittizins’: Puritan Objections to Chester’s Plays,” in *Essays in Honour of Peter Meredith*, ed. Catherine Batt, *Leeds Studies in English* NS 29 (1998), 219-34.

³³ Coletti and Gibson, “Tudor Origins,” 230-235.

³⁴ Clopper, “History and Development,” 219-20.

³⁵ Alan H. Nelson, "Principles of Processional Staging: York Cycle," *Modern Philology* 67 (1970): 303-20; Barbara Palmer, "'Towneley Plays' or 'Wakefield Cycle' Revisited," *Comparative Drama* 21 (1988): 318-48. For Nelson's influence on the development of *REED*, see Mills, *Recycling the Cycle*, 12-4.

³⁶ Palmer, "'Towneley Plays' or 'Wakefield Cycle' Revisited," 322-335.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 341. Palmer's article necessarily invalidates years of prior work—for example, Martin Stevens's "The Staging of the Wakefield Plays," *Research Opportunities in Renaissance Drama* 11 (1968): 115-28.

³⁸ Coletti and Gibson, "Tudor Origins," 230: "Biblical plays were performed in Chester as early as 1422, but evidence for their fifteenth-century production is scant; the scriptural dramas comprising the extant Chester Cycle, in text and performance, are manifestly mid- to late-Tudor phenomena... Records of civic and guild activity further detail the mounting of the Chester plays in the mid-sixteenth century and the political struggles that attended the cycle's last performances in 1572 and 1575."

³⁹ Theresa Coletti, "The Chester Cycle in Sixteenth-Century Religious Culture." *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 37.3 (Fall 2007): 532.

⁴⁰ Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills, *REED: Cheshire*, 47-48.

⁴¹ The central argument of Mills's *Recycling the Cycle* (as I discuss in Chapter Four) is that "Chester used ceremonial and custom to create and sustain a myth of its past, of which the plays are a part." See Mills, *Recycling the Cycle*, 18-9.

⁴² James Simpson, who acknowledges that performance texts are particularly resistant to periodization, moves the endpoint of medieval English literature from 1485 to 1547, but even that broadened conception of the medieval does not accommodate the final thirty years of the Chester cycle's performance (which extended until 1578). See James Simpson, *The Oxford English Literary History: 1350-1547: Reform and Cultural Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 3.

⁴³ Coletti, "Reading *REED*," 252; Coletti and Gibson, "Tudor Origins," 230.

⁴⁴ Paul Strohm, *Theory and the Premodern Text* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 80-1, emphasis his.

⁴⁵ Maura Nolan, "'Now Wo, Now Gladnesse': Ovidianism in the *Fall of Princes*." *English Literary History (ELH)* 71.3 (2004): 532.

⁴⁶ Lumiansky and Mills, *Essays and Documents*, 318.

⁴⁷ See especially Clopper, "History and Development."

⁴⁸ For a discussion of community-based performance, see Chapter Two and Jan Cohen-Cruz, *Local Acts: Community-Based Performance in the United States* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 92.

⁴⁹ Lumiansky and Mills, *Essays and Documents*, 318. Lumiansky and Mills, *Chester Mystery Cycle* Vol. 1, 490-516 includes the full text of the two fifteenth-century fragments. There is very little significant metrical variance from these early versions of the *Resurrection* and *Antichrist* plays to their cognates in the late sixteenth-century manuscripts—no less variance, at least, than the differences among the various sixteenth-century versions that were inscribed at roughly the same time as each other.

⁵⁰ Travis, *Dramatic Design*, 68.

⁵¹ See, for instance, Woolf, *English Mystery Plays*, 233.

⁵² Clopper, "History and Development," throughout.

⁵³ Happé, *Cyclic Form and the English Mystery Plays*, 240.

⁵⁴ Kolve, *The Play Called Corpus Christi*, 20.

⁵⁵ See, for instance, the Smiths' Guild's expenditure for "paper to Cobby out the *parcells* of the booke" in 1561 or the Painters' Guild expenditure for "paper to cobbye" their scripts in 1568, in Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills, *REED: Cheshire*, 106 and 122. See also Note 10.

⁵⁶ Clopper, "History and Development," 242.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Lumiansky and Mills, *Chester Mystery Cycle* Vol. 2, 193-194.

⁵⁹ Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills, *REED: Cheshire*, 47-48.

⁶⁰ Lumiansky and Mills, *Chester Mystery Cycle* Vol. 1, 1.

⁶¹ Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills, *REED: Cheshire*, 894. It is impossible to know whether Miller's continuous Trial/Passion play represents the earliest structure of the cycle, or whether the two separate pageants were recombined for the cycle's final, truncated performance on Midsummer 1575.

⁶² Clopper, "History and Development," throughout.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 230-1.

⁶⁴ Cohen-Cruz, *Local Acts*, 2.

⁶⁵ Sarah Beckwith has suggested that "as much as a tenth of the city [of York was] involved in the production" of the York cycle during the plays' years of active performance. See Beckwith, *Signifying God*, xvi. Chester's cycle offers fewer roles than York's, but its pool of citizens was also much smaller than York's. The percentage of Chester involved in the production also comes out to about ten percent. There are 296 speaking roles in the extant cycle and least 21 non-speaking roles. That estimate is conservative: in the cycle texts, when a speech heading is plural ("Good Gossips," "Angels") I count only two players, though there were likely more. The *Trial* and *Passion* plays were sometimes separate and sometimes continuous; I have counted them as a single play so that my estimate remains conservative. Each production would also have to employ at least four "putters" to move the wagon from station to station (the *Shepherds* play employed six), and probably to manage the technical aspects of their show, which were often quite challenging. I have counted four putters for each of nine wagons, the maximum number of wagons in use on a performance day (assuming putters might work for different guilds on different days), or 36. 296 speaking roles, 21 non-speaking roles, and 36 putters, add up to my conservative estimate of 353.

⁶⁶ The *Chester 2010* production at the University of Toronto this summer involved 426 collaborators. It also combined the *Trial* and *Passion* plays.

⁶⁷ C.P. Lewis and A.T. Thacker, *The Victoria History of the Counties of England, History of the County of Chester Volume V, Part 2: The City of Chester: Culture, Buildings, Institutions* (London: Boydell and Brewer, 2005), 71-72. The cast requirements for the cycle by the end of the 1520s would have been similar to what they are in the extant texts; see Lawrence Clopper, "The History and Development of the Chester Cycle," in *Modern Philology* 75.3 (Feb. 1978), 219-46

⁶⁸ "Cestrian" can refer to citizens of Chester or its surrounding county, Cheshire (of which Chester was and is county seat and cultural center). Gregorie, Bellin, Bedford, and Miller all fit that description: see Mills, *Recycling the Cycle*, 179-198.

⁶⁹ Barry Millington, *The New Grove Guide to Wagner and His Operas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 146.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 146.

⁷¹ Ibid., 173.

⁷² Ibid., 146.

⁷³ Sarah Beckwith, *Signifying God: Social Relation and Symbolic Act in the York Corpus Christi Cycle* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 59-71.

⁷⁴ Ibid., xv.

⁷⁵ David Rogers, *A Breuery or some fewe Collectiones of the Cittie of Chester*, Cheshire Archives and Local Studies, Chester Records Office, Chester, MS ZCX/3, f18r-f18v. My transcription; emphasis added. It is hard to tell whether the bracketed “s” here has been purposefully cancelled or accidentally smudged in the manuscript.

⁷⁶ Keith D. Lilley et al., “Digital Mapping” and “Digital Maps,” in “Mapping Medieval Chester,” accessed October 19, 2009, <http://www.medievalchester.ac.uk>. Information on the topography and architecture of Chester, particularly with respect to what is visible from each vantage point, comes from experiments I conducted (using a tape measure, a camera, and volunteer Cestrian players Ronno Griffiths, Brian Pearson, and Ieuan Griffiths Pearson) during a research trip to Chester in April 2011, funded by an Anglo-California Dissertation Grant from the University of California at Berkeley’s Center for British Studies.

⁷⁷ The first station was not in front of the Rows, but rather in front of the Abbey of St. Werburgh (later Chester Cathedral). There, they were in the center of a market in front of the Abbey of St. Werburgh (later Chester Cathedral), a setting that I discuss at length in Chapter Three. From the central performance station at the Pentice, the rough location of the other three performance stations are visible—I report from first-hand experience, but see also David Mills, *Recycling the Cycle: The City of Chester and Its Whitsun Plays* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 21-2.

⁷⁸ I have been part of that crowd during a revival of Chester’s Midsummer Watch in June 2006.

⁷⁹ Cestrian landlord George Ireland illegally attempted in 1568 to keep his tenant Anne Webster from using her “mansion Rowme or place for the whydson plaies in the Brudggestrete.” The room’s being “for the whydson plaies” suggests that one or both parties was attempting to use it for spectators (not performers, as we know that these worked outdoors). See Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills, *REED: Cheshire*, 118-119. See also Mills, *Recycling the Cycle*, 70-71 for the mayor’s viewing of other public events from the high window of the Pentice.

⁸⁰ Clifford Davidson, *Festivals and Plays in Late Medieval Britain* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), 126-30. See also Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills, *REED: Cheshire*, lvii for the editors’ discussion of a record of an acrobat that performed on top of one of the city’s spires in 1610.

⁸¹ Rogers, *Breviary*, CALS MS ZCX/3, f18r.

⁸² As the quote above shows, Rogers mentions four stations first, then five (adding Eastgate Street). Throughout the dissertation, only for simplicity’s sake, I discuss only the four confirmed stations. For further discussion of the ambiguity, see Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills, *REED: Cheshire*, xli, 331-2. For a bit of the ongoing debate about the wagons’ route, see also Elizabeth Baldwin, “A Note on the Chester Pageant Route,” *Medieval English Theatre* 27 (2005): 131-2.

⁸³ Rogers, *Breviary*, CALS MS ZCX/3, f18r.

⁸⁴ Southern, *Medieval Theatre in the Round*, xix-xx. See also Kolve, *The Play Called Corpus Christi*, 23.

⁸⁵ Southern, *Medieval Theatre in the Round*, 235.

⁸⁶ Kolve, *The Play Called Corpus Christi*, 22-4.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 22-3.

⁸⁸ Erika T. Lin, "Performance Practice and Theatrical Privilege: Rethinking Weimann's Concepts of *Locus* and *Platea*," *New Theatre Quarterly* 22:3 (2006): 283-298; Cami D. Agan, "The *Platea* in the York and Wakefield Cycles: Avenues for Liminality and Salvation," *Studies in Philology* 94:3 (Summer 1997): 344-367.

⁸⁹ See "Staging Conditions," below.

⁹⁰ See Note 80.

⁹¹ Among the examples in *REED* that testify to the guild players' non-dramatic activities in Chester on the day of their performance, the Smiths' 1554 expenditure record provides the clearest itinerary of the ceremonial breakfast, costuming (in this case the application of face paint), and tavern visits (between and after performances). I discuss that record at some length in Chapter Three. See Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills, *REED: Cheshire*, 95-6.

⁹² See Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills, *REED: Cheshire*, lxx-lxxi.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 72, emphasis added. A very similar proclamation was preserved in the White Book of the Pentice, but without the information about Pope Clement and his indulgence. I have used that speech to fill in the brackets here, which are unreadable in the Newhall Proclamation text.

⁹⁴ For clarity, here and below, following the practice of Chester scribes and modern scholars, I reduce the often variable full names of Chester guilds or guild collaborations (e.g. "The Barbers, Wax-chandlers, and Leeches") to a single-craft title (e.g. "The Barbers"), except where the identity of the guild collaborators is useful to my argument.

⁹⁵ See Note 77.

⁹⁶ For more information on James Miller ('the first editor of the Chester cycle') and his manuscript, see Lumiansky and Mills, *Essays and Documents*, 76.

⁹⁷ It is entirely possible (though unlikely) that an unrecorded production of the *Pentecost* in 1499 was played against the text for comic irony, with all the apostles standing when they should kneel and doing somersaults when they should genuflect, parodying the liturgy rather than mimicking it. Such a staging, however, has little bearing on the extant text of the *Pentecost*, because it specifically disregards or plays against what is written. I treat the text an accretive work bearing the marks of a centuries-long performance tradition, a palimpsest of varied showing schedules and conventions for recording and prescribing staging; thus, I only address those elements of performance that the text *does* prescribe or record.

⁹⁸ David Mills, in his current research into the letters of Christopher Goodman during the cycles' final performances, is currently pioneering new work on the disagreement between play records and play texts; as of the filing date of this dissertation, that work has not yet been released. However, such disagreements do not necessarily bear on a close reading of the extant texts: see Note 97.

⁹⁹ Miller also includes a quote from the Vulgate source of the Shepherds' scene at line 1+SD, though it provides little staging information other than that the setting of the scene is "*noctē*" ("at night").

¹⁰⁰ While the manuscripts' performance data is often supported or expanded by the archives now collated in *REED*, those archives also provide some significant contradictions. Such contradictions, like the play texts' variance in stage directions, are most often far more likely to be evidence of a set of staging practices that were always in flux, rather than of a conscious misdirection by a scribe (as with the scribal "hoax" that associated the Towneley Plays with an imagined "cycle" at Wakefield). Cestrian scribe James Miller sometimes attempts to adjust the meter, content, and stage directions of his cycle manuscript in order to preserve consistency and sense, adjustments that are clearly divorced from the plays' live performances. In such cases, the five full-cycle manuscripts at Chester can most often act as correctives to each other. If a stage direction is included in all five manuscripts, then it is highly unlikely that it was a scribal invention. The late fifteenth-century fragmentary manuscripts of the *Resurrection* and *Antichrist* plays bear an almost perfect similarity to the same plays in the late sixteenth-century full-cycle manuscripts, further evidence that little scribal tampering probably occurred in the intervening years.

¹⁰¹ Rogers, *Breviary*, CALS MS ZCX/3, f18r. See also Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills, *REED: Cheshire, xlii-xliiii*, 332.

¹⁰² See Note 80.

CHAPTER ONE

¹ In place of “Hervye,” MS B reads “hevie” and MS H reads “harlott.” The reference to London is a playful expression of distance “from here to London” that plays upon (and thus affirms) the understood disjunction between Calvary and Chester. See V.A. Kolve, *The Play Called Corpus Christi* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1966), on cycle drama as present and immediate in local space.

² “Bishoppes”: *Trial* line 1; *Passion* line 377. “Lordinges”: *Trial* lines 110, 136, 291, 355; *Passion* line 360. “Prelates”: *Trial* line 243. Pilate offers Barabbas first to the general public, of which the Four Jews are representative, and then to the prelates, making clear that the two groups form separate classes.

³ Kolve considers the crucifiers’ focus on their craft (but not on the humanity of the man they crucify) to be symptomatic of their inability to see the actual significance of what they do in general (an important argument of Kolve’s which I discuss briefly later on). See Kolve, *The Play Called Corpus Christi*, 190.

⁴ Sarah Beckwith, *Signifying God: Social Relation and Symbolic Act in the York Corpus Christi Cycle* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 65-70, emphasis hers. Later in this chapter, I will isolate a “dicing-crucifixion episode” within the Chester *Passion*—this episode’s characters and content correspond to the York Pinners’ *Crucifixion*, including all of the features that Beckwith mentions: an unsettlingly laconic Jesus; four talkative crucifiers; a step-by-step walkthrough of the dangerous spectacle of stretching, fastening, and raising up the body; dialogue that focuses on the technical details of the craft, unaffected by its human horror or divine import.

⁵ That is, the clownish craftsmen in Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. See *Midsummer* III.ii.9 in William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, in *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*, edited by David Bevington (New York: Harper Collins, 1992).

⁶ “Then the soldiers of the governor taking Jesus into the hall, gathered together unto him the whole band; And stripping him, they put a scarlet cloak about him. And plating a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand. And bowing the knee before him, they mocked him, saying: Hail, king of the Jews. And spitting upon him, they took the reed, and struck his head.” Matthew 27:27-30. Parallel scenes in Mark and John do not differ enough to merit their repetition here. See *Bibliorum Sacrorum, Iuxta Vulgatam Clementinam, Nova Editio*, edited by Aloisius Gramatica (Vatican: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1913). Translation from *The Precise Parallel New Testament, Rheims New Testament* (Challoner revision), ed. John R. Kohlenberger III (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 166, 276, 594-6.

⁷ The addition of smell and spice at the Passion connects the Third Jew’s jeer to a popular patristic analogy in which Christ or the martyrs are compared to unguents or incense: just as one must stir up or bash incense in order to release the scent, so too Christ and the martyrs were beaten in order to reveal their virtue. Thanks to Maura Nolan, who discusses the patristic use of the analogy in *John Lydgate: The Making of Public Culture*, for pointing out this connection to me. See Maura Nolan, *John Lydgate and the Making of Public Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 210.

⁸ The Third Jew’s jeer is probably connected to the motif in devotional writing that describes violence to Jesus’ body as “writing” on his flesh. An inscription with mucus on the adult Jesus’ face might also have resonated especially disturbingly in a mystery cycle in which the boy Jesus’ face was traditionally gilded. Lumiansky and Mills, after remarking on their predecessors’ confusion, suggest “OED 2b, ‘to form by painting.’” (The *OED Online* now lists the definition “To form by painting or the like; to paint” as 3b, not 2b.) However, all the quotations used as examples by the *OED* involve the painting of words, though the *OED* definition does not seem to acknowledge that specificity of meaning. Indeed, the *MED* provides no meaning for *written* as generalized painting, but it does provide two examples that hint that violence at the Passion was often imagined in devotional literature as “writing on Christ’s flesh.” See R.M.

Lumiansky and David Mills, ed. *The Chester Mystery Cycle*. Vol. 2. 2 vols. (London: Oxford University Press/Early English Text Society, 1986), 240 (note on line 347).

⁹ Peter Cockett has already written on a similarly self-referential reminder in the Chester *Antichrist* pageant, in which none of the characters engage in any role-playing as such, though they do produce false miracles. See Peter Cockett, "Staging Antichrist and the Performance of Miracles." In *Spectacle and Public Performance in the Late Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, edited by Robert Stillman (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill, 2006), 31-50.

¹⁰ Scholars have referred to the torturers' game alternately as *hot cockles* and *blind-man's-buff*. Rosemary Woolf, for instance, notices that the theme of the buffeting as a "game of blind man's buff is elaborately worked out in three out of the four English cycles (Chester is the exception)." I assume she does not mean that Chester does not include the game, but that Chester does not do so "elaborately" (one of Woolf's many similar critiques of Chester's style in comparison to the other cycles). Woolf also refers briefly to Continental cognates that also include blind-man's-buff. More recently, Beatrice Groves discusses the same gaming theme as "hot cockles." According to the *OED*, *hot cockles* is "[a] game in which one player lies face downwards, or kneels down with the eyes covered, and attempts to guess which of the other players has struck him or her on the back." Meanwhile, *blind-man's-buff* is "[a] game in which one player is blindfolded, and tries to catch and identify any one of the others, who, on their part, push him about, and make sport with him." Since the rules of *hot cockles* are much closer to the game that the torturers try to play with Jesus, I have chosen to employ that term here. See Rosemary Woolf, *The English Mystery Plays* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1972), 254-5; Beatrice Groves, "'Now wole I a newe game begynne': Staging Suffering in *King Lear*, the Mystery Plays and Grotius's *Christus Patiens*," *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 20 (2008), 142.

¹¹ Kolve, *The Play Called Corpus Christi*, 11-19; Lawrence M. Clopper, *Drama, Play, and Game: English Festive Culture in the Medieval and Early Modern Period* (University of Chicago Press, 2001), 25-107; John Coldewey, "Plays and 'Play' in Early English Drama," *Research Opportunities in Renaissance Drama* 28 (1985), 182.

¹² Kolve, *The Play Called Corpus Christi*, 19.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 175-205.

¹⁴ Christina M. Fitzgerald, *The Drama of Masculinity and Medieval English Guild Culture* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), 97-100. The point was first brought to my attention by Anna Chen in "Playing Dead: Abused Children in the Corpus Christi Slaughter of the Innocents Pageants," which she delivered at the *Conference on Medieval Children, 1200-1500*, at the University of Kent, Canterbury.

¹⁵ Elizabeth Baldwin, Lawrence M. Clopper, and David Mills, eds., *Records of Early English Drama: Cheshire, including Chester* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 75.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 75-6, emphasis added.

¹⁷ David Rogers, *A Breuary or some fewe Collectiones of the Cittie of Chester*, Cheshire Archives and Local Studies, Chester Records Office, Chester, MS ZCX/3, Cheshire Archives and Local Studies, Chester Records Office, Chester, MS ZCX/3, f17r.

¹⁸ *The Hardest Goal*. Online at *IFC.com*. Directed by Steve Watson. Derbyshire, UK: Big Time Films, 2007.

¹⁹ See the Introduction to this dissertation.

²⁰ Lawrence M. Clopper, "The History and Development of the Chester Cycle," *Modern Philology* 75.3 (Feb. 1978).

²¹ Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills, *REED: Cheshire*, 77.

²² The efforts of Johan Huizinga in *Homo Ludens*, and of the many writers who followed Huizinga's example, have sadly not had much effect on popular conceptions or presentations of "serious play" or "deep play." See Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*. Translation unattributed. (London: Beacon Press, 1950).

²³ For instance, Kolve refers to Jesus' participation in the events leading up and including the Passion as part of a "larger game" or "divine game," in which everything happens as part of God's plan: "In short, the whole of human history can be understood as a game in which the opponents are the Triune God and Satan." Kolve means to connect that "divine game" to the series of literal games played by Jesus' torturers in the cycle plays. But *game* only enters the discussion in this way because Kolve uses it figuratively—as in *OED* definition 5a or 5b (essentially synonymous with "plan" or "strategy")—a metaphoric turn of Kolve's (not of the medieval players') that clearly falls outside the broad but strictly ludic meaning of the term as used elsewhere in the book. See Kolve, *The Play Called Corpus Christi*, 200-205.

²⁴ Leah Marcus, *The Politics of Mirth: Jonson, Herrick, Milton, Marvell, and the Defense of Old Holiday Pastimes* (University of Chicago Press, 1989), 1-23.

²⁵ See Robert W. Barrett, Jr., *Against All England: Regional Identity and Cheshire Writing, 1195-1656* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009); Tim Thornton, *Cheshire and the Tudor State, 1480-1560* (New York: Woodbridge, Suff, and Rochester, 2000); Joan Beck, *Tudor Cheshire* (Chester: Cheshire Community Council, 1969).

²⁶ David Rogers, *Breviary*, CALS MS ZCX/3, f1r.

²⁷ R.M. Lumiansky and David Mills, *The Chester Mystery Cycle: Essays and Documents* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983), 3-86.

²⁸ Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills, *REED: Cheshire, cix-cx*, 856-7.

³⁰ Samuel Rowlands, "Satire 4," in *The Complete Works of Samuel Rowlands, 1598-1628, Now First Collected*. Vol. 1. (The Hunterian Club, 1880), 64.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 63-66.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Both games resemble modern backgammon. See *OED* s.v. "tick-tack, *n.*," definition 2: "An old variety of backgammon, played on a board with holes along the edge, in which pegs were placed for scoring"; *OED* s.v. "Irish, *adj.* and *n.*," definition B3: "An old game resembling backgammon."

³⁴ Beckwith, *Signifying God*, 127.

³⁵ Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills, *REED: Cheshire, xxxvii-xxxviii*

³⁶ *Ibid.*, xxxvii-xxxviii, emphasis mine.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, xxxvii-xxxviii.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, lcvii-lcviii.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, lcviii.

⁴⁰ Henry VIII, *The proclamacion made and de[vised by the] kynges hyghnesse our soueraygne lorde and his honorable counsaile*, 1528. STC (2nd ed.) / 7771 (British Library/Early English Books Online), image 2 of 2..

⁴¹ Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills, *REED: Cheshire*, 75.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 76-77

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 75-77 (especially lines 4-5).

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 76. The first homage seems to be erased and written over as "glaives" in a later hand; the REED editors are sure that, in this case, *glaives* refer not to the pointed weapon but to arrows.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 76, emphasis added. The Saddlers, instead of their painted ball on a spear, were responsible for a silver bell 3s. 4d. or above—the proclamation does not specify the cost of the Saddlers’ prior homage, but context makes clear that the specific cost of the bell is provided in order to assure fairness.

⁴⁶ Clifford Davidson, *Festivals and Plays in Late Medieval Britain* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), 109.

⁴⁷ Henry VIII, *Proclamacion* (1528), image 2 of 2.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Elizabeth I. *The effect of certayne braunches of the statute made in anno. xxxiii, Hen. viij.* 1574. STC / 2222:09 (Harvard University Library/Early English Books Online), image 1 of 1.

⁵⁰ Elizabeth I, *The effect of certayne braunches* (1574), image 1 of 1.

⁵¹ Rogers, *Breviary*, CALS MS ZCX/3, f1r.

⁵² Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills, *REED: Cheshire*, 75, emphasis added.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 66.

⁵⁵ I have witnessed first-hand the massive undertaking of Chester racing in person: tourists pour in from surrounding cities and stay for multiple nights.

⁵⁶ Henry VIII, *Proclamacion* (1528), image 2 of 2.

⁵⁷ Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills, *REED: Cheshire*, 75-77. The Saddlers, instead of their painted ball on a spear, were responsible for a silver bell 3s. 4d. or above—the proclamation does not specify the cost of the Saddlers’ prior homage, but context makes clear that the specific cost of the bell is provided in order to assure fairness.

⁵⁸ Lambert Daneau, *True and Christian friendshippe: With all the braunches, members, parts, and circumstances thereof, Godly and learnedly described. Written first in Latine by that excellent and learned man, Lambertus Danaeus, and now turned into English. Together also with a right excellent inuective of the same author, against the wicked exercise of diceplay, and other prophane gaming [A Discourse of Gaming, and Specially of Dyceplay]*, Translated by Thomas Newton, 1586, STC (2nd ed.) / 6230 (British Library/Early English Books Online), image 44 of 60.

⁵⁹ Ibid., image 40 of 60.

⁶⁰ David Mills. “Who Are Our Customers? The Audience for Chester’s Plays,” in *Medieval English Theatre* 20 (1998): 104, emphasis added.

⁶¹ Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills, *REED: Cheshire*, 71-72

⁶² Mills, “Who Are Our Customers?,” 105.

⁶³ Daneau and Newton, *A Discourse of Gaming*, images 38-9 of 60.

⁶⁴ This is certainly the case with most modern low-budget theater companies in the San Francisco Bay Area and New York, in which the relative legitimacy of small theater and dance companies is often determined (in conversation and in grant applications) by their ability to “pay the performers.” Such companies (including my own) will often pay small nominal stipends to their performers to legitimize their work as semi-professional, but rarely enough to have much effect on the performers’ finances.

⁶⁵ Lumiansky and Mills, *Essays and Documents*, 318.

⁶⁶ See the Introduction to this dissertation.

⁶⁷ Lumiansky and Mills refer to the distinctive stanza as the “Chester stanza.” See Lumiansky and Mills, *Essays and Documents*, 318.

⁶⁸ This slightly defective line is missing a stress, but its stanza clearly scans with the shortened lines I discuss elsewhere in the section.

⁶⁹ See Note 14.

⁷⁰ *Gamon* is very similar to multiple variant spellings of ME *game*, as included in the *MED*. See *MED* s.v. “game, *n.*”

⁷¹ *MED* s.v. “winnen, *v.*”

⁷² The word appears on nearly every page of Gilbert Walker’s 1538 *A Manifest Detection of the Moste Vyle and Detestable Vse of Diceplay*. See Gilbert Walker, *A Manifest Detection of the Moste Vyle and Detestable Vse of Diceplay* Walker, in *Rogues, Vagabonds, and Sturdy Beggars: A New Gallery of Tudor and Early Stuart Rogue Literature Exposing the Lives, Times, and Cozening Tricks of the Elizabethan Underworld*, edited by Arthur F. Kinney and John Lawrence (University of Massachusetts Press, 1990): 59-84.

⁷³ Sarah Beckwith writes at length on the supine position of Jesus’ body at York. See Beckwith, *Signifying God*, 65.

⁷⁴ For “badly wrung,” see *MED* s.v. “wringen, *v.*,” which recognizes the variant spelling “wrong” as a past participle of “to wring.” For “misshapen by being wrested,” see *MED* s.v. “wresten, *v.*,” which recognizes the variant spelling “wrast” as a past participle of “to wrest.” For “wrong” as physical injury, see *MED* s.v. “wrong, *adj.*,” definition 5a: “Deviating from the straight, crooked, bent, curved; of a bird’s bill: hooked; of someone’s nose or teeth: imperfect in shape or alignment, crooked, malformed; of a person: bent, deformed.”

⁷⁵ Most meanings of *cast* quite clearly denote significant distance between the caster and the object. Sports provide the few examples in which *casten*, without the modifier *down*, can refer to an action that leaves the caster still in physical contact with his object. *MED* s.v. “casten, *v.*,” especially definition 5a.

⁷⁶ *Drave*, though its significance is not necessarily ludic, also provides an example of such continuity from dicing into crucifixion. During the dice game, the Third Jew complains that the Second Jew’s grab for the seamless robe is a sign of general greed: “thou art ever inclind / to *drave* towards thee” (lines 79-80)—but it is during the crucifixion that his accusation proves eerily true, when the Second Jew suggests that Jesus’ body should be stretched to fit the Cross, and the Jews exclaim “*drave* him a lenght / *Draves*, for your fathers kynne” (lines 192-93). Just as they pulled on Jesus’ garment in the dice game, each Jew pulls on his own corner of Jesus’ body during the crucifixion.

⁷⁷ Whether they were performed live as cycles, or anthologized into cyclic form after their performance tradition had ended, England’s four extant sequences of biblical drama pageants adhere to a set of principles of selection in the way that they present their material. V.A. Kolve was the first scholar to articulate those principles: he defined them in terms of a late medieval “proto-cycle,” the collective memory from which various medieval poets, dramatic and non-dramatic, drew their basic understanding of what happened in biblical history. If there is any general rule that governs the four extant nearly all of late medieval biblical drama in England, it is that the play cycles structured their understanding and presentation of biblical history as a series of prophecies and fulfillments. Kolve, *The Play Called Corpus Christi*, 57-100.

⁷⁸ The final seventh stanza, in which the Jews place the Cross on Jesus’ back, actually comes after a brief interlude in which Pilate and the Sanhedrin (in Chester stanzas) confirm Jesus’ fate. Still, it is visibly and audibly continuous with the previous six.

⁷⁹ See Note 10.

⁸⁰ Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills, *REED: Cheshire*, 926-7.

⁸¹ Lumiansky and Mills, *Essays and Documents*, 25.

⁸² Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills, *REED: Cheshire*, 894.

⁸³ Clopper, “History and Development,” 227 and 243. See also Lumiansky and Mills, *Essays and Documents*, 165-202; Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills, *REED: Cheshire* 886-97. The *REED* editors mention that at least one scholar has dated the *Shepherds* play “earlier than 1488,” and as Lumiansky and Mills point out, any part of the cycle’s dialogue, regardless of its age, could easily have been re-revised or rewritten at any point during or after the cycle’s production history.

⁸⁴ Psalms 22:19 and Matthew 27:35. See *Bibliorum Sacrorum, Iuxta Vulgatam Clementinam*, 480, 955.

⁸⁵ For the Towneley *Play of the Dice*, see Martin Stevens and A.C. Cawley, eds., *The Towneley Plays*, 2 vols (New York: Oxford University Press/Early English Text Society, 1994): 309-322. Other early English examples include Lydgate’s *Testament* (“Beholde the knyghts / which by their frowarde / Sate for my clothes / at the dyce to pley chaunce”), and the anonymous translation of scripture in the Church of England’s 1534 *A Prymer in Englyshe* (“and as for his knytte cote which was without seme / because it coulede not wel be cut, they casted dyce for it that the. xxii. psalme myghte be fulfilled.”) See John Lydgate, *The testament of Iohn Lydgate monke of Berry* (1520), STC 1:21, British Library/*Early English Books Online*, <http://eebo.chadwyck.com>, image 11 of 13; see also Church of England, *A prymer in Englyshe* (1534), STC 111:04, British Library/*Early English Books Online*, <http://eebo.chadwyck.com>, image 64 of 176. Compare these translations and adaptations to the late sixteenth-century prose *Passion* commissioned by the Coopers’ Guild, in Cheshire Archives and Local Studies, Chester Records Office, Chester, MS ZG 7/1. The Coopers sometimes shared responsibility for the *Passion* (see “Textual History and the *Pleite*-Episodes,” above); their rendering of the “sortem” as “cast lottes” in CALS MS ZG 7/1 confirms that the dice game in the *Passion* is a conscious, playful act of anachronism.

⁸⁶ For more information on James Miller (‘the first editor of the Chester cycle’) and his manuscript, see Lumiansky and Mills, *Essays and Documents*, 76.

⁸⁷ Lumiansky and Mills, *Chester Mystery Cycle Vol. 2*, 250.

⁸⁸ Multiple instances of the words have been collected in the *Oxford English Dictionary* and the *Middle English Dictionary*. See *OED* s.v. “doublet, *n.*” 3a, “cater, *n.*” 2a and 2b, “trei, *n.*” 3; *MED*, s.v. “cater, *num.*,” “trei, *n.*” 3. None of those instances use the terms according to the meanings that Lumiansky and Mills attribute to them. I have also run searches on multiple possible variant spellings of the terms through *Early English Books Online*, but have found no evidence to support Lumiansky and Mills’ glosses. In researching this dissertation I have also looked closely through a variety of early English works on gaming, but still have not found support for Lumiansky and Mills’ glosses of the dicing terms, including Walker, *A Manifest Detection*, Daneau, *Discourse of Gaming*, as well as W.L. Braekman, “Fortune-telling by the Casting of Dice: A Middle English Poem and its Background,” *Studia Neophilologica* 52:1 (1980): 3–29; and Charles Cotton, *The compleat gamester*, London, 1674, Wing c6382 136:12, Harvard University Library/*Early English Books Online*, <http://eebo.chadwyck.com>.

⁸⁹ Cotton, *The compleat gamester*, 164 (image 91 of 125).

⁹⁰ Walker, *A Manifest Detection*; Braekman, “Fortune-telling,” *MED* s.v. “cater, *num.*”

⁹¹ *Novem-cinq* is the game used in all the examples in Walker, *A Manifest Detection*, and also described in Cotton, *The Compleat Gamester*; in *Novem-cinq*, a five is an especially bad roll.

⁹² Furthermore, if the game were won by the player who scored highest—which does not seem to be the case, since all three dice are never named, nor is the sum—then the Third Jew should beat the Fourth Jew. The most likely reading for the Fourth Jew’s “synnce” is as a total score of five, while the Third Jew’s “cator-traye” must total at least eight (playing with three dice, if one die shows four dots and another shows three).

⁹³ Lumiansky and Mills’ glosses of “three twos,” “three fours,” and “three fives” create an even more comically improbable series—think of the cinematic poker games in which the players present four-of-a-kind, then a straight flush, then a royal flush. Those glosses, which would suggest that chance has been compromised in the *Passion*—both by the

possibility of cheating and by the fatalism of prophecy—would strongly support the arguments I put forward in this essay. Since I have thus far been unable to find support for the glosses, however, I have not included a further discussion of them.

⁹⁴ *OED*, s.v. “doublet, *n.*” 1a; “sink, *n.*” See also Lumiansky and Mills, *Chester Mystery Cycle* Vol. 1, 117, on the puns in the shepherds’ gibberish.

⁹⁵ Arnold Williams, *The Drama of Medieval England* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1961), 57.

⁹⁶ Sarah Beckwith has written on the contrast between the crucifiers’ prolixity and Jesus’ silence in the York *Crucifixion*; the same effect clearly occurs in the corresponding episode at Chester. See Beckwith, *Signifying God*, 65-70.

⁹⁷ The repetition of *none* in the second example only occurs in one of the five full-cycle manuscripts (Huntington Library MS 2, San Marino, California). See Lumiansky and Mills, *Chester Mystery Cycle* Vol. 1, *xii–xiv*, with textual notes at 288.

⁹⁸ The staging of *commedia* relies on the players’ and audience’s preconditioned familiarity with a limited set of archetypal and superficial stock characters and plots, acted out in exaggerated gestures. Within the shallow diegesis of *commedia*, or of its many modern descendants (the work of the San Francisco Mime Troupe is a notable one), there is never a moment at which the player attempts to convince the audience that he or she has actually become the stock character; rather, even as the stock character undergoes the trials of the melodrama at hand, the player is distanced from the action and “in on the joke,” often punctuating actions with knowing glances to the audience. For more information on the form, a good place to start is Mel Gordon, *Lazzi: The Comic Routines of the Commedia Dell’Arte* (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1983).

⁹⁹ Lumiansky and Mills, *Essays and Documents*, 76.

¹⁰⁰ Lumiansky and Mills, *Chester Mystery Cycle* Vol. 2, 250.

¹⁰¹ “Syyes” is less likely a variant on *vingt* than on *six* (though Miller’s First Jew still refers back to the same roll as “synke” later on). Perhaps Miller saw it as illogical that the Fourth Jew should win with a five (see Note 91), and so attempted (if only partially) to emend it.

¹⁰² Email with Alexandra Johnston, 18 May 2010.

¹⁰³ Stevens and Cawley, *The Towneley Plays* Vol. 1, 320, at lines 351-62.

¹⁰⁵ Kolve, *The Play Called Corpus Christi*, 22-3.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 175-205.

¹⁰⁶ Daneau, *Discourse of Gaming*, images 50-1 of 60.

¹⁰⁷ Priscilla Heath Barnum, ed., *Dives and Pauper* Part 1 Vol. 1 (London: Oxford University Press/Early English Text Society, 1994), 166-7.

¹⁰⁸ Henry VIII, *Proclamacion* (1528), image 2 of 2.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, image 2 of 2.

¹¹⁰ See Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills, *REED: Cheshire*, 75.

¹¹¹ *MED*, s.v. “boord, *n.*”

¹¹² Lumiansky and Mills, *Chester Mystery Cycle* Vol. 2, 249-50.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ For the stationary performances, see Clopper, “History and Development,” 220-221.

¹¹⁵ Elizabeth I, *The effect of certaine braunches*, image 1 of 1.

¹¹⁶ Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills, *REED: Cheshire*, 844.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, xxxvii. See Barrett, *Against All England*; Thornton, *Cheshire and the Tudor State*.

¹¹⁸ See Note 11.

¹¹⁹ Gregory M. Colón Semenza, “Historicizing ‘Wrastlyng’ in the *Miller’s Tale*,” in *The Chaucer Review* 38.1 (2003), 74.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, throughout.

¹²¹ Gail McMurray Gibson, *The Theater of Devotion: East Anglian Drama and Society in the Late Middle Ages* (University of Chicago Press, 1989), 205 at note 30.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills, *REED: Cheshire*, 182.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 147.

¹²⁵ On the role of singers in the cycle, see Richard Rastall, “Music in the Cycle,” in Lumiansky and Mills, *Essays and Documents*, 111-164.

¹²⁶ Daneau and Newton, *A Discourse of Gaming*, image 38 of 60.

¹²⁷ Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills, *REED: Cheshire*, 182.

¹²⁸ Roland Barthes, “The World of Wrestling,” in *Mythologies*, translated by Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), 19.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 16-17.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 21-22.

¹³¹ Daneau and Newton, *A Discourse of Gaming*, image 39 of 60.

¹³² MSS A and R read “This bottill I seet at little”; Lumiansky and Mills comment: “*bottill* AR is evidently a replacement for a difficult word, but gives good sense: ‘I set little store by the whole bottle,’ i.e. I can drink it all easily.” In other words, the meaning has changed in MSS A and R, but my concern is with Trowle’s repeated measurement and comparison of value, which is still at work in both cases. See Lumiansky and Mills, *The Chester Mystery Cycle* Vol. 2, 112.

¹³³ Lumiansky and Mills, *The Chester Mystery Cycle* Vol. 1, 135.

¹³⁴ *MED* s.v. “stor, *n.*,” at definitions 1, 3, and 4.

¹³⁵ In the Mills glossary for *store*, he puts “collection (of excrement)?” with a reference to the line in the *Shepherds* play. It would make reasonable sense that Tudd should “keepe well” his collection of excrement in order to guard against a “farte.” The Notes on the scene, meanwhile, suggest that Trowle is referring to the remaining food, a less sensible reading. Hm and H read *score* for *store*, perhaps another case in which Bellin’s reading is more economics-oriented than Gregorie’s (or in this case Miller’s); Lumiansky and Mills suggest that *score* is a sporting term for the line drawn on the ground around a wrestling place; the meaning of “crevice” or “notch” for *score* (*MED*) seems more appropriate here, however, for a bit of physical humor. See Lumiansky and Mills, *The Chester Mystery Cycle* Vol. 2, 455. Maura Nolan has

also pointed out that *MED* s.v. “stor, *n.*” can mean “incense,” another possible meaning behind Trowle’s scatological taunt.

¹³⁶ Barthes, “The World of Wrestling,” 15, 23.

¹³⁷ “The virtue of all-in wrestling is that it is the spectacle of excess... There are people who think that wrestling is an ignoble sport. Wrestling is not a sport, it is a spectacle, and it is no more ignoble to attend a wrestled performance of Suffering than a performance of the sorrows of Arnolphe or Andromaque. Of course, there exists a false wrestling, in which the participants unnecessarily go to great lengths to make a show of a fair fight; this is of no interest. True wrestling, wrongly called amateur wrestling, is performed in second-rate halls, where the public spontaneously attunes itself to the spectacular nature of the contest, like the audience at a suburban cinema.” Barthes, “The World of Wrestling,” 15.

¹³⁸ Barthes, “The World of Wrestling,” 18.

¹³⁹ York *Crucifixion*, lines 186 and 211-213. See Richard Beadle, ed., *The York Plays: A Critical Edition of the York Corpus Christi Play as Recorded in British Library Additional MS 35290* (New York: Oxford University Press/Early English Text Society, 2009), 337-338.

¹⁴⁰ The Four Jews’ deferred comeuppance, and their due compensation at *Judgment*, adds a layer of complexity to the way in which the *pleie*-within-a-*pleie* conceit, centering on common artisans at play, implicates Cestrian guildsmen. Fifteenth- and sixteenth-century critics of drama would surely point out that the Cestrian guildsmen, like the oblivious and sacrilegious players they portray, are making recreational use of sacred material: if the Four Jews are due for a *quyting* for their antics, so too are the Cestrians themselves. The Four Jews’ role-play, another game in which Jesus is an unwilling and inactive participant, includes one more possible suggestion of a Barthesian sense of compensation that may clarify a point of critical confusion:

SECUNDUS JUDEUS *Cast of thy ware,
all thy clothes, yare.
Stint now and stare.
This stalward I would stere...*

Tunc posteaquam flagellaverunt eum, postea induunt eum purpurea ponentes in cathedram, et dicat

PRIMUS JUDEUS Nowe, syth hee kinge ys,
whyte his clothinge ys.
Beggere, I bringe thee this,
thee for to weare (lines 250-7, emphasis added).

Lumiansky and Mills, *Chester Mystery Cycle* Vol. 2, 233, have pointed out that the First Jew here seems confused about the color of the purple robe [*purpurea*] with which he has just costumed his mock-king:

Jesus was dressed in a white robe by Herod [at lines] 195-202, and it is presumably to this that the line [“whyte his clothinge ys,” above] refers. Presumably, however, Jesus is divested of his clothes at [the Second Jew’s “Cast of thy ware,” above], and the reference would have to be to the pile of clothes taken from him.

That reference, however, would undermine the sense of “syth hee kyng ys,” which refers to the royalty of Jesus’ present (“ys,” not *was*) clothing. It seems quite possible to read the First Jew’s “whyte,” instead, as a common alternate spelling of the participial form of *quyte*—indeed, Lumiansky and Mills read the First Jew’s “white” as the infinitive form of *quyte* at lines 100-1 of the same pageant (“may no man myne white / though I do him woo”). The First Jew’s line about the robe, then, becomes “Now, since Jesus is king, his clothing is *quyted*—returned to him accordingly.” If this reading holds, then it frames theatrical play, too, within the “quantitative series of punishments” that perhaps explains why, in the *Harrowing* play, we find a Cestrian reveller among the unsaved.

¹⁴¹ Barthes, “The World of Wrestling,” 21.

CHAPTER TWO

¹ C.P. Lewis and A.T. Thacker, *The Victoria History of the Counties of England, History of the County of Chester Volume V, Part 2: The City of Chester: Culture, Buildings, Institutions* (London: Boydell and Brewer, 2005), 71-72. The cast requirements for the cycle by the end of the 1520s would have been similar to what they are in the extant texts; see Lawrence Clopper, “The History and Development of the Chester Cycle,” in *Modern Philology* 75.3 (Feb. 1978), 219-46.

² The *Chester 2010* production at the University of Toronto this summer involved 426 collaborators. It also combined the *Trial* and *Passion* plays.

³ I discuss the taverners at more length in Chapter Three.

⁴ Lewis and Thacker, *VCH Chester*, 71-72.

⁵ Sarah Beckwith, *Signifying God: Social Relation and Symbolic Act in the York Corpus Christi Cycle* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 127. As I will discuss at length in this chapter, it is one of the basic premises of *community-based performance studies*, a sub-field of performance studies, that non-professional performers should be treated as both the deliverers and the recipients of their performance. As Jan Cohen-Cruz puts it, “people frequently get more out of making art than seeing the fruits of other people’s labors.” See Jan Cohen-Cruz, *Local Acts: Community-Based Performance in the United States* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 99.

⁶ Lewis posits that the city’s population was as high as 3,700 in 1463; a series of epidemics reduced the population to 3,500 in the 1520s, then it increased to 4,700 in 1563. Lewis and Thacker, *VCH Chester*, 71-72.

⁷ Those non-local spectators will be the subject of Chapter Four.

⁸ Sarah Beckwith, “Ritual, Church, and Theatre: Medieval Dramas of the Sacramental Body,” in *Culture and History, 1350-1600: Essays on English Communities, Identities and Writing*, edited by David Aers (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1992), 79.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ The present section is devoted to reading most of these examples closely, but below is a short list of all eighteen plays that include blessings or curses:

1. *Lucifer*
 - a. GOD (to ANGELS): The worlde that is bouth voyde and vayne, I forme in the formacion... This worke is well donne, that is soe cleane and cleare. / As I you made of naughte, my blessinge I geve you here (lines 73-77).
 - b. GOD (to all creation): As I have made you all of noughte / at myne owne wisheinge, / my first day heare have I wroughte. / I geve yt here my blessinge (lines 298-301).
2. *Adam*
 - a. CAYNE (to audience): A losell aye I muste bee, / for scapit I am of thryfte. / For soe God hath toulde mee, / that I shall never thryve nee [thee]. / And now I flee, all yee may see. / I grant you all the same gifte (lines 699-704).
3. *Noah*
 - a. GOD (to NOAH): My blessinge nowe I give thee here, / to thee, Noe, my servante deare, / for vengeance shall noe more appeare. / And now farewell, my darlinge dere (lines 325-328). [In MS B: “my *lordinges* dere”]
4. *Abraham*
 - a. GOD (to ABRAHAM): [T]hou shall bee blessed that pleased mee. / Thy seede shall I soe multiplye / as starres and sande, soe many highe I / of thy bodye comminge. / Of enimythes thou shalt have power, / and thy blood alsoe in feare (lines 448-453).
 - b. GOD (to ABRAHAM): And of all natyons, leeve thow mee, / blessed evermore shalbee / through fruyte that shall come of thee, / and saved through thy seede (lines 456-459).

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- c. EXPOSITOR (to audience, kneeling): Now the Teacher should kneel down and say:/Such obedience grante us, O lord, / ever to thy moste holye word; / that in the same wee may accorde / as this Abraham was beyne. / And then altogether shall wee / that worthye kinge in heaven see, / and dwell with him in great glorie / for ever and ever. Amen (lines 476-483).
- d. MESSENGER (to audience) That lord that dyed one Good Frydaye, / [save] you all, both night and daye. / Farewell, my lordings, I goe my waye (lines 498-491).
5. *Moses/Balaam*
- a. The second half of this play is entirely dedicated to Balaam's repeated blessings of the *platea* (see "The Bloodline of Abraham," below).
6. *Annunciation/Nativity*
- a. OCTAVIAN (to audience): *Segneurs, tous si assemblez a mes probes estates... Vous tous si prest ne sortez / de fayne intentes ma[?]volentes* ("Lords, all assembled here at my noble council... None of you should leave here intending to perform evil deeds," lines 209-212).
7. *Shepherds*
- a. PRIMUS PASTOR: I yelde, for in youth / we have bine fellowes, iwys. / Therefore lend me your mouth, / and frendly let us kysse (lines 681-684).
- b. SECUNDUS PASTOR: From London to Lowth / such another shepperd I wott not where is. / Both frend and cowth, / God grant you all his blys (lines 685-688).
- c. TERTIUS PASTOR: To that blys bringe you / great God, if that thy will bee. / Amen, all singe you; / good men, farewell yee (lines 685-692).
- d. GARCIOUS: Well for to fare, eych frend, / God of his might graunt you; / for here now we make an ende. / Farewell, for wee from you goe nowe (lines 693-696).
8. *Offerings*
- a. PRIMUS REX : Farewell, syr Jasper, brother, to you, / kinge of Tharsis moste worthye. / Farewell, syr Balthasar; to you I bowe. / I thanke you of your companye./Hee that made us to meete on playne / and offered to Marye in her jesayne, / send us saffe and sound agayne / to the land we came froo (lines 240-247).
- b. SECUNDUS REX: [S]tand we not in doubt / for to walke our land about, / and of his byrth that wee maye moote / both to great and smale (lines 252-255).
- c. TERTIUS REX / Farewell, syr kynges, both in fere; / I thanke you both of your good chere. .. Hee that shoope both sea and sand, / send us saffe into our land. / Kynges to, give me your hand; / farewell and have good daye! (lines 256-263)
9. *Innocents*
- a. DEMON (to audience): Warre, warre, for now unwarely wakes your woo! / For I am swifter then is the rowe./ /I am comen to fetch this lord you froe, / in woe ever to dwell. / And with this crooked crambocke your backes shall I clowe; / and all false beleevers I burne and lowe... By my lewtye, / that filles there measures falselye / shall beare [Herod] companye; / the gett none other grave. / I will you bringe thus to woe, / and come agayne and fetch moe / as fast as I maye goe. / Farewell, and have good-daye (lines 434-457).
- b. ANGELUS (to JOSEPH): Nowe you be readye for to goe--- / Josephe and Marye alsoe--- / forsooth I will not departe you froe / but helpe you from your foe. / And I will make a melodie, / and singe here in your companye / a worde was sayd in prophecye / a thousands yeares agoe (lines 490-497).
10. *Purification/Doctors*
- a. ANGELUS (to DOCTORS): Now have you hard, all in this place, / that Christ is comen through his grace--- / as holye Esau prophecied hase--- / and Symeon hase him scene. / LEEVE you well this, lordes of might, / and keepe you all his lawes of right, / that you may in his blisse so bright / evermore with him to leene (lines 327-334).
11. *Blind Man/Lazarus*
- a. JESUS (to MARY and MARTHA): Have good-day, my doughter[s] deare. / Whereever you goe, farre or neare, / my blessinge I give you here./ To Jerusalem I take the waye (lines 482-485).
12. *Harrowing*
- a. ALEWIFE (to audience): Thus I betake you, more and lesse, / to my sweete mayster, syr Sathanas, / to dwell with him in his place / when hyt shall you please (lines 321-324).

- b. TERTIUS DAEMON (to ALEWIFE): Welcome, deare darlinge, to endles bale. / Usynge cardes, dyce, and cuppes smale, / with many false othes to sell thy ale--- / nowe thou shall have a feaste! (lines 333-336).
13. *Emmaus/Appearance*
- a. JESUS (first to THOMAS then to audience): Yea, Thomas, thou seest nowe in mee. / Thou leevest nowe that I am hee. / But blessed must they all bee / that leeve and never see... Whoeso to this wyll consent, / that I am God omnipotent, / as well as they that be present / my dearlynges shalbe aye./ Whoeso to this wyll not consent / ever to the daye of judgment, / in hellfyer they shalbe brent / and ever in sorrowe and teene./ Whosoever on my Father hath any mynd / or of my mother in any kynd, / in heaven blysse they shall yt fynd / without any woe. / Christe give you grace to take the waye / unto that joye that lasteth aye, / for there is noe night but ever daye, / for all you thyder shall goe (lines 252-275).
14. *Appearance/Ascension*
- a. PETER (to APOSTLES): Jesu, that from us nowe ys went, / save all this companye! Amen (lines 191-192).
15. *Pentecost*
- a. ANGELUS (to APOSTLES): Rest well, all that binne here. / My lord you greetys, and his Ghooste dere. / Hee byddes you dread noe bost nor bere / of Jewes farre ne nere; / but looke yee goe anon in hye / into all the world by and by, / and also preach the fayth meekelye / and his workes so deare (lines 239-246).
- b. THE SECOND ANGELL (to APOSTLES): And through this Ghooste that I you bringe / yee shall have understandinge / of every lond speakinge, / whatsoever the saye; / and this world that ys flytchinge / yee shall despyce ever all thinge, / and heaven at your endinge / yee shall have to your paye (lines 247-254).
16. *Prophets of Antichrist*
- a. EXPOSITOR: God give you grace to do so aye / that you them worthye bee / to come to the blysse that lasteth aye. / As mych as here wee and our playe, / of Antechristes signes you shall assaye. / Hee comes! Soone you shall see! (lines 335-340)
17. *Antichrist*
- a. HELIAS (to KINGS): God gyve you grace, old and yonge, / to knowe disceate in his doinge, / that you maye come to that likinge / of blysse that never shall blynne./ I warne you, all men, wytterlye, / this ys Enock, I am Helye, / binne common his errorrs to destroye / that hee to you nowe shewes (lines 289-296).
- b. ENOCKE (to God): A, lord, that all shall leade / and both deeme the quycke and deade! / That reverence thee, thou on them reade / and them through right releaved (lines 699-702).
- c. HELIAS (to God): Yea, lord, blessed must thou bee. / My flesh glorified nowe I see. / Wytte ney sleight agaynst thee / conspired may be by noe waye. / All that leeven in thee stydfastlye / thou helps, lord, from all anoye, / for dead I was and nowe lyve I. / Honored be thou aye! (lines 707-714)
18. *Judgment*
- a. JESUS (to the SAVED): Therefore, as I you ere tould, / you shalbe quytt an hundrethfould. / In my blysse, bee you bowld, / evermore you shall bee (lines 485-488).
- b. JESUS (to the DAMNED): Therefore, goe to the fyre! (line 644)

Blessings and curses not present in all manuscripts:

Temptation/Woman Taken in Adultery

In MS H only: DIABOLUS (to audience): Therefore is nowe myne intent / or I goe to make my testament: / to all that in this place be lent / I bequeath the shitte! (Lumiansky and Mills, *Chester Mystery Cycle* Vol. 1, 223, at textual notes)

Resurrection

In MSS R and H only: JESUS (to PETER): Goe forth! Forgiven is thy trespase./ And have here my blessinge (lines 94-95).

¹¹ As I show, another blessing (in *Noah*) and another curse (in *Temptation/Adulteress*) are also directed toward the audience in the *platea*, but not in all of the manuscripts' versions of the text.

¹² Richard Schechner uses performative utterances as the acid test of whether a ritual act has become a theatrical one: when a rain dance is performed without any intention of calling forth rain, then it ceases to be a ritual and becomes a piece of theater. Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 136-140. For an interesting counterpoint, see Beckwith, *Signifying God*, 62-65.

¹³ The Chester plays often use “the” as a pronoun for the third-person plural subject (i.e. “they”), a variant spelling recognized by the *MED*. Elsewhere, “the” can also be the third-person singular indirect object (i.e. “thee”); most often (as in Satan’s curse above), it is simply the definite article. See *MED* s.v. “thei, *pron.*”

¹⁴ R.M. Lumiansky and David Mills, ed., *The Chester Mystery Cycle*. Vol. 1., 2 vols. (London: Oxford University Press/Early English Text Society, 1974), 223.

¹⁵ Linda Phillips (Director, Poculi Ludique Societas/Interim Director, *Chester 2010*), interview by Matthew Sergi. Toronto, 24 May 2010.

¹⁶ Rosemary Woolf, *The English Mystery Plays* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 233.

¹⁷ Cohen-Cruz, *Local Acts*, 2.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 100-101, emphasis hers.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*, 2, 92, 111.

²² See Note 5.

²³ Cohen-Cruz, *Local Acts*, 85. As I demonstrate in Chapter Three, guild records demonstrate that the preparation for and celebration of the Chester plays in “players’ breakfasts,” “rehearsal dinners,” and general post-show merriment seem to have been as important as the plays themselves.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 106.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 108.

²⁶ More thoroughly, for Cohen-Cruz, the aesthetic value of a community-based performance often depends on how much, how visibly, and how skillfully it:

- effects change, whether that change is “conservative, reinforcing existing values/beliefs” or “capable of imagining new social orders” (49)
- makes use of an ongoing process, from pre- through postperformance (99)
- makes use of collective process and relies on multiple contributors (throughout)
- exploits “the aesthetic strengths of each... actor,” i.e. their natural talents (99)
- casts people in parts that are enhanced by the actor’s real experience (99)
- casts participants with diverse viewpoints or levels of experience in a way that brings them into close contact with each other (84, 99, 107)
- makes use of “cultural forms and content that are expressive of a group of people connected by place, tradition, history, and/or spirit” (81)
- provides “emotional and intellectual linkage between our individual lives, those who have come before, and those who will come after” (85)
- is both traditional and new, walking the line between convention and invention (81)
- displays its participants’ real identities (107)
- displays its participants’ personal connection to the subject matter (106)

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- displays its participants' personal commitment or vulnerability (109)
 - broadly encompasses and interacts with the community's physical location (if it has one) (46)
 - is "allied to the aesthetics of everyday life," dealing "directly with the concrete world intensely familiar to its audience" (84)
 - "works' with an audience" (87), activates spectators, turning passive viewers into participants (107) and rendering them all reciprocal "co-creators of the evening's pleasures" (95)
 - draws its audience, participants, and content from the same community (throughout)
 - is accessible to and pleases its community without oversimplifying (81, 83, 177)
 - is "quirky but... revealing" (109)
 - "works on us... slowly, even after the event is over" (109)

²⁷ Molly MacLagen (Director, Play 13, *Chester 2010*), interview by Matthew Sergi, Toronto, 24 May 2010.

²⁸ On Suzanne Lacy's *Three Weeks in May*, Cohen-Cruz writes: "The city was the frame of the performance; its acts were multiple actions of life simultaneously or sequentially arranged over the three weeks... Lacy conceptualized workshops, media campaigns, political contexts, and other artists' productions as part of the art. Having framed the piece by time—three weeks—whether one was watching a piece of performance art or participating in a women's self-defense class, one was interacting with the art. Given the emphasis on activities rather than on character-based scripts, anyone can perform in Lacy's work, reflecting the democratic impetus of feminist art [and] the participatory nature and quotidian aesthetic of happenings..." Cohen-Cruz, *Local Acts*, 46.

²⁹ See, for instance, Elizabeth Baldwin, Lawrence M. Clopper, and David Mills, eds., *Records of Early English Drama: Cheshire, including Chester* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 858.

³⁰ Beckwith, *Signifying God*, 101-102. As Beckwith points out, civic processions and royal entries usually justified themselves by the Entry into Jerusalem passage in the Gospels, from which they often drew elements of their ceremonies.

³¹ Money is set aside at Whitsun 1549 for "vj chelder of esaraell." Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills, *REED: Cheshire*, 92.

³² See Note 28.

³³ Phillips also notices the power of unison in community-based performance when she comments on the "matching shirts" that the huge cast of the *Chester 2010 Bethany/Jerusalem* play wore—in their case, the shirts were not costumes but as a sign of common membership in their convivial group. When that group moved as a unit, even when they were nowhere near their wagon, it seemed as though the performance was still underway.

³⁴ Cohen-Cruz, *Local Acts*, 99-100.

³⁵ See Chapter One.

³⁶ Cohen-Cruz writes of "a core axiom of the field—that everyone has artistic potential," and judges community-based facilitator Bill Rauch a "master at casting people in parts that are enhanced by the actor's real experience." Cohen-Cruz, *Local Acts*, 99.

³⁷ This resonates interestingly with the content of most of the Old Testament plays in the cycle, each of which dramatize a different lesson of obedience to or rebellion against order (Lucifer, Eve, Cain, Noah's Wife, and Balaam each rebel against divine orders and receive punishment).

³⁸ The percentage of Chester's *men and boys* involved in the plays was likely much higher than ten percent; it seems likely, too, that those boys who formed links to the Corvisors' Guild in their youth would remain connected to the same guild in their adulthood. Still, too little attention has been devoted thus far to the possible ways in which women and girls might have performed in the plays, or participated otherwise—considering that the Wives of Chester once presented an *Assumption of Mary* play, it seems likely that women were involved. I plan to incorporate the question of female performers into further research on the plays.

³⁹ See, for instance, Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills, *REED: Cheshire*, 107 (“5 boyes for singing” in 1560).

⁴⁰ For Cohen-Cruz, the process and craft of casting can bear aesthetic impact; rather than being rendered invisible behind a finished product (in which even Hollywood stars are expected to subsume their identity behind the narrative), the recognizable identity of the cast “enriches” the work. The more diverse a cast is—particularly in its “diversity of experience” (Cohen-Cruz, *Local Acts*, 99-100), putting new players alongside seasoned players—the more moving an experience it can be in creating “a direct relationship between performer and audience because the material, passed down over generations, was deeply familiar” (Cohen-Cruz, *Local Acts*, 84). Seeing younger community members alongside older community members achieves an aesthetic effect that supports the sense of timelessness and tradition in the art piece (Cohen-Cruz, *Local Acts*, 107).

⁴¹ Orme provides “copious evidence to show that [medieval] adults regarded childhood as a distinct phase or phases of life... Medieval people, especially (but not only) after the twelfth century, had concepts of what childhood was, and when it began and ended.” Nicholas Orme, *Medieval Children* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 5-6.

⁴² Orme, *Medieval Children*, 214.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ “Lyttle God” certainly refers to the boy Jesus when the guilds mention the character in their records. See Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills, *REED: Cheshire* 96, 107, 113.

⁴⁶ The Boy may be double-cast with the Nuntius (twelve lines) later on in the play, since so many of the messengers in the cycle seem to be children. However, there is no evidence for double-casting; as I have already demonstrated, the Chester players tended to inflate, rather than economize, their cast lists.

⁴⁷ The aged Adam introduces “Cayne and Abell, my children deare / whome I gate within xxx yeare”; the inclusion of this specific but unbiblical detail suggests the strong influence of Comestor’s *Historia Scholastica* or the Middle English *Genesis and Exodus*, both of which set Abel’s age at fifteen and Cain’s at thirty. See Lumiansky and Mills, *Chester Mystery Cycle* Vol. 2, 27.

⁴⁸ Lumiansky and Mills, *Chester Mystery Cycle* Vol. 2, 87, 103.

⁴⁹ *MED* s.v. “taitful, *adj.*”

⁵⁰ *OED* s.v. “miting, *n.*” and “knave, *n.*”

⁵¹ *OED* s.v. “garcion, *n.*”

⁵² Lumiansky and Mills, *Chester Mystery Cycle* Vol. 2, 112.

⁵³ The enumeration of the Boys without counting Trowle (i.e. they are numbered 1 through 4, rather than 2 through 5, counting Trowle as the First Boy) does not mean that Trowle was not *one of* the Boys. Elsewhere in the cycle, when only one or two members of a group are named and the rest are numbered, the numbering always starts at 1: in the *Adam* play, the Angels are numbered 1 through 4 (Michael is not counted); in the *Passion* sequence of plays, the Four Jews are numbered 1 through 4 despite the presence of Annas, Caiaphas, and other Jewish characters.

⁵⁴ The taunts are: “For thy tooth here is good tugging... / on this loyne thow may have good luggingge” (lines 199-201); “Boye... kneele downe and axe me a boone” (lines 258-9). The boast: “Nowe comes Trowle the Trewe; / a torne to take have I tight / with my masters. Or I rewe / put him forth that moste is of might” (lines 234-7).

⁵⁵ Lumiansky and Mills, *Chester Mystery Cycle* Vol. 2, 87, 103.

⁵⁶ See Note 45.

⁵⁷ York *Abraham and Isaac*, line 82, in Richard Beadle, ed., *The York Plays: A Critical Edition of the York Corpus Christi Play as Recorded in British Library Additional MS 35290* (New York: Oxford University Press/Early English Text Society, 2009), 57.

⁵⁸ Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Shipman's Tale*, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, edited by Larry D. Benson et al. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), 204, at line 97.

⁵⁹ Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills, *REED: Cheshire*, 858.

⁶⁰ In contrast, once the *Northampton* Isaac learns of God's apparent plan, he cries, "Alas, what haue I displesid þis Lord of blisse, / Pat I shal be martyred in þis mysse?" (lines 184-185). The Isaac of the *Brome* play comments, "He mygth a sent me a better desteny / Yf yt had a be hys plecer" (line 192-193). Norman Davis, ed., *Non-Cycle Plays and Fragments* (London: Oxford University Press/Early English Text Society, 1970), 37, 48.

⁶¹ Dympna Callaghan, *Shakespeare Without Women: Representing Gender and Race on the Renaissance Stage* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 152.

⁶² Allen J. Frantzen, "Tears for Abraham: The Chester Play of Abraham and Isaac and Antisacrifice in Works by Wilfred Owen, Benjamin Britten, and Derek Jarman," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31.3 (Fall 2001): 445-76.

⁶³ *Northampton Abraham*, lines 200-207, in Davis, *Non-Cycle Plays and Fragments*, 37.

⁶⁴ See the introduction for more information about staging areas.

⁶⁵ Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills, *REED: Cheshire*, 111.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 864, 866.

⁶⁷ *MED* s.v. "naked, *adj.*," definitions 1a, 1b.

⁶⁸ It is also worth considering the stage directions "Then Adam and Eve shall stand naked and shall not bee ashamed" *Adam* 160+SD.

⁶⁹ Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills, *REED: Cheshire*, 272.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 272-273.

⁷¹ See Chapter One.

⁷² The first wagon station was not in the center of the Rows, so in this particular case the gestures upward would not signify in the same way. They might instead have incorporated the high architecture of Chester's Abbey of St. Werburgh (later Chester Cathedral), but it is impossible to determine direction in which the performer would have been facing. See the Introduction to this project, under "Staging Conditions."

⁷³ Later, in the *Bethany/Jerusalem* play, Jesus is welcomed as "of all frutes the flowre" (line 153)—the pinnacle of beauty in the plant, but not the part that bears any further physical progeny (compare to Adam, Noah, and Abraham, who have "seeds"). Jesus is rarely called "Father" in the Chester cycle; divinity in this cycle is most often set *against* the physical cycles of life and procreation, which are markers of humanness. Divinity is without end; what makes human characters human is the fact that they must be born and die, and that they can only continue on in perpetuity by reproducing.

⁷⁴ It is possible that the Chester player mimed Abraham's self-circumcision onstage. Not only does the text seem to point to this as much as any other verbal cue, but without some physical representation of the ritual, this middle episode

would also be limited to static dialogue. Such a marked absence of physical action would be unusual in the Chester plays, otherwise saturated with the purposeful movement of props and bodies, bloody violence, and grotesque comedy.

⁷⁵ Beckwith, "Ritual, Church, and Theatre," 65.

⁷⁶ Compare to Genesis 22:1-11.

⁷⁷ For instance, in William Smith and William Webb, *The Vale Royall of England, or the County Palatine of Chester* (1656), edited by Thomas Hughes (London: John Gray Bell, 1852).

⁷⁸ See Lumiansky and Mills, *Chester Mystery Cycle* Vol. 2, 156.

⁷⁹ See, for instance, Mervyn James, "Ritual, Drama and Social Body in the Late Medieval English Town," *Past and Present* 98 (1983), 6. James suggests that Chester's shift from Corpus Christi to Whitsun was a result of the conflict (in scheduling and in commanding attention) between the processional-liturgical aspects of Corpus Christi and the dramatic aspects of the feast. It is also possible that Cestrians simply wanted to increase the scope of their spectacle, so they looked to the nearest holiday occasion that could accommodate three days of performance. Whatever the original motivation for the change, it is clear that the move to Whitsun week brought with it a new liturgical context that exerted pressure on the cycle plays in perceptible ways.

⁸⁰ Peter Travis has already made an elegant argument about the "credal structure" of the cycle, in which the organization and presentation of the plays is governed by the Apostles' Creed as it is composed in the *Pentecost* play. Travis resists dramaturgical or historicist readings, preferring to restrict the scope of his argument to the pure text, excluding performance; my argument here, by providing Travis' close reading with a symbolic matrix of performance, supports that reading and makes it more convincing. My own reading of the cycle's engagement with time leading up to the Pentecost complements, but does not conflict, with Travis' interpretation. The presence of that symbolism asserts that Chester's is not entirely a "Corpus Christi cycle," at least not in as decisive a way as the cycle at York. It does not displace the powerful presence of the Corpus Christi festival, which provides the core structure for all British cycles, and which occasioned the Chester cycle's fifteenth-century performances. Rather, the presence of Whitsun in the Chester plays locate the cycle decisively in *both* its early and late performance traditions, and everything in between. See Peter Travis, *Dramatic Design in the Chester Cycle* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 192-217.

⁸¹ Lumiansky and Mills, *Chester Mystery Cycle* Vol. 2, 307-8.

⁸² Thanks to Cestrian performers Ronno Griffiths, Brian Pearson, and Ieuan Griffiths Pearson for helping me test this theory in the streets of Chester.

⁸³ Lumiansky and Mills, *Chester Mystery Cycle* Vol. 2, 309 (note on line 65).

⁸⁴ Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills, *REED: Cheshire*, xli-xlii.

⁸⁵ *MED* s.v. "gon, *v.*," definitions 4c and 11a.

⁸⁶ Even if a given performance deviated from the extant script so that it only included two cases of kneeling and rising in unison, that performance would still look very much like common liturgical ritual.

⁸⁷ I have left the possibility of a trap door out of this discussion of levels, since no trap door could be large enough to accommodate this large of a cast.

⁸⁸ The Apostles may, though it is unlikely, stand directly beneath the Angels; if so, the Angels cannot aim their fire at their fellow players, since they cannot throw the fire through the floor on which they are standing.

⁸⁹ At the *Chester 2010* production in Toronto, the Angels stood on an elevated wagon level above and behind the lower level of the wagon; they threw weighted balls of red ribbon (representing fire) which landed on the lower level of the wagon and at ground level, in close proximity to the audience. (In the *Chester 2010* staging, which had the benefit of much more open space than Chester's streets, some Apostles were able to kneel at ground level).

⁹⁰ See Chapter One. Among the notable differences between Harley 2124 and the other manuscripts is that Harley 2124 always titles the plays by the name of their guild; other manuscripts use “The Fishmongers Play” while Harley 2124 uses only “The Fishmongers,” as if the Fishmongers themselves are preserved in the text—a testament, perhaps, to Miller’s antiquarian intentions.

⁹¹ See Chapter Four for an extensive discussion on how the cycle renders the neighbors foreign and foreigners neighborly.

⁹² *OED* s.v. “Pentecost, *n.*” See also Lumiansky and Mills, *Chester Mystery Cycle* Vol. 2, 307: “It may be noted that Whitsun coincides with the Jewish Feast of Weeks, when the first-fruits of the harvest were presented, Deuteronomy 16/9, and the giving of the Law to Moses commemorated; compare episodes in Play 5 [*Moses/Balaam*].”

⁹³ Revelation 22:13. See *Biblorum Sacrorum, Iuxta Vulgatam Clementinam, Nova Editio*, edited by Aloisius Gramatica (Vatican: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1913), 1152.

⁹⁴ Lumiansky and Mills, *Chester Mystery Cycle* Vol. 2, 352.

⁹⁵ See “Textual History and the *Pleie*-Episodes” in Chapter One.

⁹⁶ See, for instance, Peter Happé, *Cyclic Form and the English Mystery Plays: A Comparative Study of the English Biblical Cycles and Their Continental and Iconographic Counterparts* (New York: Rodopi, 2004), 223-242.. If anything, I would argue that it is the preservation of York’s *regenall* copy that is a scribal accident: such copies were meant not as records of literary history but as functional and centralized checks on a set of performance versions that were continually in flux. Chester is the only city that we know of which purposefully initiated a project to preserve its texts, but it did so after the performances ended.

CHAPTER THREE

¹ Four out of five extant cycle manuscripts contain twenty-five plays; MS Harley 2124 (1609) presents the *Trial* and *Crucifixion* as one play, so it only contains twenty-four. See R.M. Lumiansky and David Mills, eds., *The Chester Mystery Cycle*, vol. 1 (London: Oxford University Press/Early English Text Society, 1974), 303. All textual references below are from the Lumiansky and Mills edition, unless otherwise noted.

² Among the examples of suggested or implied food and drink, some from extra-biblical sources:

1. In *Noah*, lines 277-92, God goes into detail about adding clean beasts, fowl, and fish to a previously vegetarian diet. No parallel speech exists in the other extant English dramatizations of the Noah story.
2. In the *Offerings* play, Melchior’s offering of gold takes the form of a chalice (line 135+SD).
3. Various characters in the *Innocents* and *Resurrection* plays swear “As drinke I wine” or “As ate I brede”; the *Resurrection* also includes Jesus’ extended monologue on the “verey bread of life.”
4. In the *Temptation*, lines 41-84, Satan tempts Jesus with “speach of bread.”
5. *Christ at the House of Simon the Leper* features the hospitality of Simon and his household, and probably involved a table setting or feasting, especially when Martha offers “to serve you here... in good manere (lines 37-40).
6. In the *Trial*, Jesus’ torturers use food-based metaphors for violence: buffeting as a feast “though my fiste flye, / gettes he a feast” (after line 97, only in MSS R and B); spitting as spice “nowe my nose hase / good spice” (line 350); in the *Passion*, when Jesus cries out from thirst, they offer him torment as “drynke” (not vinegar, interestingly: lines 352-5, compare *Harrowing* lines 130-4). In the *Harrowing*, as I will discuss at more length, the Demons offer the Alewife “a feaste” of torture (line 336).
7. In the *Prophets of Antichrist*, line 135, Daniel prophesies a beast “eatinge over all that hee could fonge.”
8. In the *Last Judgment*, lines 453-67, Jesus saves those who fed the hungry and damns those who did not.

³ Lumiansky and Mills provide thorough explanations and hypotheses for the meanings of “grayne” and “sowre milke” in their notes to the *Shepherds* play: see R.M. Lumiansky and David Mills, eds., *The Chester Mystery Cycle*, vol. 2 (London: Oxford University Press/Early English Text Society, 1986), 108. For “jannock,” see *MED* s.v. “jannock, *n.*”

⁴The play dialogue does not make clear whether Tudd's "meate" refers appositively to one of the many foods he has already named and unpacked, or whether he brings out still more food each time he mentions "meate," adding item after item to an already extensive menu (a more comic reading of the lines).

⁵ *MED* s.v. "sos, *n.*"; *OED* s.v. "souse, *n.*"

⁶ Lumiansky and Mills, *Chester Mystery Cycle*, vol. 1, 130. See also *Chester Mystery Cycle*, vol. 2, 108.

⁷ Elizabeth Baldwin, Lawrence M. Clopper, and David Mills, eds., *Records of Early English Drama: Cheshire, including Chester* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 122-5.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 139-41.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 165-7.

¹⁰ *Chester Mystery Plays 2008*, directed by Robin Goddard, performed by Citizens of Chester at the Cathedral Green, Chester, June 26-July 19 2008. Confirmed by Robin Goddard, email message to author, January 31, 2009.

¹¹ Peter Travis, *Dramatic Design in the Chester Cycle* (University of Chicago Press, 1982), 124.

¹² "My hunch that the foodstuffs for the feast were obvious, artificial stage-properties is not supported by the Painters' records for 1574/75, where real food seems to have been bought for the performance." Travis, *Dramatic Design*, 279, at note 32.

¹³ As the *REED: Cheshire* editors explain, clear records only remain for these final three cyclic performances of the *Shepherds* because the Painters began to distinguish their play expenses under a special heading in 1568. By "final three cyclic performances," I do not count a final non-cyclical performance of the *Shepherds* play, performed at Chester for the Earl of Darby and Lord Strange in July 1578; that performance does not appear in the Painters' records and probably was not produced by the guild. See Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills, *REED: Cheshire*, 1013.

¹⁴ Lawrence M. Clopper, *Drama, Play, and Game: English Festive Culture in the Medieval and Early Modern Period* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 178, emphasis added.

¹⁵ The Late Banns appear in Rogers's *Breviary*. There is some disagreement over the Late Banns' date of composition (and thus over the performance years to which they refer), but Clopper and others have agreed that the extant revisions of the Late Banns probably refer to the cycle performances of the 1560s and 1570s. The Banns are thus applicable to the 1568, 1572, and 1575 performances and records that I discuss in this section. It is important to note here that both Clopper's estimations and my own, in this section of the paper at least, are *restricted to the latest performances of the plays*. No information about casting loaves appears in the Early Banns. See Lawrence Clopper, "The History and Development of the Chester Cycle," *Modern Philology* 75.3 (Feb. 1978), 219-46; R.M. Lumiansky and David Mills, "Development of the Cycle," in *The Chester Mystery Cycle: Essays and Documents* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983), 165-202; Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills, *REED: Cheshire*, 886-97.

¹⁶ Clopper, *Drama, Play and Game*, 178 (note 26).

¹⁷ Travis, *Dramatic Design*, 124 and 279 (at note 32).

¹⁸ Clopper, *Drama, Play and Game*, 178.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 169.

²⁰ Travis, *Dramatic Design*, 122. See also 38-9, 68, and 253.

²¹ In 1550, the Cordwainers and Shoemakers spend 4s. 8d. for "bakynge of godes brede," which seems to be part of the "generall Reyherse" feast before the show. Though the Late Banns make clear that "God's loaves" are some kind of

baked goods that are small and cheap enough to be prepared in bulk and distributed (while soft and non-sticky enough to be safely “caste” from players to audience), there are few clues to what the baked good might have looked like. The term is absent from the *OED* and *MED*, except in *OED* s.v. “god, *n.*” 16a, in oaths by the Eucharist—as in *Romeo and Juliet* III.v.177, “God’s bread, it makes me mad!”, in *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*, edited by David Bevington (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), 1009—though the favors passed out at Chester obviously cannot have been Eucharistic wafers. I will suggest one possibility for “God’s loaves” when I return to the Bakers’ play later on in this essay.

²² In 1575, two fewer mugs are bought, but there is also one fewer putter on the books. See Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills, *REED: Cheshire*, 140.

²³ Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills, *REED: Cheshire*, 126.

²⁴ If the Painters’ two *jannocks* were somehow large enough to act both as favors and props, then they could not have fit in Tudd’s pack at the beginning of the play. See *OED* s.v. “jannock, *n.*”

²⁵ Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills, *REED: Cheshire*, 122-6.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 123.

²⁷ These ordinances appear in the Painters’ Records, Cheshire Archives and Local Studies, Chester Records Office, Chester, MS ZG 17/1.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Sarah Beckwith, *Signifying God: Social Relation and Symbolic Act in the York Corpus Christi Cycle* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 65-71.

³⁰ Travis, *Dramatic Design*, 120-2.

³¹ Clopper, “History and Development,” 219-20.

³² Lumiansky and Mills, *The Chester Mystery Cycle* vol. 2, 108. Lumiansky and Mills note that the line only appears as “wee serven yt here” in two of five manuscripts, but the editors favor the reading for sense.

³³ C.P. Lewis and A.T. Thacker, *A History of the County of Chester*, vol. 5, part 2, *The City of Chester: Culture, Buildings, Institutions* (London: Boydell and Brewer, 2005), 94. On Chester as the northwest’s primary port town, see Chapter Four of this dissertation, and Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills, *REED: Cheshire*, xli-xlii.

³⁴ Lucian, *Extracts from the MS. Liber Luciani De Laude Cestrie, Written About the Year 1195 and Now in the Bodleian library*, Oxford, M.V. Taylor, ed. (London: The Record Society, 1912), 44-47. See also David Mills, *Recycling the Cycle: The City of Chester and Its Whitsun Plays* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 20-38.

³⁵ Lucian, *De Laude Cestrie*, 47. After praising the secular marketplace, Lucian attempts to sacralize it: “*Nimirum ad exemplum panis eterni de celo venientis, qui natus secundum prophetas ‘in medio orbis et umbilico terre,’ omnibus mundi pari propinquate voluit apparere*” (“Clearly, it is a symbol of the eternal bread coming from heaven, which springs forth, following the prophets, ‘at the center of the earth and the navel of the world,’ who wishes to provide for all of the world brought equally near.”) The fact that the streets date back to a pre-Christian Roman grid (see Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills, *REED: Cheshire*, xciii) serves as a corrective to Lucian’s attempt to read divine symbolism into Chester’s topography.

³⁶ Lewis and Thacker, *VCH: Chester*, 98-100.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 94-5.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 95. See also Keith D. Lilley et al., “Digital Mapping” and “Digital Maps,” in “Mapping Medieval Chester,” accessed October 19, 2009, <http://www.medievalchester.ac.uk>.

³⁹ Rogers, *Breviary*, CALS MS ZCX/3, f18r-f18v.

⁴⁰ Mills has argued that, although modern criticism tends to focus more on religion and politics, “the simple commercialism of the occasion” was foremost in the mind of the average guildsman. See David Mills, “Who Are Our Customers? The Audience for Chester’s Plays,” *Medieval English Theatre* 20 (1998): 104.

⁴¹ See Chapter Four.

⁴² The suggestion may surprise modern theater-goers, including Goddard’s modern Cestrian players, who enjoy the benefits of a quiet and attentive audience. See “Staging Conditions,” in the Introduction to this dissertation. That quiet and attentive is fast eroding in the twenty-first century, when silent audiences may be passing somewhat out of vogue—during the Tony-nominated *Rock of Ages*, for instance, “vendors walk down the aisles hawking cold six packs like they’re at a Mets game.” See Ellen Carpenter, “7 Reasons to Love ‘Rock of Ages’” in *Spin Magazine Online*, accessed October 19, 2009, <http://www.spin.com/blog>.

⁴³ C. Clifford Flanigan, “Liminality, Carnival, and Social Structure: The Case of Late Medieval Biblical Drama,” in *Victor Turner and the Construction of Cultural Criticism: Between Literature and Anthropology*, ed. Kathleen Ashley (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 42-63.

⁴⁴ Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills, *REED: Cheshire*, 91. After the Cordwainers and Shoemakers in 1550, those records are: the Smiths, Cutlers, and Plumbers in 1554, 1561, 1567, 1568, 1572, and 1575; the Painters, Glaziers, Embroiderers and Stationers in 1568, 1572, and 1575; the Bowyers, Fletchers, Coopers, and Stringers in 1572 and 1575.

⁴⁵ The Cordwainers’ bookkeeper separates the record into two totals, noting 58 s. in the margins halfway through, then adding 21 s. 4 d. at the end. His grand total is still a few shillings off from my own figures.

⁴⁶ See, for instance, Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills, *REED: Cheshire*, 92.

⁴⁷ Such a complaint, in 1422, constitutes our first reliable record of the plays in performance. See Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills, *REED: Cheshire*, 47-8.

⁴⁸ This is a conservative estimate. Context makes it probable that expenditures “at Iohn plemers howse,” “at Iohn a leys,” and “at Richard Anderton founderer” were primarily for refreshments.

⁴⁹ Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills, *REED: Cheshire*, 95-6. The total of all the expenditures listed here amounts, according to my count, to £3 4 s. 10 d, not £3 4 s. 7 d. The Smiths’ bookkeeper seems to have made a three-penny error here, but I give him the benefit of the doubt and proceed with his total.

⁵⁰ Cp. the Smiths’ 1568 record, which specifies charges for food “at our generall reherse,” just before the “tewsdai morning... players brekfast.” Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills, *REED: Cheshire*, 126.

⁵¹ The expenditures “for bred in northgatestreet” and for drinks “in the watergate street” could theoretically be taken, out of context, to imply indoor locations (“for bread *at a house* in Northgate Street,” “in *a tavern* in Watergate Street.”) However, the Smiths’ bookkeeper makes a point, when the guildsmen enter a house or tavern, of referring to the place by name, not by location; since all these events happened in succession, and the names of local establishments were used elsewhere—the simplest explanation is that these cases describe eating or drinking in the streets themselves. That said, whether outdoors or inside taverns, the consumption was still public, and still festive: as I will discuss at more length in the final section here, there would still be significant interplay between indoor revelry and outdoor theatrics.

⁵² Most of the roles in their play, the *Purification/Doctors*, require their actors to only be present for half of the action.

⁵³ Another reading of the day’s events might place the tavern visits on two separate nights: one on Tuesday night, after the performance; one on Wednesday night, after the final payments are made to players. That reading would strengthen my argument that the Smiths engaged in near-constant feasting throughout the Whitsun-week celebration. It may also be worth noticing that the record specifically refers to “Mr. Davison” and “Mrs. Davison” as the tavern owners; this is a likely scribal error, but its suggestion of two competing taverners named Davison is amusing.

⁵⁴ Meg Twycross has remarked on the centrality of meals to civic ceremony at York; there, not even mortal illness could excuse a Sheriff from providing dinner supplies, and failure to do so constituted grounds for formal complaint. When Eamon Duffy's discussion of medieval lay piety turns specifically to guild-sponsored processions across England, he remarks that "[t]he function of these processions as celebrations of communal identity... is underlined in accounts of early Tudor perambulations by the prominence within them of the motif of eating and drinking." See Meg Twycross, "The King's Peace and the Play: The York Corpus Christi Eve Proclamation," *Medieval English Theatre* 29 (2007): 126; see also Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, c.1400-c.1580* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 137.

⁵⁵ The very notion of "in character" here is anachronistic. Since the players dressed and put on face paint as part of their morning ceremonies, and did not remove them until their play was done, then they would likely have remained in costume throughout the day, in full view, eating and drinking, both attendees at and creators of the festival. The ritual procession of costumed cycle characters during Chester's Midsummer festival is a testament to the players' tendency to remain simultaneously in the persona of their characters and to walk through the marketplace as Cestrians.

⁵⁶ This minor point has proven to be my most contentious, because of axiomatic assumptions about medieval people's alcohol tolerance, and the weakness of their ale. As high as their alcohol tolerance was, premodern Englishmen must have gotten drunk sometime, or else Langland and Chaucer would have had no models for Gluttony or the Miller. I am convinced that the occasion of the plays was one of those times, but my argument here does not depend upon this point. Sixteenth-century English ale could be relatively weak indeed, but it was still usually as strong as modern light beer (according to the "Medieval Brewers' Guild" that meets and shares its wares each year at the International Congress on Medieval Studies at Kalamazoo). In their *Harrowing of Hell* play, the Cooks and Innkeepers imply that the adulteration of ale is among the worst of mortal sins.

⁵⁷ Robin Goddard, email message to author, January 31, 2009.

⁵⁸ Anna Meigs, "Food as a Cultural Construction," in *Food and Culture: A Reader*, edited by Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik (New York: Routledge, 1997): 95, emphasis hers.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 104-5.

⁶⁰ V.A. Kolve reminds us that the plays "used actors from the community who were known to the audience in real life... local, familiar faces." Kolve, *The Play Called Corpus Christi*, 23-4.

⁶¹ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 86-7.

⁶² Jesus stood in the midst of [the Apostles], and saith to them: Peace be to you; it is I, fear not. But they being troubled and frightened, supposed that they saw a spirit. And he said to them: Why are you troubled, and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? See my hands and feet, that it is I myself; handle, and see: for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as you see me to have. And when he had said this, he shewed them his hands and feet. But while they yet believed not, and wondered for joy, he said: Have you here any thing to eat? And they offered him a piece of a broiled fish, and a honeycomb. And when he had eaten before them, taking the remains, he gave to them. And he said to them: These are the words which I spoke to you, while I was yet with you, that all things must needs be fulfilled, which are written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. Then he opened their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures (Luke 24: 36-45). *Bibliorum Sacrorum, Iuxta Vulgatam Clementinam, Nova Editio*, edited Aloisius Gramatica (Vatican: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1913), 1004-5. Translation from *The Precise Parallel New Testament, Rheims New Testament* (Challoner revision), edited John R. Kohlenberger III (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 468-70.

⁶³ Thanks to Meg Twycross for suggesting that a love-feast may be hinted at here.

⁶⁴ Mills, *Recycling the Cycle*, 181.

⁶⁵ R.M. Lumiansky and David Mills, *The Chester Mystery Cycle: Essays and Documents* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983), 57-76.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁶⁸ Lumiansky and Mills, *Chester Mystery Cycle*, vol. 2, 345 (note for lines 585-616). Also see Richard K. Emmerson, "Contextualizing Performance: The Reception of the Chester *Antichrist*," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 29.1 (1999): 81-119, at 99.

⁶⁹ Emmerson, "Contextualizing Performance," 98-100.

⁷⁰ See A. Jefferies Collins, ed., *Manuale ad Usam Percelebris Ecclesie Sarisburiensis* (Chichester: Moore and Tillyer Ltd. for the Henry Bradshaw Society, 1960), 85-86.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁷² *MED* s.v. "prente, *n.*"

⁷³ See *OED* s.v. "hot cross bun, *n.*": "A type of sweet spiced currant bun marked with a cross and traditionally eaten hot or toasted on Good Friday," with a reference as early as 1733. The significance of the cross on the bun is Christian, but that does not make the bun the Eucharist.

⁷⁴ Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills, *REED: Cheshire*, 148.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 147-8: he refers to the *Last Supper*, the *Resurrection*, and the *Pentecost*.

⁷⁶ Meigs, "Food as a Cultural Construction," 103.

⁷⁷ Cues for music in the Chester cycle manuscripts are generally vague and inconsistent, and Richard Rastall acknowledges that the positive indication of music in one cycle manuscript neither necessitates nor precludes singing in the other four, though the similarity of the lyrics to a psalm later in the play makes it very probably that the lines were sung. Whether or not they were sung, the first two stanzas of the passage are set apart in meter, rhyme, and content as a stand-alone lyric: the Gossips switch to three stanzas of a⁴b⁴a⁴b⁴, which is sing-song in comparison to the typical Chester dialogue (a⁴a⁴a⁴b³c⁴c⁴b³, sometimes a⁴a⁴a⁴b³a⁴a⁴b³), which pauses and ties stanzas together with a shortened tag line. See Lumiansky and Mills, *Chester Mystery Cycle* vol. 2, 52; Richard Rastall, "Music in the Cycle," in *The Chester Mystery Cycle: Essays and Documents* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983), 111-65, at 156.

⁷⁸ Travis, *Dramatic Design*, 68. See also Lumiansky and Mills, *Essays and Documents*, 57-76, in which no data is given to support Travis's suspicion that the Gossips and Alewife scenes were from a late, corrupted copy of the cycle.

⁷⁹ See line 160+SD: "Then Noe shall goe into the arke with all his familye, his wyffe excepte, and the arke muste bee borded rownde aboute. And one the bordes all the beastes and fowles hereafter reahersed muste bee paynted, that ther wordes may agree with the pictures." In the lines that follow, the characters point out forty-eight different species, with two animals each.

⁸⁰ Some of it certainly was set up in the Rows or on the high levels of the abbey: the stage directions suggest that *Noah's* God made use of site-specific architecture that varied from station to station. "And firste in some high place—or in the clowdes, if it may be—God speaketh unto Noe standinge without the arke with all his familye" (line 1+SD).

⁸¹ See Chapter Three, below, for further information on the use of the *platea* at Chester. Thanks to Jennifer Miller for providing the initial suggestion that the Gossips would be located in the audience.

⁸² See 1 Corinthians 15:32.

⁸³ Rastall, “Music in the Cycle,” 157.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 159.

⁸⁵ Chaucer’s Pardoner, for instance, uses Herod as an archetype of drunken misconduct: “Whan he of wyn was repleet at his feeste, / Right at his owene table he yaf his heeste / To sleen the Baptist John, ful giltelees.” Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Pardoner’s Tale*, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, edited by Larry D. Benson et al. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), 196.

⁸⁶ Thomas Hughes, “On the Inns and Taverns of Chester, Past and Present. Part I,” *Journal of the Chester and North Wales Architectural, Archaeological, and Historical Society 2nd Series, Number 5* (1858): 91-110, especially 97-105.

⁸⁷ Travis chooses to “excise” the entire Alewife episode from the text because it does not fit into the “dramatic design” of the cycle. Travis, *Dramatic Design*, 66-68.

⁸⁸ Kolve argues that medieval street theater was “never geographically localized... it happened *there* in England, in front of and amid the spectators.” The Mulier’s speech does not disprove Kolve’s point, but it does add new complexity to his notion of locatization. Kolve, *The Play Called Corpus Christi*, 23.

⁸⁹ Matthew 26:38, emphasis added. Aloisius Gramatica, *Bibliorum Sacrorum, Iuxta Vulgatam Clementinam, Nova Editio* (Vatican: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1913), 953. Translation from John R. Kohlenberger III, *The Precise Parallel New Testament, Rheims New Testament*, Challoner revision, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 156.

⁹⁰ *MED* s.v. “thirst, *n.*” recognizes them both as variant spellings.

⁹¹ *MED* s.v. “felaushipe, *n.*” Definition 3 is “The mutual relationship, or characteristic behavior, of boon companions; conviviality, revelry”; definition 6 is “An organized society of persons united by office, occupation, or common rules of living: (a) a collegiate body; a knightly order; (b) a craft fraternity; a guild, (c) a monastic community.” See the Chester *Antichrist* at lines 123 and 147.

⁹² At 25 minutes per play per station, plus 10-minute transitions between stations—a very conservative estimate (based more on the practicalities of transitions at modern revivals than on the references to quick transitions in Rogers’ *Breviary*)—the entire day of overlapping plays would have taken 6 hours and 50 minutes. At all stations, the sun rose and set behind at least two stories on all sides (the only station outside of the Rows was in the shadow of the Cathedral and Market Hall), so semi-darkness would have set in earlier than if the plays were performed in an open field. See Lilley et al., “Digital Maps.”

⁹³ Lilley et al., “Digital Maps.”

⁹⁴ “[p]e zennes / þet comeþ of glotounye / and of lecherie... arizeþ communliche / ine tauerne: þet is welle of zenne... De tauerne / ys þe scole of þe dyeule / huere / his deciples studieþ. and his oþene chapel / þer / huer me de / his seruese. and þer huer he makeþ / his miracles / zuiche ase behoueþ to þe dyeule.” (“The sins that come from gluttony and lechery commonly arise in the tavern: it is a well of sin... The tavern is the school of the devil, where his disciples study. And it is his chapel, where men do his service. And there, he makes his miracles, such as are fitting to the devil.”) See Pamela Gradon, ed., *Dan Michel’s Aeynbite of Inmyt, or Remorse of Conscience*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press/Early English Text Society, 1975), 56. Interestingly, much later in the *Aeynbite*, Dan Michel also describes Heaven as a tavern, at 247-8.

⁹⁵ Gerald Robert Owst, *Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England: A Neglected Chapter in the History of English Letters and of the English People*, 2nd Rev. Edition (Oxford: Blackwell, 1961), 434-41.

⁹⁶ Ralph Hanna III, “Brewing Trouble: On Literature and History—and Alewives,” in *Bodies and Disciplines. Intersections of Literature and History in Fifteenth-Century England (Medieval Cultures 9)*, edited by Barbara A. Hanawalt and David Wallace (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 7-10.

⁹⁷ See also Lumiansky and Mills, *Chester Mystery Cycle* Vol. 2, 275-6.

⁹⁸ Owst, *Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England*, 434-41.

⁹⁹ Chaucer, *The Pardoner's Tale*, 196.

¹⁰⁰ "Longe erst er prime rong of any belle... set hem in a taverne to drynke." Chaucer, *The Pardoner's Tale*, 198-9.

¹⁰¹ See Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, 11-14. Duffy insists that pre-Reformation lay piety could often reach extremely rigorous levels of personal devotion and affect. He acknowledges, however, that in practice, lay festival often incorporated "patently pagan observances," drawing on "a vocabulary derived from the ritual calendar, in which secular and sacred themes, the polarities of fast and feast and downright misrule, were difficult to disentangle."

¹⁰² Steven Justice, "Did the Middle Ages Believe in Their Miracles?" *Representations* 103 (2008), 14.

¹⁰³ Beckwith asserts that one of the York cycle's primary social functions was to work through "some of the central paradoxes of Christ's ministry on earth in a dramatic language from which the meanings of that ministry cannot be separated or extracted." She focuses on transubstantiation as one of York's "most ardent and outrageous claims," a contradiction not only embodied in public play but also made possible by it. See Beckwith, *Signifying God*, xvi-xvii, 59-60, 121-24.

CHAPTER FOUR

¹ Joan Beck, *Tudor Cheshire* (Chester: Cheshire Community Council, 1969), 7. See also David Mills, *Recycling the Cycle: The City of Chester and Its Whitsun Plays* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 34.

² Mills, *Recycling the Cycle*, 34.

³ *Ibid.*, 176. On the subject of Welshness in the *Shepherds* play, see also David Mills, "The Chester Mystery Plays and the Limits of Realism," in *The Middle Ages in the North-West: Papers Presented at an International Conference Sponsored Jointly by the Centres of Medieval Studies of the Universities of Liverpool and Toronto*, edited by Tom Scott and Pat Starkey (Oxford: Leopard's Head, 1995): 221-36.

⁴ David Rogers, *A Breuary or some fewe Collectiones of the Cittie of Chester*, Cheshire Archives and Local Studies, Chester Records Office, Chester, MS ZCX/3, f18r-f18v.

⁵ That estimate does not take into account the crowds which might stand in a walker's path. I confirmed this estimate with multiple tests on my last research visit to Chester; each trial took me between five and six minutes.

⁶ Mervyn James, "Ritual, Drama and Social Body in the Late Medieval English Town," *Past and Present* 98 (1983), 12-13.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ David Mills, "Who Are Our Customers? The Audience for Chester's Plays," in *Medieval English Theatre* 20 (1998): 104, 114-5.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 107-8.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 109.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 104 and 114-5.

¹² Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills, *REED: Cheshire*, 82.

¹³ Mills, "The Chester Mystery Plays and the Limits of Realism," 233. In "The Chester Mystery Plays and the Limits of Realism," Mills provides the seminal argument about the Shepherds' Welshness. The effects of Mills's interpretation are

now visible in modern revivals of the *Shepherds* play (for instance, Robin Goddard's community-based take on the *Shepherds* in his *Chester Mystery Plays 2008* added extra Welsh caricatures, to the audience's delight) and throughout modern scholarship on the *Shepherds*, most recently Robert W. Barrett, Jr., "Leeks for Livery: Consuming Welsh Difference in the Chester *Shepherds' Play*," forthcoming in *Mapping the Medieval City: Space, Place, and Identity in Chester c.1200-1600*, edited by Catherine Clarke (Swansea: University of Wales Press, 2011).

¹⁴ David Mills, *The Chester Mystery Cycle: A New Edition with Modernised Spelling* (East Lansing: Colleagues Press, 1992), 125.

¹⁵ The travel calls for a set change, so that the main wagon stage might be converted from the hilly pasture into the manger, but the variable length of the "troy, loly, loly, loo" song might easily provide time for that change to occur.

¹⁶ Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills, *REED: Cheshire*, 111, 865, 866.

¹⁷ Other English sources imagine a permanent watch or a monthly watch; Chester is the only extant early English source to imagine a yearly watch. See R.M. Lumiansky and David Mills, ed. *The Chester Mystery Cycle*. Vol. 2 (London: Oxford University Press/Early English Text Society, 1986), 125.

¹⁸ Only in the MS Harley 2124 extension of the play, at lines 289-296.

¹⁹ For local markets, see C.P. Lewis and A.T. Thacker, *The Victoria History of the Counties of England, History of the County of Chester Volume V, Part 2: The City of Chester: Culture, Buildings, Institutions* (London: Boydell and Brewer, 2005), 94-100.

²⁰ Translation from Lumiansky and Mills, *The Chester Mystery Cycle* Vol. 2, 126-127.

²¹ Including the variant in British Library MS Harley 2124, there are thus a total of six French speeches and dialogues in the cycle, most of which I discuss in the present chapter: Octavian greets the audience in the *Nativity*, lines 209-217 (9 lines); the Three Kings see the star in *Three Kings* lines 65-72 (8 lines); the Three Kings and Herod exchange greetings in *Three Kings* lines 153-160 (8 lines); Pilate greets the Sanhedrin in the *Trial*, lines 134-135 (2 lines); Joseph of Arimathea greets Pilate in the Harley 2124 version of the *Passion*, line 77 (1 line); Pilate greets the Sanhedrin in the *Resurrection*, lines 1-8 (8 lines).

²² Translation from Lumiansky and Mills, *The Chester Mystery Cycle* Vol. 2, 129.

²³ Albert C. Baugh, "The Chester Plays and French Influence," in *Schelling's Anniversary Papers, by His Former Students*, editor unattributed (New York, The Century Company, 1923), 44.

²⁴ Coventry Shearmen and Tailors' Pageant, lines 475-485, in Hardin Craig, ed., *Two Coventry Corpus Christi Plays* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner and Co., Ltd./Early English Text Society, 1902), 16-17.

²⁵ York *Christ Before Herod*, lines 145-146, in Richard Beadle, ed., *The York Plays: A Critical Edition of the York Corpus Christi Play as Recorded in British Library Additional MS 35290* (New York: Oxford University Press/Early English Text Society, 2009), 282. Towneley *Play of the Dice*, line 435, in Martin Stevens and A.C. Cawley, eds., *The Towneley Plays*, Vol. 1 (New York: Oxford University Press/Early English Text Society, 1994), 322.

²⁶ Baugh, "The Chester Plays and French Influence," 44.

²⁷ Lumiansky and Mills, *The Chester Mystery Cycle* Vol. 2, 137.

²⁸ Not all of that exposition occurs outside the manger; I also count lines 144-151, 160-167, and 176-183, in which the Kings offer up further exposition to the holy family at the actual moment of gift-giving.

²⁹ See Chapter One.

³⁰ *MED* s.v. "red, *n.* 1."

³¹ Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills, *REED: Cheshire*, 83.

³² Damask literally means silk from Damascus, or woven in the style of silks from Damascus; sarsenet comes from medieval Latin *pannus saracenicus* (“Saracen cloth”), suggesting a Middle Eastern origin; silk in general (of which satin and taffeta are other varieties) had its first origins in the Far East. See *OED* s.v. “damask, *n.* and *adj.*,” “satin, *n.* (and *adj.*),” “silk, *n.* and *adj.*,” “taffeta | taffety, *n.* and *adj.*,” “sarsenet | saracenet, *n.*”

³³ Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills, *REED: Cheshire*, 337.

³⁴ The Shepherds, for instance, name each other as soon as they enter, within the first 92 lines of their play (at lines 45, 55, and 92).

³⁵ Puck’s closing to *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, the earliest known usage of “give me your hands” for applause, does not postdate the Chester cycle by far enough to rule out the possibility that the Third King’s “give me your hand” might add a second theatrical pun to Monday’s final stanza, as a call for applause. See V.iii.432-433 in William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, in *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*, edited by David Bevington (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), 177.

³⁶ Baugh, “The Chester Plays and French Influence,” 62-3.

³⁷ Peter Happé, *Cyclic Form and the English Mystery Plays: A Comparative Study of the English Biblical Cycles and Their Continental and Iconographic Counterparts* (New York: Rodopi, 2004), 243.

³⁸ Lumiansky and Mills, *The Chester Mystery Cycle* Vol. 2, 60 and 78.

³⁹ Baugh, “The Chester Plays and French Influence,” 45, 50.

⁴⁰ Happé, *Cyclic Form and the English Mystery Plays*, 241.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 241-242.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 240.

⁴³ Mills, *Recycling the Cycle*, 146.

⁴⁴ Jane Desmond, *Staging Tourism: Bodies on Display from Waikiki to Sea World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 26.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁴⁷ Mills, *Recycling the Cycle*, 18.

⁴⁸ Robert W. Barrett, Jr., “Leeks for Livery: Consuming Welsh Difference in the Chester *Shepherds’ Play*,” forthcoming in *Mapping the Medieval City: Space, Place, and Identity in Chester c.1200-1600*, edited by Catherine Clarke (Swansea: University of Wales Press, 2011).

⁴⁹ Lumiansky and Mills, *The Chester Mystery Cycle* Vol. 2, 193-194.

⁵⁰ Here, I have attempted to fine-tune the translation from Lumiansky and Mills, *The Chester Mystery Cycle* Vol. 2, 279. Lumiansky and Mills’ original translation reads:

By you, sir Cayphas,
and you and you, sir Annas,
and his disciple Judas
who committed treason,

and the great light of brilliance
to me perfectly revealed;
our lady was judge
to praise the noble king.

⁵¹ York *Pentecost*, lines 155-172. See Richard Beadle, ed., *The York Plays: A Critical Edition of the York Corpus Christi Play as Recorded in British Library Additional MS 35290* (New York: Oxford University Press/Early English Text Society, 2009), 413-414.

⁵² For a further discussion of the staging logic of the *Pentecost*, see the Introduction and Chapter Two.

⁵³ Translation from Lumiansky and Mills, *The Chester Mystery Cycle* Vol. 2, 85. Thanks to Maura Nolan for her suggestion that an “I” be supplied in “ma[ll]volentes.”

⁵⁴ Lumiansky and Mills, *The Chester Mystery Cycle* Vol. 2, 85.

⁵⁵ Here, with the help of Professor Misty Schieberle Lundin at the University of Kansas, I have attempted to fine-tune the translation from Lumiansky and Mills, *The Chester Mystery Cycle* Vol. 2, 85. Lundin and I suggest that “treasoroce” be read as “*tres heureux*,” “treasagyle” as “*tres agile*,” and “mes de toyle plerunt” as “*mais d’etoile pleurent*.” Lumiansky and Mills’ original translation reads:

I am a person, none so capable; I know how to do so many praiseworthy deeds.
[The editors skip over the line “En treasoroce ne treasagyle, mes de toyle plerunt” as “almost totally obscure.”]
Discreet and wise I am in council, friend to lady and maiden.
By the pure and holy mother—another such ruler does not live.

⁵⁶ Lumiansky and Mills, *The Chester Mystery Cycle* Vol. 2, 87.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills, *REED: Cheshire*, 71-72.

⁵⁹ Rogers, *Breviary*, CALS MS ZCX/3, f1r.

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