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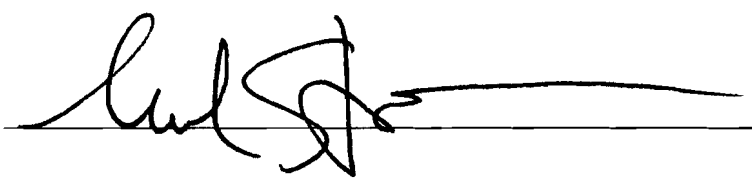
Abstract approved: 

Light is one of the most frequently occurring elements in the York Mystery Cycle, and the York playwrights make use of this element to further characterization in the cycle. The first two dramas establish God as a literal source of light and connect Lucifer to darkness. Therefore, light is indicative of all things good and darkness is indicative of all things evil. Thus, students of the York cycle can use light to analyze other characters in the cycle; good characters are able to perceive the light of God, but wicked characters are not able to perceive it. Additionally, the necessity for visual perception can account for the appearance of certain characters in specific dramas, and Moses is one such character. He must see God's light prior to the Exodus, the Transfiguration, and the Harrowing, and Moses's ability to perceive the light of God connects his appearances in the cycle.

"SUCH FAIR BEFORE WAS NEVER FOUND": THE LIGHT OF GOD AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF VISUAL PERCEPTION IN THE YORK MYSTERY CYCLE

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Chapter 1: The Significance of Light in the York Mystery Cycle

The first play in the York Mystery Cycle, The Barkers, provides the audience with an account of the fall of Lucifer. Throughout the play, light is a critical element, one that demands attention because of its repetition and appearance at critical junctures. Richard Beadle states that it is important to identify key phrases and words throughout the cycle and the analysis of these phrases and words could prove to be original and fruitful criticism of the cycle: "Analysis of the most frequently occurring words in the York Cycle, and of their semantic groupings could be taken very much further" ("Verbal" 174). Light is indeed a recurring word in the cycle, and, as Beadle suggests, its analysis provides further depth for the audience of the York Cycle. Additionally, analysis of light is another way of linking together the various dramatic episodes in the cycle, episodes that may have different authors and dates of publication: "All the evidence of diverse authorship and rolling revision of the cycle through the years nevertheless fails to displace the powerful submerged consistency of intent that informs the writing at every point" (Beadle, "The York Cycle" 88-89). Though the cycle was under constant revision by numerous playwrights, major elements and themes were not ignored and continued to serve as links for the various dramas. Light constitutes one such link and its importance is emphasized in the first play in the cycle.

Light constitutes one of the primary reasons why the Fall occurs and light is important in shaping God's creation of earth. The second play in the cycle, The Plasterers, continues, much like The Barkers, to demonstrate that light is a crucial element. In the second play, God reflects upon the fall of the angels and creates night and day. Both The Barkers and The Plasterers are critical to analyzing correctly the remaining

plays in the cycle. These plays are important because they introduce key elements that, through repetition and specific allusion, the playwrights use to shape the way the rest of the cycle should be read. Light and darkness are the elements that are frequently alluded to within the first two plays of the cycle, and I will argue that the York playwrights use these plays as the foundation upon which further references to light and darkness should be read throughout the rest of the mystery cycle

Even early in the cycle's first drama, The Barkers playwright refers frequently to light, and it accounts for God's naming of Lucifer: "I name þe for Lucifer, als berar of lyghte" (I, 36). However, light constitutes more than the mere etymological foundation for Lucifer's name; his celestial body equals the tremendous brightness, or "lightness," that his name suggests, and God substantiates Lucifer's physical appearance with a specific comparison: "Of all þe mightes I haue made, moste nexte after me / I make þe als master and merour of my mighte; / I beelde þe here baynely in blys for to be" (I, 33-35). By metaphorically comparing Lucifer to a mirror, God provides readers with a detailed account of what Lucifer's celestial body will look like. The mirror provides a reflection of God's might, but it must necessarily provide a reflection of His physical composition as well. Throughout the Bible, it is not difficult for one to find references that indicate that God's body is extremely bright. For example, Psalm 18 indicates that even the elements of nature must submit to the light and the brightness of God: "At the brightness that was before him the clouds passed, hail and coals of fire" (Ps. 18.13). This quotation leaves little doubt that actual beams of brightness are emitted from the body of God. As well, this passage provides a further example for how one can read more familiar references to God as light, such as in Psalm 26: "The Lord is my light and my salvation,

whom shall I fear?" (Ps. 26.1). Without question, Christian doctrine indicates that God provides believers with a figurative source of light upon which to direct their hopes, but, from references such as in Psalm 18, one can accurately infer that God provides believers with more than a figurative source of light. He is a literal source of light as well and He is indeed very bright. Thus, when God describes Lucifer as the mirror of God's might in the York Plays, one can infer that Lucifer, in mirror-like fashion, also will be a reflection of God's physical brightness. However, as a reflection, Lucifer will not be the original source of light. Thus, God's highest angelic creation, Lucifer, will possess brightness close to, but not equal to, God Himself. However, being the second most powerful, as well as the second-brightest being in heaven is insufficient for Lucifer; he wants more. It is Lucifer's near-God-like brightness that causes his pride and subsequent fall.

Shortly after Lucifer's introduction in The Barkers, he assuages any doubt that, as a reflection of God, his physical composition is very bright. Lucifer becomes enamored with his brightness and his self-fascination only increases as the play progresses. In Lucifer's opening stanza, he makes clear the pride he possesses because of his luminous body, and, according to Lucifer, his brightness is more noteworthy than a simple reflection of God's image:

> Þe bemes of my brighthode ar byrnande so bryghte,
> And I so semely in syghte myselfe now I se,
> For lyke a lorde am I lefte to lende in þis lighte.
> More fayrear be far þan my feres. (I, 50-53)

It is absolutely correct for Lucifer to recognize that he is above his peers because God places him in this position; Lucifer is second in heaven only to God. However, God does

not place Lucifer in an entirely separate category of beings; he is still an angel. Thus, he must, necessarily, recognize his creator and lord, God. Though one could be simultaneously lord and vassal in the medieval feudal system, Lucifer overaccentuates his recognition of his own lordship. His purpose in heaven is not to worship himself. He is an angel, a subordinate of God, and he should be recognizing the glories and the attributes of his creator, who is also the creator of Lucifer's own light. Mistakenly, Lucifer makes no attempt to praise or to honor God. Lucifer's narcissistic attitude stands in stark contrast to that of the other celestial beings who continue to worship their maker: "Lorde, with a lastande luf we loue þe allone" (I, 57). As well as identifying God as the undivided source of their praise, the angels are quick to identify one of the reasons for their extreme love for their maker: "Ay loved be þat lufly lorde of his lighte" (I, 43). Not coincidentally, the celestial beings love God for the same reason that Lucifer loves himself, light. The angels' actions provide readers with a significant contrast to the actions of Lucifer. While the other angels are praising God for His light and His goodness, Lucifer is noticing his own radiance and ignoring God. The praise of the angels becomes prophetic, because it becomes increasingly clear that Lucifer does not love God "alone," and Lucifer's own light is the major cause for his misdirection. It is important to note that the playwright begins Lucifer's self-praise in similar fashion to the structure used when the angels praise God: "O, what I am fetys and fayre and fygured full fytt! / [. . .] Þe bemes of my brighthede are bygged with þe beste" (I, 65-68). Readers need to notice the parallel structure of the stanzas of praise. Line 65, Lucifer's praise of himself, is very similar to line 57, a line praising God that begins with His name: "Lord!" However, Lucifer substitutes an audible sigh for a reference to God to reflect Lucifer's

own passion for himself. As the play progresses, the other angels continue their praise of God, and the playwright continues to allow light to be a major part of their praise, continuing the repetition of structure: "Lorde, to be fede with þe fode of thi fayre face" (I, 76). For a third time, readers witness the same type of construction that has been used in the preceding two stanzas. The name of God precedes the praise. The identical structure invites readers to draw comparisons among the three lines, and the results are important. The other celestial beings begin their praises by naming their creator, but, because of his light, Lucifer is capable of only making self-reflective comments and praise. The other celestial beings recognize the glory, importance, and light of God, while Lucifer notices only the magnitude of his own brightness.

Lucifer's final moments in heaven occur in stanza eleven of The Barkers play. This stanza also marks the end of the alternating structure of praise that begins in stanza six. Stanza six contains praise of God. Stanza seven contains Lucifer's praise for himself. The receiver of the praise being given—Lucifer receiving self-praise and God receiving the praise of the angels—continues to alternate until Lucifer's final moments in heaven in stanza eleven. During this final stanza, the author accentuates the reason for Lucifer's fall, his pride and ambition based on the magnitude of the light he emits:

> Owe, certes, what I am worthely wroghte with wyrschip, i-wys!
> For in a glorius gle my gleteryng it glemes;
> I am so mightyly made my mirth may noghte mys--
> Ay sall I byde in this blys thorowe brightnes of bemes.
> Me nedes noghte of noy for to neuen,
> All welth in my welde haue I weledande;

Abowne ȝhit sall I be beeldand,

On heghte in þe hyeste of hewuen. (I, 81-88)

His pride and ambition, based primarily on the level of light he possesses, cause Lucifer to aspire to sit on the highest possible throne, the throne of God. When Lucifer considers displacing God (he merely mutters the words to himself), he commits an unforgivable offence. He has forsaken his maker, the ultimate source of light and the only true light. Immediately after Lucifer's traitorous musings, God throws Lucifer from heaven and condemns him to hell.

Surprisingly, Lucifer is not the only angel thrown from heaven; there are several more, though an exact number is never given. Admittedly, the fact that Lucifer inspired followers is not surprising from a theological perspective; according to most theological teachings, Lucifer possesses his own following. However, Lucifer's following is not foreshadowed prior to the Fall in the York Plays. Prior to line 95 in The Barkers, no other celestial being indicates any allegiance to Lucifer. Nevertheless, once the Fall occurs, The Barkers author leaves little doubt that Lucifer's light attracted others, and it was, indeed, Lucifer's light that caused others to follow him: "For thow was oure lyghte and oure ledar, / Þe hegheste of heuen hade þu hyght vs" (I, 111-12). Even before the fallen angel identifies Lucifer as his leader, he identifies him as the light that he and the other fallen angels followed. It is important to note that there is no mention that the other angels who fell possessed any desire to rise above God. The playwright does not describe them as possessing pride similar to Lucifer's. In the York Cycle, the only sin that the other angels commit is that they follow the incorrect source of light. Once again, this is

an important moment that occurs early in the play cycle. Following the incorrect source of light is evil, as the fallen angels demonstrate.

However, the light that causes others to fall does not continue to shine after the descent into hell. Stanza thirteen, Lucifer's first entire stanza of dialogue after the fall, makes clear the dramatic physical toll God's sentence has taken on him: "Whare es my kynde become, so cumly and clere? / Nowe am I laytheste, allas, þat are was lighte. / My bryghtnes es blakkeste and blo nowe" (I, 99-101). Lucifer's light, the source of his pride, is stripped from him. As well, Lucifer's actions cause his followers to lose their light as well: "Owte on þe Lucifer, lurdan, oure lyghte has þou lorne" (I, 108). The angels have fallen from grace, and, subsequently they have also fallen from light. Since they have followed an incorrect source of light, the fallen angels are rewarded by being removed from the only true source of light, God, and having their own light taken from them. Unquestionably, The Barkers playwright provides the proper context from which readers can interpret similar accounts that will take place later in the cycle.

It is important to recognize that lightness and darkness take on very significant connotations because of the actions of Lucifer. Lightness and the ability to recognize and to follow the true source of light, God, are indicative of all things good. Darkness and the inability to recognize and to follow the true source of light are indicative of all things evil. As God continues to create and to form the earth, He accentuates the good and bad connotations of light and darkness:

> I byd in my blyssyng ȝhe aungels gyf lyghte
>
> To þe erthe, for it faded when þe fendes fell.
>
> In hell sall neuer myrknes be myssande,

þe myrknes thus name I for nighte,

The day þat cal I this lyghte. (I, 147-51)

By alluding to the actions and fall of the angels, the playwright uses God to create multiple connotations for how darkness can be read. The same darkness that engulfs hell is the darkness that touches the earth when Lucifer and his followers fall. God Himself does not seem to be able to differentiate between hell and darkness, and the interconnectedness of the terms sparks Him to name the darkness "night." Thus, because the playwright makes a close connection to the actions of the fallen angels and darkness, it would be a mistake for the audience not to make a similar connection. Any time there is an absence of light, or individuals choose to follow the incorrect source of light, there is an implication of evil and an implication of hell.

Such implications continue to be stressed in the second play of the cycle, The Plasterers. In this play, God continues to create the earth and its inhabitants, and, not surprisingly, light continues to be a major element in the process of his creation. But even as God continues the Creation, the playwright sees the necessity of having God reiterate the significance of darkness. Once again, according to God, darkness appears to be inseparable from the fall of Lucifer and the betrayal of the angels. God will not forgive their sins and condemns them to be covered in black, the only color that does not reflect light:

Þare mys may neuer be amende

Sen þai asent me to forsake,

For all þere force non sall þame fende

For to be fendys foule & blake. (II, 17-20)

The first time God mentions any type of light, or lack thereof, He alludes to the betrayal of Lucifer. This is the second time, very early in the play cycle, that darkness has been branded with an unmistakably negative connotation, and the repetition is not coincidental. The playwright purposely uses these connotations, and the frequency of the references must necessarily shape readers' interpretations any time darkness is discussed. Darkness, or the absence of light, is closely tied to the actions of the devil. Because night is enveloped in darkness, and God makes the correlation between the darkness of night and the actions of Lucifer, one must necessarily look at darkness as possessing similar negative connotations.

Without question, the York playwrights provide the proper context from which to analyze any scene that lacks light or alludes to darkness; darkness and the absence of light are indicative of evil. Further, because of the inverse relationship between light and darkness, if darkness is analogous to evil, the presence or depiction of light must necessarily be indicative of good. Once again, the playwright uses God's Creation to help establish the way one must view references to light throughout the rest of the plays in the cycle.

In the book of Genesis, when God creates a distinction between day and night, He creates two distinct celestial bodies. There is a difference between the two bodies and God is pleased with His actions: "And God made two great lights: a greater light to rule the day; and a lesser light to rule the night: and the stars. And he set them in the firmament of heaven to shine upon the earth. And to rule the day and the night, and to divide the light and the darkness. And God saw that it was good" (Gen. 16-18). Though God states that He is pleased, the "it" God says He is pleased with is a generalization. He

is pleased with His entire sequence of actions, but the text does not provide further specificity.

There can be no doubt that God's actions in Genesis serve as the primary antecedent for the creation of day and night in the York Cycle. However, The Plasterers playwright makes several significant changes to the Biblical account, and that is why it is crucial for one to understand the Biblical treatment of the same scene. The playwright, in his depiction of the creation of day and night, works to create positive connotations for how readers can view the presence of light, just as negative connotations surround darkness in the creation of night:

> The more light to the day
> Fully suthely sall be sent,
> Þe lesse lyght allway
> To þe nyght sall take entent
> Þir figuris fayre þat furth er fun
> Þus on sere sydys serue þai sall:
> The more lyght sall be namid þe son,
> Dymnes to wast be downe and be dale.
> Erbis and treys þat er bygune,
> All sall he gouerne, gret and smale. (II, 97-106)

Readers must remember that the playwright does not allow God to forget the actions of Lucifer when discussing darkness and night. Thus, when God creates the heavenly body that will be the primary source of light for earth and, subsequently, man, it is entirely plausible to assume that the author had in mind multiple connotations of "son." In one

respect, God could be simply naming the body the "son," as in the celestial body, but because of the playwright's care up to the this point, it is highly probable that, in creating the "son" to light the earth, there is a play on words referring to the coming of Christ, the "Son" of God. Beadle reminds critics that wordplay in medieval texts is not unusual: "Modern criticism of medieval English poetry in general often acknowledges the presence of wordplay" ("Verbal" 167). The possibility of wordplay is furthered by the distinction of the placement of the two bodies of light, and this is an important detail. According to God, the two sources of light will serve on opposite sides. The placement of the celestial bodies parallels the placement of the celestial beings formed in the image of God. Lucifer, created as a reflection of God's image, and thus a lesser body of light, is ruling in hell, the direct opposite of heaven. Christ, the Son of God, possesses the equivalent brightness of God because He is formed from God Himself. Thus He is a greater light and will rule heaven. Additionally, the rhetoric of line 106 seems to support the argument that the playwright indeed intends for the creation of the "son" to be a reference to Christ. By stating that "[a]ll sall he gouerne, gret and smale" the playwright's word choice echoes the descriptions in the New Testament of the Coming and of the teachings of Jesus, the "Son" of God. In the book of Luke, when Mary is informed by an angel that she will conceive a son, the angel makes it clear to Mary that her son will be extremely powerful: "He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he shall be king over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end" (Luke 1.32-33). The angel says He shall be "great," and Jesus's greatness is frequently mentioned in the New Testament. It is also clear that His kingdom is limitless. Thus, He indeed rules all, great

and small, reflecting the powers that the playwright states that the celestial "son" will possess. Even the Biblical teachings of Jesus parallel line 53 in the York account of the creation of the "son." The playwright presents the "son" as ruling over herbs and trees. In the book of Luke, Jesus explains the actions of men in a parable of trees that explains that good fruit is not produced from a bad tree. Thus, once again, the playwright's word choice echoes the New Testament: "For every tree is known by its fruit. For from thorns men do not gather figs, neither from a bramble do they harvest grapes. The good man from the treasure of his heart brings forth that which is good; and the evil man from the evil treasure brings forth that which is evil" (Luke 1.44-45). The angel God sends to Mary stresses the fact that Jesus will rule all, and, by metaphorically comparing the actions of men to fruit trees, the teachings of Jesus help to complete the similarities to The Plasterers playwright's description of the creation of the son. The playwright works so diligently to connect darkness to the actions of Lucifer, the creation of light must necessarily connect to God's greatest creation of all, Christ.

Accentuating the rhetoric and treatment of the creation of day and night is the fact that the York account of the Creation severely diverges from the dramatic accounts of the creation of day and night in other well-known medieval mystery cycles. The playwright of the Chester Mystery Cycle presents a much more subdued account of the creation of the lights that will control night and day. In this dramatic account, it is unclear whether God possesses a preference for either of the two lights that He creates, but it is very clear that the light of day, the "sun" is limited in its power:

> At my byddynge made be light.
>
> Light is good, I see in sight.

Twynned shalbe through my might
the light from thestearnes
Light 'day' I wilbe called aye,
and thestearnes, 'night', as I saye.
This morne and evene, the first day,
is made full and expresse. (II, 9-16)

The treatment in the Chester Cycle is obviously dramatically different from the treatment of a similar scene in the York Cycle. Besides never being referred to as the "son," the sun appears to possess no additional powers in the Chester Cycle, much less the power to rule everything, "great and small." As well, in the Chester Cycle, the creation of day and night precedes the fall of Lucifer. Thus, the format of the Chester Cycle is parallel to that of the York Cycle. Both begin by showing the betrayal of Lucifer and then displaying God's creation of Earth. However, in the Chester Cycle, when God creates night, He never alludes to the actions of Lucifer. This stands in dramatic contrast to the treatment of the same scene by the York playwright. Prior to the creation of day and night, God makes two comments directly linking the actions of Lucifer to the absence of light. In the Chester Cycle, light is still the cause of Lucifer's pride and subsequent fall, but the playwright does not further the connotations as does the York playwright. Thus, when the Chester playwright presents his version of the Creation, readers may well have forgotten the actions of Lucifer. By repeating the cause of the fall and the actions of the fallen angels, the York playwright does not allow his readers to forget. Darkness is directly tied to the actions of the devil. Thus, the presence of light is a drastic change that must necessarily possess multiple connotations.

Another well-known dramatic account of the Creation and the fall of Lucifer occurs in the Towneley Mystery Cycle. Once again, the Towneley playwright presents his account in a much different fashion than the York playwright. In the Towneley Cycle the initial order of the plays is different. The Creation occurs before the Fall. This particular organization of the plays is the opposite of the order of the Chester and York Cycles. Thus, references to Lucifer do not accompany the creation of darkness, making it much more difficult to read further connotations into the creation of the sun. The creation of the first day occurs early in the first play of the cycle and is given a more sterile handling:

> Darknes we call the nyght,
> And lith also the bright;
> It shall be as I say.
> After my will this is furth broght:
> Euen and morne both ar thay wroght,
> And thus is maid a day. (I, 25-30)

Since the creation of the first day occurs so early in the Towneley Cycle, it would be difficult to look at the presentation of this scene as accomplishing anything more than establishing the setting and the necessary actions of God, as set forth in Genesis. Within the first thirty lines it would be difficult for the Towneley playwright to establish a precedent for how a particular element should be viewed, and it seems unlikely that this scene is more than a straightforward treatment of a necessary Biblical action.

Thus, the York playwright's treatment of the same Biblical scene is obviously much different. By presenting the plays in an entirely different order and making frequent

references to light prior to the creation of night and day, the York playwright ensures that his treatment of night and day will be read differently. It is necessary to compare the various dramatic treatments of the creation of the first day to accentuate the key elements that the York playwright is trying to convey to readers. The creation of the first day in the York Cycle is merely one artist's rendition of a famous Biblical account. However, the York treatment is significant because it continues to make clear the importance of light, importance that is stressed very early in the cycle.

Norma Kroll notes that it is important for readers of medieval mystery cycles to identify the links that connect the various plays in the individual cycles: "Any study of the art of the Chester or of the York, Towneley, or N-town plays must address the ways in which the dramatists transform Christian doctrine and history from sets of principles and sequences of acts into networks of interactions" (33). Even in the two earliest plays in the cycle, the magnitude of light consistently serves as the element that connects and provides a transition into other plays in the York Cycle.

Light constitutes the reason for the traitorous actions of Lucifer in heaven and his subsequent fall. Lucifer is unable to follow and to worship the correct source of light, God, and thus he is punished. The followers of Lucifer perpetuate the importance of following the correct source of light. They follow the light of Lucifer, and, even without committing any other known offence to God, their misdirection is an unforgivable sin. God Himself is unable to separate the actions of Lucifer from His subsequent discussion of darkness. When Lucifer falls he loses his light, and he brushes the earth while plummeting to hell. God muses how the darkness touches earth, and He quickly arrives at the name of the darkness, the same darkness that overwhelms hell, "night." Thus, when

God creates the sun, the celestial body that will rule the daytime, and the entire earth, it is difficult for one not to read multiple connotations into the treatment of son. The celestial body of the sun is necessarily good, the direct opposite of the darkness of Lucifer, a close parallel to the omnipotent "son" to come, the son of God. Thus, the repetition and interweaving of references to light throughout the first two plays in the cycle establish it as a crucial element. This is an element that will continue to appear frequently throughout the remaining plays in the cycle, and one must arrive at a way of interpreting the references. Light, throughout the York Mystery Cycle, serves as means for readers to distinguish between good and evil. The playwrights work carefully to establish God and, subsequently, Jesus, as the correct and true source of light. The playwrights work just as carefully to establish that the original light of Lucifer is an impure and incorrect source of light. He loves himself, not God. Subsequently, Lucifer loses his light, and he epitomizes darkness and loss of light.

Based on the foundation set by the playwrights—God is the only true source of light and Lucifer lacks light—one can begin to analyze the actions of other characters in the play cycle. Characters that are capable of seeing, appreciating, and following the true source of light, God, are necessarily good characters. Characters who are incapable of seeing, appreciating, or following the light of God are evil. By recognizing and analyzing the playwrights' use of light, readers are able to recognize the nature of a character in the dramas. After the initial two plays in the cycle, the number of clustered references to light decreases. However, because of the playwrights' care in the first two dramas, the foundation has already been established. Light is the element throughout the York Cycle that distinguishes between morally good and evil characters.

Chapter 2: Perceiving the Light of God

Dante's Divine Comedy is another medieval work that relies heavily upon images of light. References to light and darkness abound as Dante descends into hell and ascends into purgatory and, eventually, heaven. Sharon Harwood explains that Dante creates a hierarchical order of light, with God, as light, at the top of the hierarchy. As Dante ascends to heaven, light emanates from the souls of others and the reflected light is closely tied to the souls' acceptance of God as the true source of light: "The amount of light reflected by the individual soul after death is in direct proportion to that soul's willingness and ability to perceive God as the source of all power, wisdom, and love" (Harwood 206). The key word here is "perceive." Because the other souls are serving as reflections, one must infer that God is the central source of light. Therefore, readers must, necessarily, interpret Harwood's use of "perceive" as connoting physical perception—the ability to see. If the souls are serving as reflections, they must be literally seeing the true light of God. Thus, individuals must be able to see the light of God to recognize his "power, wisdom, and love." Vision and recognizing the light of God are central to Harwood's argument, for without seeing the light of God, the souls would not be granted the opportunity to recognize the other attributes of God.

Richard Kay echoes the importance that Harwood places upon the act of actually seeing God. To emphasize his point, Kay refers to the words of Beatrice from the Divine Comedy: "[T]he state of blessedness rests on the act of vision" (Par. 28.109-10). Kay reaffirms the significance of actually "seeing" God. Kay believes that in Dante seeing the actual light or presence of God is, in fact, central to salvation: "Without seeing God, then, one cannot be blessed" (52). Harwood's and Kay's scholarship is important to individuals

analyzing the York Plays because both scholars attempt to explain the significance of a recurring element in Dante's work that is also a recurring element in the York Cycle, light. Both Kay and Harwood believe that the ability to perceive the light of God is a reflection of the spiritual state of the characters within Dante's work; only the blessed are capable of seeing the light of God.

While Harwood believes that the blessed are capable of seeing God, she believes that those who cannot see God have equally specific moral character:

> Forced to look inward upon the blackness of their own souls, the damned have deprived themselves of light. They are eternally banished to a kingdom of darkness not because God willfully withholds the light from them, but because they have deliberately chosen to direct their vision to their own desires. It is the vision of their souls that is defective, and in refusing to look toward God, they have condemned themselves to eternal moral blindness. (206)

With Dante's masterpiece in mind, it is easy for Harwood's audience to understand the setting of the "kingdom of darkness" that she refers to, hell. However, Harwood's interpretation of moral blindness is applicable in the York Cycle anytime one witnesses a character incapable of seeing the light of God. Although these characters are not always trapped in a literal kingdom of darkness, they are trapped in a figurative form of darkness, devoid of the glories of God.

Without question, light is a recurring element throughout the York Plays, and scholars such as Edmund Reiss have recognized the overall importance of light: "The radiance of Christ, as well as the light itself, is particularly stressed throughout York"

(154-55). Reiss is correct in recognizing the overall importance of light, but, unfortunately, his sweeping analysis is indicative of the scholarship that comments upon light in the York Cycle; it is brief and, without question, incomplete. I believe that readers of the York Cycle can interpret images of light in a manner similar to the way that Kay and Harwood interpret images of light in Dante's work. The ability to perceive the light of God is a direct reflection upon the moral standing of the character; good characters are able to perceive the light, while evil characters are not capable of perceiving it.

As I have already demonstrated, the York playwrights work to establish light as a crucial element very early in the play cycle, especially in the first two dramas, The Barkers and The Plasterers. The following dramas in the cycle then allow readers to analyze what they know about the significance of light—that it is closely tied to God as darkness is closely tied to Lucifer—throughout the cycle.

In The Shipwrights, the play that focuses upon Noah's building of the ark, the ability to perceive light is important to the success of the drama. God decides to cleanse the world of sin by sending a great flood that will decimate the inhabitants of earth. However, God decides to spare one man, Noah, but when God initially contacts Noah, it is clear that he is confused by God's plans: "O, mercy lorde, qwat may þis meyne?" (VIII, 37). God does not physically appear before Noah when He first contacts him, and the absence of the physical presence of God is the source of Noah's confusion. Without the physical presence or sign from God, there is no light. Critics must remember that the York Plays carefully establish that God is light; thus, when God appears, light must appear as well. One must remember Harwood's point that one must perceive God to

understand His power and wisdom. Without visual perception, Noah responds with uncertainty. God quickly recognizes that He needs to provide a visual sign for Noah: "I am þi Gode of grete and small / Is comyn to telle þe of thy teyn, / And qwat ferly sall eftir fall" (VIII, 38-40). Following God's pronouncement that He will come to tell of the events that will befall the earth, Noah's reaction makes clear to readers that God does appear in some physical capacity:

> A, lorde, I lowe þe lowed and still
> Þat vnto me--wretche vnworthye--
> Þus with thy worde, as is þi will,
> Lykis to appere þus propyrly. (VIII, 41-44)

Although how God's appearance before Noah is staged is unclear, it is clear that a more substantial contact than just words takes place. Noah, who is a good man, is able to see and understand the will and the ways of God. Noah's immediate recognition and understanding is starkly contrasted with his confusion about the verbal contact God initially provides. Noah needs to see God, a source of light, to understand fully the wisdom and power of God.

The necessity to provide a visual signal does not stop once God makes His plans known to Noah. Following the flood, in the play The Fishers and Mariners, God provides an image of light that will allow men to see and trust His actions. God pledges never to destroy the world with water again, and in a fashion similar to the way that He approaches Noah, God sees the necessity of providing a visual sign—a sign that men will be able to look upon to understand the ways of God: "Sette his senge full clere / Vppe in þe ayre of heght; / The raynebowe it is right" (IX, 290-92). However, God is very

specific about who will be able to see the sign: "He sette his bowe clerly to kenne / As a tokenyng bytwene hym and vs, / In knawlage tille all cristen men" (IX, 284-86). By specifying the intended recipients of the sign, the playwright reaffirms that only certain individuals are capable of perceiving the light of God. In the Biblical account of the flood, God is far less specific as to the intended audience of the rainbow: "I will set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be the sign of a covenant between me, and between the earth" (Gen. 9.13). The playwright makes a substantial change from the Biblical story that he bases his play upon. However, the change is consistent with the overall theme of light that he attempts to convey to readers. The rainbow, a visual source of light, is intended for Christian men because they are the individuals, according to God, who are capable of perceiving the light. Thus, Christians will be the only people who will truly "see" the sign from God because they will be the only individuals capable of understanding its importance.

The Goldsmiths playwright uses the theme of light to expound upon what is one of the most famous images of light in Christian theology: the star of Bethlehem. Biblical accounts make clear that this particular star was a signal to others that the Savior was to be born. The playwright uses the Biblical story as the foundation upon which to expand the importance of light imagery. One of the three kings who seek the Christ child comments upon the type of light that he and his companions are seeking: "Thay saide a sterne with lemys bright / Owte of the eest shulde stabely stande" (XVI, 61-62). However, when the second king speaks, he makes certain that readers understand that, in the York Cycle, the star the kings are seeking is more than a mere celestial formation:

> All-weldand God þat all has wroght,

I worshippe þe als is worthye,

That with thy brightnes has me broght

Owte of my reame, riche Arabie. (XVI, 69-72)

The second king clearly attributes the brightness of the star to God. The king states that "thy" [God's] brightness has caused him to journey from Arabia. He could just as easily have stated that its brightness, meaning the star's, was cause for the journey, but the playwright is careful, once again, with his word choice. The brightness is unmistakably coming from God. To ensure that readers do not mistake the source of the star's light, the first king reiterates the second king's claim: "The lorde þat lenys þis lastand light" (XVI, 153). "Lenys" can be glossed as "gives," and God is giving of Himself; the light of the star is the light of God that He provides.

In the York Plays, allusions anticipating the coming of Christ, not just allusions to Christ Himself, establish Him as a source of light. Referring to Christ as light is similar to the way that God Himself is established as a source of light earlier in the cycle. In the play, The Pewterers and Founders, Joseph plays a critical role in furthering the representation of the birth of Christ as the emergence of a powerful source of light. Prior to the birth, Joseph doubts that Mary has been faithful to him since she is pregnant and yet is supposed to be a virgin. Though a maid tries to convince Joseph that the father of the baby is God, Joseph is sure that he is being deceived: "Þe aungell has made hir with childe. / Nay, som man in aungellis liknesse / With somkyn gawde has hir begiled" (XIII, 135-37). Joseph cannot accept the truth based on words alone; he needs something more substantial to ease his thoughts of jealousy. Not coincidentally, the playwright employs the use of light to help demonstrate the establishment of Joseph's trust in Mary. She prays

to God, and the playwright uses careful word choice to convey the significance: "Rewe on þis wery wight, / Þat in his herte myght light / Þe soth to ken and trowe" (XIII, 204-06). The playwright purposely makes use of the key element that Joseph needs to trust his wife. By using "light" as a verb, the playwright echoes the necessity of Joseph to see the light of God to be able to recognize the truth about his wife. The playwright's choice of verbs is not coincidental because the "lighting" of truth that Mary requests foreshadows the actions of God. He understands that Joseph is doubtful, just as Noah did not understand through words alone. So God must send a visual representation of His light, the angel Gabriel, for Joseph to understand fully the miraculous birth. Once confronted with a visual representation, Joseph's feelings change immediately:

> Nowe lorde God full wele is me
> That euyr þat I þis sight suld see,
> I was neuer ar so light.
> For for I walde haue hir þus refused,
> And sakles blame þat ay was clere,
> Me bus pray hir halde me excused. (XIII, 284-89)

Not surprisingly, the playwright makes use of light in Joseph's response. Once he receives visual confirmation of Mary's loyalty through Gabriel, sent as a sign from God, Joseph describes himself as never being so "light." Joseph, through the use of a carefully chosen adjective, confirms the importance of light. Without the visual signal from God, Joseph would not have been able to understand God's plan. However, following the appearance of Gabriel, Joseph is able to "see" the light of God. By selectively incorporating the use of the word "light" into Mary's plea and Joseph's response, the

playwright reaffirms the significance of the imagery. It is necessary for one to see the light of God to understand, and, being a good man, Joseph is able to see the light.

Once the dramas begin to focus upon the birth and actions of Jesus, the plays continue to prove that Jesus is a source of light. Simon, in the play The Hatmakers, Masons, and Labourers, longs for death, but he wishes to see one thing before he dies, the baby Jesus. Simon makes clear that the vision of Christ will be glorious and that Jesus will be a literal source of brightness:

> And Melachiell that proffett snell
> Hais tolde vs of that babb so bright,
> That he shulde comme with vs to dwell
> In our temple as leme of light. (XVII, 111-14)

Simon continues to expound upon his desire to see Christ, and light continues to be closely associated with Him: "Ay, well were me for ever and ay / If I myght se that babb so bright" (XVII, 132-33). God grants Simon's wishes and he is allowed to view Christ before his death. Simon's hopeful musings foreshadow the way students of the York Cycle should view the birth of Jesus; it is the birth of a new source of light.

In the play The Goldsmiths, the first of the three kings greets the baby Jesus in the manger at Bethlehem and the king makes clear that Jesus is, indeed, a source of light: "Hayle, þe fairest of felde, folke for to fynde" (XVI, 309). The very first adjective used in a direct address to Jesus describes Him as the fairest, and one must necessarily read "fair" as possessing connotations of luminosity. The second king continues to refer to the bright splendor of the Christ child: "Hayll floure fairest, þat neuer shall fade" (XVI, 322). Once again, "fair" and "fade" must be read as direct reference to the brightness of Christ,

though "fair" and "fade" could be references to beauty as well. The playwright uses John the Baptist in The Barbers, a play that focuses upon the baptism of Christ, to assuage any doubt that the kings' use of the word "fair" must be read as direct reference to the physical brightness of Christ. John describes his role as the forerunner of Christ, and it is important for readers to note how the York playwright chooses to have John describe Jesus:

> Þus am I comen in message right
> And be fore-reyner in certayne,
> In witnesse-bering of þat light,
> Þe wiche schall light in ilka man
> Þat is command
> Into this worlde; nowe whoso can
> May vndirstande. (XXI, 15-21)

The playwright chooses to have John describe Christ, not by name, but as "that light." Then, to reiterate the significance of the initial reference to light, the playwright uses light as a verb. The light, or Jesus, will light, or touch, those who can understand with the truth. The playwright's word choice and repetition are appropriate. Just as the previous dramas confirm the connotations of light connected to God and Lucifer, when the Son of God appears in the cycle, the dramas quickly confirm Him as a light source.

Jesus is, without a doubt, a source of light in the York Plays, and any interpretation of the significance of His light there must take into account The Saddlers. This is the drama of the Harrowing of hell. Jesus begins the play by addressing the audience and discussing His future actions. He is going to harrow all of the Old

Testament characters who were followers of God but lived before the coming of Christ and the day of salvation. Prior to His arrival in hell, Jesus wants to provide those who will be saved with a sign that His coming is near. The type of sign that Jesus intends to give the souls is significant:

> And some signe schall I sende before
> Of grace, to garre þer gamys begynne.
> A light I woll þei haue
> To schewe þame I schall come sone. (XXXVII, 19-22)

Though the fact that the sign is a light is significant and in keeping with the York playwrights' theme of placing importance upon light, it is the type of light that Christ intends to send that is even more important. He plans to send a light "of grace." The word "of" in Middle English commonly means "from." Thus, Christ is sending a light from grace, and the "grace" must be interpreted as Christ Himself. The light of God is sent to give hope to those in hell. The Saddler playwright's presentation of the Harrowing is tied closely to that in the Towneley Cycle; the two plays are nearly identical and are often printed next to each other in editions of the play. However, lines 19-22 are quite different in the Towneley Cycle:

> Som tokyn will I send before,
> With myrth to gar thare gammes begyn.
> A light I will thay haue,
> To know I will com sone. (XXV, 19-22)

The sign will still be a light, but the type of light that will be given is very different. The sign will be given "with mirth." Thus, it is uncertain whether the sign in Towneley is to

be read as the light of God. It very well could be, but the York playwright leaves little doubt. The light of God is an important thematic element, and the playwright provides concrete evidence to inform readers that the light Jesus gives the souls in hell is the light of God.

The souls in hell who are to be harrowed quickly perceive the light and its significance. As good characters, their recognition continues another important theme; good characters are able to perceive the light of God. Adam is the first to spot the light: "A glorious gleme to make vs gladde, / Wherfore I hope oure helpe is nere" (XXXVII, 42-43). After Adam and Eve are the first to perceive the light, Isaiah alleviates any doubt that the light comes from Christ himself: "Þis light comes all of Criste" (XXXVII, 57). Jesus provides the light of God as a sign to the souls that are to be harrowed, and they are readily able to perceive it. The Saddlers is an important play that reaffirms two of the York Cycle's largest themes: God and light are intertwined and good characters are able to recognize the light of God.

The reaction of the souls in hell is possibly the most dramatic example of good characters being able to perceive God's light, but it is not the only example in the cycle. When Jesus enters Jerusalem upon an ass, in the play The Skinners, many who wish for Jesus to cure their various afflictions approach him. A man who has been blind since birth is among those who seek Jesus's help:

> CECUS. Lorde, my syght is fro me hydde,
>
> Þou graunte me it, I crye mercy,
>
> Þis wolde I haue.
>
> JESU. Loke vppe nowe with chere blythely,

Þi faith shall þe saue. (XXV, 346-50)

Jesus's interaction with the blind is particularly important in developing the importance of light in the cycle. The York Plays have clearly established Jesus as a source of light, and the actions of the souls in hell prove that good characters are able to see readily the light of God. The actions of the blind man further the point that, in fact, all good characters should be able to perceive God's light. Obviously, the blind man does not possess the physical capabilities to see the light, but he is still able to perceive the importance of viewing Christ. He makes the importance clear to his helpers:

Sir, helpe me to þe strete hastely,
Þat I may here
Þat noyse, and also þat I myght thurgh grace
My syght of hym to craue I wolde. (XXV, 314-17).

The blind man's perseverance pays off. He perceives the importance of viewing Christ, and his understanding allows him to receive the gift of sight. The actions of the blind man exemplify the manner in which good characters should respond to Christ; they should be able to see the light of God. At the end of the play, as Jesus enters the city, eight burgesses give praise to him, and they often praise his light: "Hayll lylly lufsome lemyd with light" (XXV, 519). Because of Jesus's interaction with His followers while entering the city, critics must interpret the burgesses' praise literally. Light must be emitted from Jesus and good characters should be able to see it.

Though it is obvious that good characters are able to perceive it, they are sometimes slow to recognize the light of God and His subsequent powers. Following the

crucifixion of Christ, there is mourning among His disciples and family members. Mary, the mother of Jesus, in the play The Winedrawers, explains the source of her grief:

> In lame is it loken, all my light,
> Forthy on grounde onglad I goo;
> Jesus of Nazareth he hight,
> The false Jewes slewe hym me froo. (XXXIX, 5-8)

Obviously, she is troubled because of the death of her only Son, but once again, the playwright indicates that Jesus was more than a son; He was Mary's source of light. Mary lacks the light of God, the light that will give her wisdom and strength. Therefore, it is clear that her emotional state is in shambles: "Mi witte is waste nowe in wede. / I walowe, I walke, nowe woo is me" (XXXIX, 9-10). It is important for readers to note Mary's own admission of the loss of mental sharpness; the shock of the loss of light makes her temporarily incapable of perceiving the light once it returns. When Jesus rises and returns to Mary, though He is disguised, she is unable to recognize the same light that she laments losing. When Jesus tells Mary that her lord is near, she demonstrates her lack of perception: "Sir I wolde loke both ferre and nere / To fynde my lorde--I se hym noght" (XXXIX, 34-35). Mary's inability to perceive the light of Jesus is not indicative of depravity in her character. Mary is still a good character, and what separates her from the likes of Herod is her own admission. Readers must look at the loss of light, the death of Christ, as an event that has a strong negative effect upon His followers. By Mary's own admission, she is not in a collected mental state, and she suggests that others may be in a similar state: "I am but sorowe of worldly sight" (XXXIX, 61). Mary understands the trials of being without the light of God and she fears that others may be feeling similar

pains. The differences between Mary and other good characters who may be unable initially to recognize the light of God are furthered by the fact that once she is told whom she is speaking to, Jesus, she is able to perceive the source of her light: "Mi lorde Jesu, I knowe nowe þe, / Þi woundes þai are nowe wette" (XXXIX, 80-81). Thus, when Jesus acknowledges His true identity, the shroud of emotional grief lifts from Mary, and she is once again able to perceive the light of God. The playwright's treatment of Mary is quite significant because her inability to perceive initially the light of God seems to jeopardize the legitimacy of the argument that good characters are able to perceive the light of God while bad characters are not able to perceive it. However, the fact that Mary and other characters are slow to recognize the presence of Jesus after His death actually furthers the argument. Once the light is taken from these characters by Jesus's death, they are so dumbfounded that they need help to regain the emotional strength to be able to recognize the vision. The death of Christ is nearly too shocking for good characters to comprehend.

Without question, the removal of a significant source of light is startling. However, shock due to the amount of light that good characters are exposed to is not limited only to the dramatic episodes that follow the crucifixion of Christ. An interesting relationship can be seen between the good characters' shock due to an abrupt withdrawal of a powerful source of light and the shock of similar good characters when presented with too much light. One must remember that the Son of God comes to earth in human form. Thus, the light of Christ, though still pure because He is without sin, must be seen as being somehow diffused; Christ's light emanating from his celestial body would be more powerful. The York Plays demonstrate the differences in the power of light in the play, The Curriers. This play provides readers with a dramatization of the

Transfiguration. The Transfiguration demonstrates the true nature of Christ, that He is indeed the Son of God, and brings the disciples within the presence of God. However, the Biblical account of the Transfiguration is very brief. Thus, the York playwright takes many artistic liberties in his creation of the scene, and, once again, light is significant. When Christ and His disciples crest the hill, Jesus's body becomes so illuminated that the brightness surpasses anything that they have previously seen:

> Brethir, whateuere ȝone brightnes be?
>
> Swilk burdis beforne was neuere sene.
>
> It marres my myght, I may not see,
>
> So selcouth thyng was neuere sene. (XXIII, 85-88)

However, one must remember that the disciples are viewing the Transfiguration of Christ while He is still in human form. Thus, the light is necessarily diffused because Christ is not in His most pure form, the most powerful celestial being. Unquestionably though, the change that Jesus undergoes is dramatic, and the disciples continue to make clear the degree of the change: "He was full fayre before / But neuere als he is nowe" (XXIII, 95-96). However, the disciples are able to perceive visually and mentally the image of Christ's Transfiguration because He is still confined to his earthly body. There is a difference when the Father appears, God in His most pure form. The Father descends to inform the disciples that Jesus is indeed His Son, but when the Father appears before the disciples He does so in His celestial form, and this form is too much for the disciples to comprehend. Immediately following the descent of the Father, Peter is struck dumb: "Þis meruayle movis my mynde / And makis my flessh affrayed" (XXIII, 189-90). Following Peter's description of his emotional state after the appearance of the Father, John informs

readers of the primary cause of the disciples' shock: "Þis brightnes made me blynde, / I bode neuere swilke a brayde" (XXIII, 191-92). The Father's light overcomes the disciples and becomes too much for their human perceptions to comprehend; it overpowers them before they can even view the form of the Father. Jesus explains to them that the appearance of God is more than humans are capable of withstanding: "Þat langar of lyffe schall he noght be / Þat seys his Godhede as it is" (XXIII, 223-24). Humans are not capable of viewing God Himself and living. Thus, the playwright expounds upon the Transfiguration and makes light a very significant element in the play; all mortals, good or bad, are incapable of viewing the pure sight of God. Good characters are able to view the light of Jesus because He is God in human form, and even the sight of Jesus, as the disciples demonstrate, is awe-inspiring. Thus, if the appearance of God dramatically affects good characters, readers must necessarily understand that an inverse relationship to a total absence of light must necessarily exist. The same good characters that thrive within the light of Jesus can be equally as affected when their source of light is removed. Thus, Christ's own mother, who identifies Him as her source of light, is not initially able to recognize His true identity. Mary's inability to perceive is not a reflection on her character but is indicative of her dependence upon Christ. Her initial inability to perceive Jesus is not the same as the inability of bad characters to perceive the light of God; she is in an emotional state of withdrawal following the death of Christ and the consequent loss of her source of light.

Unquestionably, characters such as Noah, Joseph, Mary, and the three kings who travel to meet the Christ child are capable of seeing and perceiving the light sent from God, and, as good characters, they should be able to see it. However, other characters are

not able to perceive God's light, and their inability continues the cycle's theme. Harwood's argument about the "moral blindness" evident throughout Dante's work can be applied to the wicked characters in the York Cycle. God does not withhold his light from certain characters; they choose not to perceive because of their own selfish desires. Their inability to perceive the light exemplifies their misdirection and marks them as evil characters.

The first example of a character who is incapable of seeing the light of God occurs in The Coopers, the play that recreates man's first sin. Prior to the eating of the forbidden apple, Adam and Eve coexisted with the presence of God in the Garden of Eden. However, once the first sin is committed, there is a stark contrast in the relationship between God and man. God searches for Adam after he tastes the apple, and Adam's reaction is significant. Adam, who has previously had no trouble seeing and walking with God, is suddenly unable to see Him after eating the apple:

> DOM. Adam, Adam.
>
> ADAM. Lorde.
>
> DOM. Where art thou, yhare?
>
> ADAM. I here þe lorde and seys the noȝt. (V, 138-39)

Prior to this exchange between God and Adam, Adam indeed states that he wishes to hide from God. However, Adam clearly reacts willingly and decisively to the calls from God. Thus, one is presented with two possible readings when Adam claims that he cannot see God. One interpretation could be that Adam is acting coy, attempting to feign knowledge of the location of God, but this interpretation is not in keeping with Adam's initial reaction to the calls of God. If Adam were truly attempting to disguise his location from

God, Adam's response to Him would be much more timid. The second possible interpretation of Adam's blindness, and the most probable, is that Adam is, indeed, telling the truth; he cannot see God. God, as the plays have diligently conveyed to readers, is light, and after committing the first sin, Adam is no longer able to perceive the light of God. God is not withholding His light from Adam; Adam chooses to sin, and thus chooses not to follow the light of God, a light that can only lead away from sin. In similar fashion, after coveting the position of God, Lucifer is thrown from heaven and subsequently banned from the true light. Adam, following his own transgression, is similarly devoid of God's light. Though it may be difficult for some readers to interpret Adam as a bad character, he is in the sense that he allows sin to enter the world. Though he is subsequently harrowed after the death of Christ, and inexplicably regains the ability to see the sign of light that God sends, Adam, following the eating of the apple, loses the ability to perceive the light of God, and Adam's inability to see it sets the precedent for the lack of perceptive capabilities of other evil characters throughout the York Cycle.

Herod, the same king who will be responsible for the deaths of many children in the attempt to kill the Christ child, is incapable of fully understanding the light of God. In the play The Goldsmiths, Herod firmly disbelieves the prophecy surrounding the light of the star of Bethlehem:

> Kyng? In þe deueles name, dogges, fye!
>
> Nowe se I wele ȝe roye and raue.
>
> Be any skemeryng of þe skye
>
> When ȝe shulde ye knawe outhir kyng or knave? (XVI, 177-80).

Herod's word choice in his response serves to exemplify his moral state. When confronted with the possibility of accepting the light as coming from God, Herod refuses, immediately referring to the being devoid of all light, the devil.

When Herod must confront, in the play The Girdlers and Nailers, the truth that a child has been born that will one day be king, his reaction is, once again, indicative of the fact that he is an evil character and incapable of seeing the light of God. Herod laments the potential sight of the baby Jesus and turns once again to his true source of inspiration: "Als for sorowe and sighte, / My woo no wighte may wryte; / What deuell is best to do?" (XIX, 136-38). Jesus, as the dramas demonstrate, is a source of light. Herod juxtaposes "sorrow" with the "sight" of the baby Jesus. Unlike its effect on good characters, the light of God greatly troubles Herod. Because of the sharp contrast between Herod's reaction to the birth of Christ and the reaction of the three kings who go to worship the Christ child, one must read Herod's reference to the devil as more than a passing comment. Herod views the birth of the future king as a horrible event and responds by having all of the boys age two and younger in and around Bethlehem killed. Herod's response shows pure evil and appears quite possibly to be the counsel of the devil. However, because Herod is a wicked character, he is incapable of finding the baby Jesus. Though Herod sends his soldiers to kill all of the children who could possibly fit the description of Jesus, Herod does not know how to identify his target, and his soldiers must report back unsuccessful: "Lorde, tokenyng hadde we none / To knawe þat brothell by" (XIX, 264-65). It should not surprise readers that Herod cannot find or identify the Son of God. Jesus, even immediately after birth, is made plainly visible to good characters, as evidenced by the three wise men. But it is nearly impossible for bad characters to locate Jesus. Though

Joseph and Mary take Jesus into another land, this cannot account for Herod's inability to recognize Jesus. Jesus is God in human form, and His brightness should be unmistakable. Herod kills innocent children because he is unaware of the light of God, a light that is so bright that it draws visitors from distant lands. Thus, the light should be equally bright enough to alert the king dwelling within the same region of the child's presence, but Herod is an evil character.

When Jesus comes of age and must suffer the temptations of the devil in the desert, in the play The Smiths, the devil exemplifies the extent to which bad characters are able to view the light and the glories of God. The devil vigorously tempts Christ and hopes that He will fail in His mission to save mankind. Seeing the potential failure of Christ is the only thing of interest to the devil:

> Shew som poynte here in þis place
>
> To proue þi myght.
>
> Late se, falle doune vppon þi face
>
> Here in my sight. (XXII, 99-102)

The devil is equally as capable of seeing the light of Jesus and His subsequent glories and powers, as Harwood points out, because Jesus does not hide His light from the devil. However, the devil is consumed with his own darkness, and thus he wishes only to find fault, and similar darkness, in the Son of God. Jesus is a source of light, and the above quotation does not indicate that Jesus has attempted to conceal his identity or nature. But the devil wishes Jesus to "shew" him a weakness; thus the devil is asking Jesus to blemish His purity and, therefore, His brightness. Harwood's point becomes clear; the devil wishes to see only the darkness of Christ. Unfortunately for the devil, Jesus

withstands the temptations and remains without blight, and once confronted with pureness and light, the devil is sent back to the realm of darkness where his fate and the pureness of Christ are more than he can withstand: "Owte! I dar noȝt loke, allas!" (XXII, 175). The devil dares not to look because the sight of pureness is not his desire. He wishes to see darkness and evil similar to his own, but Jesus does not provide the devil his wish. The hopefulness of the devil and his subsequent inability to look upon Christ are, once again, the work of the York playwright. By having the devil unable to see the good acts of Jesus, the playwright has caused the devil to expound upon his own darkness and his own sin.

When the Conspiracy is plotted against Jesus, in The Cutlers, the York Plays continue to show that Jesus is not visibly perceptible to wicked characters. They must rely upon a sign from another character to identify Christ, an individual Whose same brightness brought good characters from distant lands. Judas must acknowledge Jesus with a kiss—the sign to alert the soldiers to His identity:

> I Miles. We knawe hym noght.
>
> Judas. Take kepe þan þat caytiffe to catch
>
> The whilke þat I kisse. (XXVI, 257-58)

No character should require an additional signal to locate Christ; His brightness should be enough. However, for evil characters it is not, and He is imperceptible.

Just as The Saddlers clearly demonstrates the ability of good characters to perceive the light of God, it also demonstrates, like so many of the other episodes, that bad characters are incapable of perceiving that light. After Jesus sends His light into hell, six good characters are able to recognize and comment upon the light that indicates the

impending arrival of the Savior. The Saddlers playwright leaves little doubt that the light is obvious to all of the good characters. However, when the first devil speaks, it is similarly obvious that he does not see the light: "Helpe, Belsabub, to bynde þer boyes-- / Such harrowe was neuer are herde in helle" (XXXVII, 97-98). The light that is so apparent to the good characters is not even mentioned by the first devil who speaks. The second such bad character to speak continues to make clear to readers that the devils cannot perceive the light that other characters see so plainly: "Why rooris þou soo, Rebalde? Þou royis-- / What is betidde, canne þou ought telle?" (XXXVII, 99-100). Clearly, the devils have no idea what is causing the captives in hell to react with such joy, and their confusion only continues the playwright's theme. The bad characters cannot see the light of Christ. Their inability to perceive the light hampers their ability to know any of the other attributes of Christ. Harwood's observation must be remembered. One must be able to perceive God to know his other powers. One of the devils makes clear that much about Jesus in unknown to the bad characters in hell: "Itt is þe Jewe þat Judas solde / For to be dede þis othir daye" (XXXVII, 147-48). The devils appear to be barely capable of knowing Jesus's identity, let alone His powers and glory, and the major reason for their ignorance must be tied to light. They are unable to perceive the light of God, and, thus, they are ignorant of all else that relates to God. Their lack of perception indicates that they are evil characters.

In summary, light constitutes a significant theme in the York Cycle, and there are numerous references to light throughout the cycle. Therefore, readers and critics should attempt to account for the significance of the imagery. I have previously shown that God

is portrayed as light, and light is necessarily good. Conversely, the absence of light is closely tied to Lucifer, and a lack of light is necessarily bad. These two premises form the foundation upon which to interpret allusions to light. Characters who recognize that God is light and who are able to perceive the light of God are good. Characters who do not recognize that God is light and who are not able to perceive the light of God are evil. Thus, depicting the ability to perceive or not to perceive is another way that the York playwrights further characterization throughout the cycle.

Chapter 3: The Role of Moses

Edmund Reiss thoroughly documents the artistic treatment of Moses prior to, and during, the Middle Ages. Some theologians, citing the vagueness of Biblical allusions to the location of Moses's grave, believe that Moses never tasted death. Rather, they believe that he ascended to heaven without dying, similar to Enoch and Isaiah. However, Reiss points to various early works, such as the Catechetical Lectures by Cyril of Jerusalem, that indicate that Moses entered hell following his death (141-44). Because of the uncertainty surrounding the location of Moses after his death, Reiss notes the importance of the York playwright's placing him among the souls to be harrowed by Christ. Even more noteworthy, according to Reiss, is the fact that the York Cycle includes a treatment of the Transfiguration, another play in which Moses plays a role. Reiss states that, "[d]ramatic representations of the two events are especially few" (150). Reiss argues that the York playwright, because of the way that he develops the character of Moses, must include both the Transfiguration and the Harrowing in the cycle. In the Transfiguration, in the second of two speeches, Moses predicts the Harrowing, and in the Harrowing, in the only stanza that Moses speaks, he refers back to the prediction made during the Transfiguration. On the basis of this, Reiss argues that Moses provides symmetry to the cycle; his presence in one of the two plays necessitates his appearance in the other.

Reiss makes a compelling connection between the speeches that Moses makes in the Transfiguration and the Harrowing, and the two speeches do, indeed, appear to be closely tied. However, Moses plays a more substantial role in the York Cycle than his appearances in the two dramas that Reiss focuses upon. In The Hosiers, Moses plays a critical role in leading the Israelites out of bondage. When analyzing the role of Moses,

one should not forget his role in this particular play. The York playwrights expound upon one key element in all of the dramas that Moses is centrally involved in: The Hosiers, The Curriers, and The Saddlers. Not surprisingly, this element is light. Admittedly, Reiss notes the importance of light and its connection to Moses in the latter two dramas: "[T]he main purpose of the relationship [between the Transfiguration and Harrowing] would seem to be to develop the pattern of light imagery and the role of Moses" (154). Without question, Moses's relationship to light is very significant, but the Transfiguration and Harrowing do not develop a pattern of imagery or the role of a particular character; they cement the pattern and the role of Moses that is first developed in The Hosiers.

There should be no question of the importance of light in the York Mystery Cycle, and the ability of characters to perceive God's light is equally important. However, Moses plays a unique role in the cycle; no other character in the York Cycle is witness to the light in crucial episodes as frequently as Moses. He is the only character who is capable of seeing the light of God that leads to the freedom of the Israelites. Thus, in the Transfiguration, Moses is able to confirm the true identity of the light of God, as Moses has proven previously that his visual perceptive abilities can be trusted. Finally, he is able to recognize the light of God that will harrow the souls from hell, and, once again, Moses provides confirmation of the source of the light. Time and again throughout the cycle, Moses's ability to perceive the light of God is necessary for the action in the drama to continue.

In The Hosiers, God sends a sign to Moses to inform him of the divine plan to free the Israelites, and the sign is a great light. Moses is immediately able to demonstrate that he is capable of perceiving God's light:

A, mercy God, mekill is thy myght,

What man may of thy meruayles mene!

I se ȝondyr a ful selcouth syght

Wherof befor no synge was seene.

A busk I se yondir brennand bright

And þe leues last ay inlike grene;

If it be werke of worldly wight

I will go witt withowten wene. (XI, 97-104)

The playwright is careful in the manner in which he phrases Moses's response, and his care can be demonstrated by comparing lines 99 and 100 from the York Cycle with lines 99 and 100 from the Towneley version, which are nearly parallel to the York version: "Yonder I se a selcowth syght, / Sych on in warld was neuer seyn" (VIII, 103-04). The difference between the two versions is subtle, yet significant. Moses, in the York treatment, makes clear that the light is a sign. Thus, the visual signal in the York version must necessarily provide echoes of every other sign given by God in the form of a light: the rainbow, the star of Bethlehem, and the light of God sent into hell. The importance of good characters recognizing visual signals from God is continually stressed throughout the York Cycle. However, in the Towneley version, the light is a spectacle, worthy of notice but devoid of the echoes that the York version contains. Without question, in the York Cycle Moses is a good character, and like other good characters, he is able to perceive the light of God. Additionally, Moses recognizes the message that the light implies. After receiving orders from God to contact the Pharaoh and demand the release of the Israelites, Moses understands the necessity of providing the Pharaoh with a similar

visual signal from God: "Withouten taken trewe, / They will noght take tente þertill" (XI, 143-44). However, the Pharaoh, an evil character, is unable to recognize the meaning of the sign that Moses provides. In fact, the Pharaoh refuses to release the Israelites until the last of ten plagues, pestilence, overwhelms Egypt. However, the pestilence that befalls Egypt appears to be closely tied to a lack of light:

> ii EGIP. Lord, ther is more myscheff thynke me,
>
> And thre daies hase itt bene durand,
>
> So myrke þat non myght othir see.
>
> i EGIP. My lorde, grete pestelence
>
> Is like ful lange to last. (XI, 342-46)

After this passage the subjects provide the news of the new horrors that befall Egypt. Beadle suggests that darkness and pestilence may have been used to provide medieval audience members with an allusion to the plague years. However, light is so frequently alluded to in the cycle and so closely tied to God, and the absence of light is so closely tied with evil, that it is fruitful to analyze the reaction of the Pharaoh. The complete absence of light, and thus absence of God, may have been deemed too terrifying to withstand, and the absence appears to allow further travesties to befall the Israelites' captors. Thus, the actions of the Pharaoh are a stark contrast to the actions of Moses. Moses is able to perceive the light of God and begin to take his people toward the Promised Land. The Pharaoh fails to recognize the will of God until light is taken completely from Egypt and death sweeps the land. Thus, one drama is able to demonstrate, through the use of Moses, one of the central themes in the York Cycle, that

good characters are able to perceive and to understand the light of God and bad characters are not.

The light of God allows Moses to lead his people out of Egypt. Thus, one can interpret the actions of Moses as those appropriate to a type of Christ; both characters harrow their people out of suffering. The playwright's use of light furthers the similarities. Prior to harrowing the souls from hell, Christ sends a sign of light. Moses, prior to harrowing the Israelites from Egypt, must see the light of God. It is questionable whether Moses would be able to recognize the wishes of God without the light. Light in The Hosiers, just as in The Saddlers, is necessary to allow the rest of the actions in the drama to occur.

Early in the cycle, as The Hosiers demonstrates, Moses is established as an important character worthy of perceiving the light of God. Therefore, it is incorrect for Reiss to interpret Moses's actions in The Curriers and The Saddlers as "developing" a pattern of light imagery. These two plays are, respectively, the twenty-third and thirty-seventh plays in the cycle. Thus, the pattern of light imagery has been long established. One could look at Moses's role in The Curriers as cementing his connection to light. Just as Moses must perceive the light of God that will lead to the freedom of the Israelites, Moses, in the Transfiguration, must confirm the identity of the light that the disciples are about to view:

> Frendis, if þat ȝe frayne my name,
>
> Moyses þan may ȝe rede by rawe.
>
> Two thousand ȝere aftir Adam

Þan gaffe God vnto me his lawe,

And sythen in helle has bene oure hame,

Allas, Adams kynne, þis schall ȝe knawe.

Vnto Crist come, þis is þe same

Þat vs schall fro þat dongeoun drawe.

He schall brynge þam to blys

Þat nowe in bale are bonne,

This myrthe we may not mys,

For this same is Goddis sonne. (XXIII, 121-32)

Unquestionably, Moses alludes to the impending Harrowing in this passage. However, this does not appear to be the sole focus of Moses's second speech in the Transfiguration. Moses begins by reintroducing himself to audience members. One cannot overlook the importance of the playwright's causing Moses to identify himself to audience members. The playwright seems deliberately to provide echoes of the previous dramas that the audience members would have seen. When Moses restates his name, they would have undoubtedly remembered his previous actions in the dramas. He alone was capable of seeing the light of God early in The Hosiers, and, in a play that relies almost entirely on light, such as The Curriers, he would have been looked upon as a character who could reliably identify the importance of light. Identification, rather than foreshadowing the actions of Christ, appears to be Moses's primary role, and the playwright's word choice provides confirmation. Moses declares, "þis is þe same," and the "this" is the light. His final line is nearly parallel to his first reference to the light of God: "For this same is Goddis sonne." The playwright closely links these two lines because they are the lines of

identification, and Moses is the perfect character to utter them. He has proven himself capable of correctly perceiving the light of God, and in a play that displays the Son taking near-celestial form, Moses is able to alleviate any doubt as to the identity of Christ.

In The Saddlers, the play that describes the Harrowing of hell, Moses is again witness to the light that will lead characters from bondage, only in this instance, the characters are held captive in hell. After Jesus initially addresses readers and informs them that the light that will penetrate hell will be the light of God, the playwright allows five characters to recognize and comment about the celestial light that fills the depths of hell. Moses is the last of the characters in hell to speak about the light:

> Of þat same light lernyng haue I:
> To me, Moyses, he mustered his myght,
> And also vnto anodir, Hely,
> Wher we were on an hille on hight.
> Whyte as snowe was his body,
> And his face like to þe sonne to sight;
> No man on molde was so myghty
> Grathely to loke agaynste þat light.
> Þat same light se I nowe
> Shynyng on vs sarteyne,
> Wherfore trewly I trowe
> We schalle sone passe fro payne. (XXXVII, 85-96)

It would be a mistake not to recognize the importance of Moses's first two lines and the importance of the order in which Moses speaks. By commenting about his previous

"learning" of the light, Moses refers to the other two dramas in which he recognizes the light of God, The Hosiers and The Curriers. Moses must see the light of God before the harrowing of the Israelites can occur. In similar fashion, prior to Christ's Harrowing, the playwright allows Moses to see the light of God before the Harrowing can occur. Thus, the playwright's placement of Moses's speech in The Saddlers is fitting. If the only connection that the playwright is attempting to make with Moses's presence is a connection to his prediction in the play of the Transfiguration, the playwright could have easily allowed Moses to make the first speech in the drama. Therefore, the connection between the Transfiguration and the Harrowing could have been established and the true identity of the light could have been confirmed much earlier than Isaiah's speech, the third in The Saddlers. The playwright, by placing Moses's speech last, completes the symmetry in the play cycle. The Harrowing truly begins immediately after Moses's perception of the light. Just as the exodus of the Israelites can begin only after Moses's recognition of light, the exodus of the souls can begin as soon as he sees the light of God again.

There is no question that Moses plays an important role in the York Plays. However, the question remains, what is that role? Some scholars, such as Reiss, believe that Moses's primary purpose in the cycle is to connect the Transfiguration to the Harrowing and to be a representative of the good Old Testament characters who are to be harrowed by Christ. However, Moses is present during three of the most important dramas that focus upon light: The Hosiers, The Curriers, and The Saddlers. Without light, none of these three dramas would be complete. Therefore, when analyzing the role of Moses, one cannot forget that in all three plays in which he appears, light is particularly

emphasized. Thus, the primary role of Moses seems not to be that he connects two dramas in the cycle, The Curriers and The Saddlers, but rather that he connects the importance of light in all three dramas in which he appears. Moses uses light to lead his people from bondage, and Moses recognizes the source of the light for audience members in the other two plays. Whenever Moses appears, light is always especially meaningful, and, thus, one must realize that light is never secondary to him. Both he and light are closely connected. There is no character in the York Cycle who is able to witness the light of God as frequently at important moments, and Moses is able to reaffirm the significance of the light and the importance of good characters perceiving the light of God.

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Damon Kraft

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"Such fair before was never found": The Light of God and the Significance of Visual Perception in the York Mystery Cycle

Mary Cooper

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