

STAGING AND AMPLIFICATION OF THE ANNUNCIATION THEME IN THE
CHESTER, YORK, TOWNELEY-WAKEFIELD, AND HEGGE CYCLES:

A TEXTUAL STUDY

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PREFACE

The subject matter of medieval English drama lies in the Scriptural accounts from man's Creation, to his Fall, to Judgment Day. One finds, however, the basis for the enactment of the various Biblical episodes contained within the liturgical practices, the tropes, antiphons, and lectiones, of the Roman Catholic Church. The direct source, however, for the four extant English cycle plays, the Chester, York, Towneley, and Hegge, may have been a no longer extant liturgical play, because the four cycles seem to be patterned after a common source. More specifically, one realizes that the episodes under consideration in the present study have their basis, although the relationship may not be direct, in the Matthew and Luke accounts of the Immaculate Conception and the events surrounding and concerning it, in the apocrypha, and, of course, in the liturgy of the church. In the Chester, York, Towneley, and Hegge cycles, therefore, the events in the episodes of the Annunciation, Mary's Visit with Elizabeth, and Joseph's Tribulation over Mary's Pregnancy are, basically, the same. The anonymous playwrights attained individual characteristics for their episodes only through amplification or the lack of it, addition, deletion, and versification.

The fact that the earlier episodes contain fewer amplifications, additions, and simpler versification than the later ones is obvious.

The present study represents an attempt to treat not only the telescopic growth of themes from cycle to cycle in the episodes concerning Mary's conception, but, also, the development of the staging (time and distance), properties, costuming, and use of music in these three episodes in each cycle. One discovers that specific internal evidence of aids in presentation is minimal; however, implications within the speeches suggest that the episodes were performed with the aids of properties, costumes, and music. Furthermore, the staging of the performances of these three episodes in each of the four cycles was, probably, quite similar.

Perhaps, the most important consideration and the most difficult aspect of the drama for today's empirically oriented mind to comprehend is the role of the audience in the performances of these episodes. The drama came out of the church not to entertain, but to instruct, in the vernacular, the unlettered masses. The performances "told" and "showed" the story of man. Because staging devices were limited and the plays could not be presented realistically, the audience had to supply verisimilitude for various actions

and events. In fact, to the minds of the people of the Middle Ages, the events on stage and the people portraying the various roles became the real Biblical situations and characters. The spectators accepted, through faith, the actions on stage, and the events became real. The drama was, then, symbolic, and this principle of credibility is the same in these episodes as it is in the Doctrine of Transubstantiation. Time, distance, music, colors, properties, and costumes were symbolic. Moreover, one may conjecture that a body of symbols with which almost all people were familiar had arisen from the liturgy and art within the church. These familiar symbols were, probably, employed in the performances of these mystery plays.

One suggests, then, that the Chester, York, Towneley, and Hegge cycle plays were based upon not only common Biblical, apocryphal, and liturgical sources, but, also, upon a common body of symbols which enabled the audience to supply verisimilitude necessary to make the drama real. The episodes acquired individual characteristics only through amplification, addition, deletion, and versification. The present study suggests, however, that these differences among the plays are, indeed, significant in understanding the development of the plays and the eventual "humanization"

of the rigid medieval Christianity.

Deep gratitude is expressed to Dr. Charles E. Walton for his suggestion of this topic and for his scholarly advice, thorough criticism, and patience in directing the present study. Appreciation is expressed, also, to Mr. Richard L. Roahen for his intelligent reading, constructive comments, and understanding.

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CHAPTER I

THE CONCEPTION AND CONCEPTS OF MEDIEVAL DRAMA

Action is eloquence, and the eyes of the ignorant
More learned than the ears.

—Coriolanus, III.ii.76-77

The Bible, the most studied book of the Middle Ages, represented, also, the highest branch of medieval learning. Unquestionably, scriptural language and accounts permeate medieval thought, and medieval man knew Biblical history as thoroughly as Elizabethans knew English history.¹ Few books, including the Bible, were available, and since most of the populace was illiterate, these few books could not have been read, even if the people had had access to them; however, a knowledge of Biblical stories was available to practically all men. In vernacular renditions, the medieval people had listened to Scriptural accounts repeated and read. Because books were scarce, those people who could

¹Beryl Smalley, The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages, p. xi; Effie MacKinnon, "Notes on the Dramatic Structure of the York Cycle," SP, XXVIII (July, 1931), 435.

read committed much of this material to memory.² Likewise, the illiterate masses must have memorized much of the material that they heard read and repeated, if they intended to retain or repeat it. In the churches, medieval man heard, repeatedly, the accounts of events from man's Creation, man's Fall, to the Judgment Day. Through oral tradition, almost all men became familiar with Biblical lore.

Within the church, the liturgy, based upon the Scriptures, played a vital role in the services. The term, liturgy, in an ecclesiastical sense, signifies the celebration of the Eucharist in the Christian service. In its common reference, however, liturgy is simply a collection of formularies for the conducting of the service.³ Because of a desire to make the service more meaningful, ecclesiasts amplified the liturgy during the eighth century. These additions and augmentations related to the liturgy were called tropes, the form for which was actually derived from the antiphons. These tropes consisted of a brief exchange

²Quoted in George R. Coffman, "A Plea for the Study of the Corpus Christi Plays as Drama," SP, XXVI (October, 1929), 421.

³Felix E. Schelling, Elizabethan Playwrights: A Short History of the English Drama from Medieval Times to the Closing of the Theaters in 1642, p. 6.

of dialogue, sung or chanted by choir boys, monks, priests, or nuns, who personated the characters involved in the narrative.⁴ The principle behind the trope is not unlike that of the oratorio, and the trope's basic dramatic quality is the origin of the religious drama of the Middle Ages. More specifically, the only parts of the liturgy that were dramatized at an early time were the lectiones, which depicted the most significant stories in the history of man, e. g., from his Creation to Judgment Day, and told of the lives of saints.⁵ The one trope that is usually considered to be the most consequential in the development of English drama is the quem quaeritis trope, preserved in a manuscript in the Monastery of St. Gall in Switzerland.⁶ From this quem quaeritis trope emerged the Easter liturgical plays, because this trope in its simplest form, told of the three Marys' visit to the sepulchre of Christ, but, eventually, it was developed into a full drama depicting the events surrounding

⁴F. J. Tickner (ed.), Earlier English Drama from Robin Hood to Everyman, p. 38.

⁵Hardin Craig, "Origin of Old Testament Plays," MP, X (April, 1913), 473; and English Religious Drama of the Middle Ages, pp. 28-29.

⁶Sir E. K. Chambers, The Mediaeval State, II, 9; and Craig, English Religious Drama, p. 31.

Christ's Resurrection.⁷ This quem quaeritis trope served also as a model for the Ad Dominicam Missam trope, from Limoges, which is considered to be the basis for the Christmas liturgical drama, consisting of a dialogue between persons at the manger and the traditional shepherds.⁸ Eventually, however, the episode of the announcement of the Nativity to the shepherds was prefixed to this trope as demonstrated in a twelfth-century Officium Pastorum from Rouen.⁹ Moreover, the Officium Stellae, the Latin play of the Magi, is significant in the history of the development of this Christmas drama. Thus, a combination of themes in this Christmas group came from a union of the events contained in the Stella and the Pastores and is an early indication of cycle-forming.¹⁰ Other liturgical Latin plays and dramatic offices that contributed to the formation of the Christmas cycle include the Prophetiae, the Annunciation, and the Purification. The Prophetiae is concerned with the various prophecies of Christ's coming; the Annunciation,

⁷Loc. cit.

⁸Karl Young, The Drama of the Medieval Church, II, 4.

⁹Craig, English Religious Drama, p. 50.

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 54-55.

celebrated on March 25, nine months before the birth of Jesus, is concerned with Gabriel's announcing to Mary the Immaculate Conception and with Mary's visit to Elizabeth. Finally, the Purification, celebrated on February 2, is concerned with the presentation of the infant Jesus in the Temple.¹¹ It is obvious that the germ of medieval drama lies in the dramatization of these certain parts of the liturgy, and, in some respects, one sees that the early state of the miracle play is simply an acted sermon.¹² The miracle play, of course, is contained in the vernacular, rather than in the Latin of the church.

Various opinions exist, however, concerning the development of the four "complete" extant English cycles of Chester, York, Towneley, and Ludus Coventriae. One point of debate among medieval scholars concerns the questions of whether or not the plays were ever secularized and why they were moved in performance outside of the church. Indeed, these arguments over the problem of secularization seem, at times, absurd, because semantics is the basis for much of this debate. For example, one scholar may claim that these

¹¹Ibid., pp. 58-63.

¹²Sidney W. Clarke, The Miracle Play in England, p. 5.

plays never lost their original religious basis and purpose, but that their removal from the church and the influence of the beliefs of the laity brought some secular concepts into the plays; therefore, the drama was secularized. On the other hand, scholars may take the same point of view, but insist that the original religious intention was never lost; therefore, the plays were never secularized. For example, Chambers holds that a gradual secularization of these dramas occurred, arguing that, eventually, the characters in the moralities were not scriptural or legendary persons but, rather, became almost wholly, abstractions, yet retaining their religious intentions, although the aim of this drama was for ethical cultivation, not for the establishment of faith.¹³ Opposing Chambers is Wickham, who maintains that no gradual secularization, and, in fact, no separation took place, believing that, during the thirteenth century, friars, clerks, and some priests insisted that these plays be presented out-of-doors, in order to " . . . bring the relevance of Christ's sacrifice to bewildered mankind in the market place" ¹⁴ He concludes, therefore, that these plays

¹³Chambers, op. cit., II, 151.

¹⁴Glynn Wickham, Early English Stages 1300 to 1600, I, 314-316.

did not break away from the church. Salter thinks, also, that these plays did not separate from the church, because the Church of England was the only source of opposition to these plays, and as long as Roman influence endured, the church continued its jurisdiction over them.¹⁵ He believes, indeed, that they were never secularized.¹⁶ Furthermore, he observes that the presentations of these plays by the craft guilds does not necessarily imply the secularization of these plays, because the guilds were semi-religious organizations, each having a patron saint.¹⁷ Mâle agrees, noting that all trades and professions professed to having a saint or saints.¹⁸ Young accepts, however, the view that this drama did change from the ecclesiastical to the secular, because both playwrights and audience wanted the scope of the performance increased, content enriched, and the vernacular used.¹⁹ Craig's assertions concerning the secularization of the drama

¹⁵F. M. Salter, Medieval Drama in Chester, p. 43.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 45.

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 8-9.

¹⁸Émile Mâle, Religious Art from the Twelfth to the Eighteenth Century, p. 82.

¹⁹Young, op. cit., II, 421.

do not contradict these points, even though Wickham contends that they do.²⁰ According to Craig, "[The mystery plays] were liturgical and they became secular; this fact is obvious and needs no proof."²¹ Craig further notes:

The materials out of which these amplifications were composed were to the minds of medieval people authoritative, sacred, and dramatically interesting. They were religious and not secular.²²

Obviously, Craig is referring to an earlier time, before the mystery plays were placed in secular hands, because, later he remarks:

The mystery plays after they fell into secular hands were not of course by any means faithful to their simple religious beginnings. They were full of aberrations, and their secularity grew as time went on. But they never lost their motive force [religion] essentially, much less completely.²³

Certainly, Craig does not deny the original religious basis of the drama as Wickham contends, even though it did become

²⁰Wickham, op. cit., I, 119. Since Wickham's quotations from Craig's English Religious Drama are not complete, he concludes falsely that Craig contradicts himself. An incorrect page reference is given, also. The first quotation concerning Craig's view of the secularization is from page 88 in English Religious Drama, not 83.

²¹Craig, English Religious Drama, p. 88.

²²Ibid., p. 158.

²³Loc. cit.

secularized. Rossiter supports, also, the thesis that the drama left the church, suggesting that the plays broke with the church because they were increased in their length, because they interrupted the ritual, and because there was a demand for spectacle. However, he thinks that, within the church, the liturgical histrionics continued, even as troping did.²⁴ At least two other scholars are in agreement with Rossiter, avering that, since extraneous matter crept into these plays, the dramas were excluded from the ceremonies of the church.²⁵ For example, Owst contends that popular preaching brought about secularizations of the drama and concludes that, since this kind of drama derives practically all of its content from sermons and homilies, when preaching was taken into the streets and secular material, of necessity, became a part of the sermons, the drama, also, was secularized.²⁶

²⁴A. P. Rossiter, English Drama from Early Times to the Elizabethans, p. 48.

²⁵I. and O. Bolton King (eds.), The Chester Miracle Plays, p. xii.

²⁶G. R. Owst, Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England, p. 478.

Thomas points out the fact that the Wiclifite Tretise of miraculis pleyinge, written at the end of the fourteenth century, condemned what were, obviously, popular dramatic performances. Afterwards, evidence accumulates for the existence of the plays in the vernacular.²⁷ Chambers mentions the treatise, but indicates that the opposition came from church heretics, not from its heads.²⁸ Also, Craig deals with the subject of this contemporary opposition to the drama:

It is certain that the plays were not expelled from the church. There had been a small number of reformers who had objected to drama in the church, and these reformers no doubt exerted influence at certain places and at certain times. But the transition from church to street, from Latin to vernacular, and from liturgy to secularity does not seem to have been offensive to the clergy.²⁹

Other objections to miracula came presumably from Robert Grosseteste and specifically from William of Waddington.³⁰ Regardless of such opposition to these plays, however, the records show that they did develop and become significant in

²⁷R. G. Thomas (ed.), Ten Miracle Plays, p. 4.

²⁸Chambers, op. cit., II, 102.

²⁹Craig, English Religious Drama, p. 88.

³⁰Chambers, op. cit., II, 101.

Middle English literature. However, the vital question of secularization still remains confusing and somewhat absurd. Since this drama did fall, eventually, into the hands of the laity as revealed in the history of the craft guilds, it would be expected to have undergone some phases of secularization, even though these guilds were semi-religious organizations. These guilds were, however, only semi-religious, and their members were only laymen. Wickham emphasizes that these laymen's attitudes were not a priori secular to ecclesiastical matters.³¹ His point is well taken, especially as it serves to explain why the churches eventually asked the secular clergy and, later, the guilds for assistance in producing this drama. Since the guild was a semi-religious organization that looked after the economical and spiritual problems of its members, the church let or asked the guild to assist the production of plays.³² Nevertheless, these guilds were, undoubtedly, affected by secular ideas; and therefore, the cycle plays were also influenced by non-ecclesiastical philosophies and traditions. Even though these plays were secularized, in some respects, they never

³¹Wickham, op. cit., I, 127.

³²Salter, op. cit., p. 9.

lost sight of their original religious purpose, for never were the early playwrights disrespectful of the Scriptural message.

The reason that these plays left the church is, obviously, another point of disagreement among scholars. As observed previously, Rossiter and King suggest that the drama out-grew and became too spectacular for the church; and therefore, they insist that the plays emerged " . . . out of God's blessing into the warm sun."³³ This reason does not seem altogether logical. Certainly, these plays did not become as spectacular, inside the church, as Rossiter would have his reader believe, and, surely, the Church Fathers had a purpose in allowing the drama to leave the church. Some scholars, however, cite a definite purpose of the drama's emergence from the church.

The purpose of the Corpus Christi festival, established in 1311, and accepted in 1318, was to inject into secular life, the relevance of Christian worship.³⁴ The miracle play became, eventually, a major part of this festival. Craig suggests that the intention of medieval religious drama was to encourage piety, to establish faith, and to offer

³³Rossiter, op. cit., p. 48.

³⁴Wickham, op. cit., I, 122.

religious instruction.³⁵ Purvis explains that removal of this drama from the church was an attempt on the part of the churchmen to educate the laity.³⁶ Kolve adheres to the belief that the drama was instructional, adding that these plays sought to enrich and deepen the individual emotionally as a creature of God.³⁷ Obviously, instruction is most effective when it is perceived through the "students'" eyes and ears. Indeed, drama is, potentially, the literary art most capable of making a lasting impression upon its audience. Also, it is, certainly, the most social of all literary arts. In connection with this view, two scholars note that, since the miracle play was written to tell the great story to the audience in an appealing manner, it was presented dramatically, with all of the staging aids that would enhance it.³⁸ Pollard offers the same idea. Today, the manger scene shown to children at Christmas has an effect comparable to that of the miracle play on the unlettered medieval man. Children

³⁵Craig, English Religious Drama, p. 15.

³⁶J. S. Purvis (ed.), The York Cycle of Mystery Plays, p. 12.

³⁷V. A. Kolve, The Play Called Corpus Christi, p. 4.

³⁸King (eds.), op. cit., p. xiii.

delight in seeing the manger, and actually seeing it is more effective in relating a message than would be any number of sermons. During the Middle Ages, examples of similar attempts to show the illiterate the reality of the most significant events connected with the Christian religion are infinite.³⁹ Obviously, the manger scene is merely a symbol, which causes an awareness of many details surrounding Christ's birth. Viewing the manger scene may evoke a recollection of the entire Christmas story. Indeed, symbols in medieval art, church services, and drama were many; therefore, a knowledge of the meanings of symbols was a prerequisite for understanding the message that the artist, priest, or playwright was trying to communicate. Certainly, medieval man recognized and knew, immediately, the symbols contained in plays and art, and, indeed, the relationship between medieval art and the cycle play is intimate. For example, Anderson observes that some inconspicuous detail in a Biblical scene may often be associated with lines or stage directions in one of the cycle plays.⁴⁰ Often, the glaziers and alabasterers of the late

³⁹Alfred W. Pollard (ed.), English Miracle Plays, Moralities and Interludes, pp. xiii-xiv.

⁴⁰M. D. Anderson, Drama and Imagery in English Medieval Churches, p. 14.

fourteenth to early sixteenth centuries drew upon their impressions of the plays to illustrate the life of a saint or the Scriptural story.⁴¹ Many symbols in art and literature were the same, because the origin of both was in the church. Not only did these plays influence the plastic and graphic arts, but the playwrights reproduced, also, what they saw in stained-glass windows, bosses, carvings, and other aspects of ecclesiastical art.⁴² Certain costumes were representative of specific characters in medieval art and literature. In the drama, characters were identifiable by the properties that they carried or the costumes that they wore.⁴³ Indeed, the man of the Middle Ages could instantly identify the Biblical characters by symbolic costumes and properties. Each character possessed some identifying mark. The objective of typology in the drama was that of simplicity.⁴⁴ Because stage devices and properties were, of necessity, crude, in comparison to the modern stage, theatrical realism in performance was non-existent in the Middle

⁴¹Ibid., p. 15.

⁴²Arnold Williams, The Drama of Medieval England, p. 101.

⁴³Ibid., p. 110.

⁴⁴Karl Mantzius, A History of Theatrical Art in Ancient and Modern Times, II, x.

Ages. Nevertheless, all symbols became real to the medieval mind. Indeed, medieval authors did not distinguish between truth and symbol.⁴⁵ These symbols are, then, basic to the drama's appeal to the auditory and ocular senses of the audience.

The drama did not appeal only to the physical senses, however. Man was able to identify himself with the plays, because he was a part of them. Man, himself, was included in the story which was being told, because the drama was about the record of mankind from his Creation to his Judgment Day. The subject was not only known by everyone; it was, also, relevant to each person's life. Religious knowledge, like all other knowledge, was the "property" of all men, because all learning was the province of God. Indeed, knowledge did not belong to the "finder," but to God; therefore, all knowledge was shared. Because man knew the Scriptural accounts, he accepted the fact that he was a part of a great, overall plan of creation, life and death, and infinity. Obviously, when the illiterate people saw the events from the Creation to Judgment Day enacted upon a stage, they

⁴⁵Katharine Lee Bates, The English Religious Drama, p. 179.

became even more cognizant of mankind as an intimate part of the "scheme of things." Man realized that the elapse and recognition of mundane time was relatively futile and not irrecoverably dissipated. Concern with time on earth was rather insignificant, and extensive measurement of it was useless. Time traveled vertically, not horizontally, and eternal time was the only permanent time.⁴⁶ Man could hope only for relative perfection in the category or class with which he was identified in the social hierarchy on earth and in the hierarchical cosmos. The individual, therefore, was not important, because he was only a member of "man" in the macrocosm and a member of his own social class in the microcosm.

Life on earth was heavenly life defective, and, indeed, one of the greatest defects may have been man's excessive concern with time, which is, of course, nonexistent in infinity. Man tried to live, however, the mundane, unfinished life, in the best way he could, because his total rejection of earthly things would have resulted in evil and privation.⁴⁷ He was acutely aware of and intensely interested in the

⁴⁶Craig, English Religious Drama, p. 16.

⁴⁷Ibid., pp. 16-17.

subjects of the cycle plays, because he realized that he was present in and a part of a continuing story. There was no past, because events had not ended; hence, the past was in the present. Anachronisms occurring in the speeches in the cycle plays and the fact that the characters of the drama were clothed in medieval dress are both indicative of the past's being alive in the present, just as in the Renaissance paintings in which a child with an old person's face represents a fusion of the past and the present. Indeed, medieval man was not aware of the use of changes in fashion or costume to indicate an age. The past was real and present. Costumes, other than those worn by medieval man, would have confused him and have made him too aware of the concept of a past that no longer existed. Man really had no knowledge of changes in "styles," because he had always seen, in art and drama, nothing but clothes like those worn by people of the Middle Ages. Costumes in the cycle plays were, then, unhistorical.⁴⁸ Another example of past in the present is Christ's suffering, that was as real to and as much with medieval man, as it was with those who actually witnessed

⁴⁸Frederick B. Artz, The Mind of the Middle Ages A. D. 200-1500: An Historical Survey, p. 358; Mantzius, op. cit., II, 99; and Tickner (ed.), op. cit., p. x.

His Crucifixion. Christ's suffering was a consequence of the sins of the man of the Middle Ages.

Human history could not be explained in purely human terms; therefore, the drama could not be restricted to the representation of human characters.⁴⁹ Since the roles of God, the angels, the devil, and virtues were all played by men, one questions the credibility of the performances.

Coffman comments:

The validity of the illusion created rested mainly not on "that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment which constitutes poetic faith," but on the complete acceptance of the theme dramatized as a historical reality and as vital to the life and destiny of the spectator. Hence, in general, the material which the Corpus Christi playwrights selected from Biblical and extra-Biblical sources as harmonious for their scheme was realistic rather than romantic.⁵⁰

The plays were not dramatic presentations, because the audience saw the plays as Truth itself.⁵¹ The drama was spontaneous, natural, and grotesque, and, therefore, real.

The Pinta was no more real to Columbus, than Noah's Ark was to medieval men, who were watching the Noah play. The

⁴⁹Kolve, op. cit., p. 9.

⁵⁰Coffman, op. cit., pp. 423-424.

⁵¹Bates, op. cit., p. 179.

principle of transubstantiation within the church is the same. In fact, the ecclesiastical definition of the word liturgy, from which the drama developed, connects the ritual specifically with the Eucharist. The man who played Noah actually became Noah; the Holy Ghost actually "made Mary with child"; the real Jesus suffered for mankind's sins; and God observed all from His "high throne."⁵² The actual acting and setting, certainly, could not have been believable; therefore, verisimilitude was supplied by the minds of the spectators.⁵³ Time and distance were symbolic.⁵⁴ For example, Mary conceives and gives birth to Jesus in a matter of minutes, not in a period of nine months, and the trip to Elizabeth's home or the trip to Bethlehem takes only a few seconds, because these places are only a few steps away. The plays were not, however, less real to their audience, because its members knew the story well, and their minds supplied this verisimilitude. Indeed, the "real" God was not sitting on His throne, but the symbolic god became the real Christian God

⁵²Richard Southern, The Medieval Theatre in the Round, Plate 3 and p. 96.

⁵³Craig, English Religious Drama, pp. 8-9.

⁵⁴Loc. cit.; Samuel B. Hemingway (ed.), English Nativity Plays, p. vii.

to the unlettered medieval man. Time, distance, costume, and stage properties are not the only aspects of this drama, however, that were symbolic. Color, action and gestures, music, characters, and certain words in speeches also served as typology.

In the region of the other senses, however, this drama was extremely realistic. For example, Christ's crucifixion and suffering were realistically and grotesquely depicted. This grotesqueness is apparent, also, in medieval paintings, illuminations, miniatures, and wood-carvings.⁵⁵ However, the grotesque is not the only realistic aspect of this drama. The "human" elements also contributed to its realism. For example, Noah and his shrewish wife have a quarrel, because she does not want to leave her home, and, surely, the thought of traveling with a menagerie is distasteful to her. Furthermore, Joseph is upset when he returns home to find Mary pregnant, thinking that she has had intercourse with some other man, because, as far as Joseph knows, the sexual act is the only one that causes pregnancy. Since Joseph is only a man, he would never be capable of thinking of Immaculate Conception or of comprehending it. In a least two of the

⁵⁵Mantzius, op. cit., II, 100.

cycles, comic episodes accompany and are part of the human element in scenes such as those concerning Noah and his wife and Mary and Joseph. Although this comedy may seem distasteful and sacrilegious, because of its subject matter, it was not. The only way to instruct medieval people in such incomprehensible subjects and to justify the ways of God to man, was to make a link between man and God, or to show that God and man were one. Indeed, in the miracle plays, as in Milton's Paradise Lost, Christ as man communicates the oneness of man and God, but the additional element of comedy, as in the cycle plays and in Milton's Paradise Regained, seems to have served a similar purpose. By means of its presence, Christ's humanity is revealed. Both laughter and sorrow, thus, link the spectators with God. The medieval audience was able to see that Biblical characters also encountered and experienced mundane problems. Consequently, the people in the audience could identify themselves with and laugh at these ridiculous situations, not unlike their own. No great difference existed between Biblical man's and medieval man's situations. Both were human. The plays proved and emphasized this important fact. Schelling observes that "the past was frankly translated into the terms of the familiar present," and that in the ". . . fidelity to the

actualities of everyday life," lay this drama's power to move men.⁵⁶ According to Craig, the vernacular crowded out the Latin, and, because of popular demand, these plays included " . . . not only non-liturgical Scripture, apocryphal narrative, and approved hagiography, but comic and sensational matter from mere folklore and from daily life."⁵⁷ Cawley suggests, also, that these plays are not only a product of the liturgy, but, also, of folklore, non-liturgical Scripture, the apocrypha, classical myths, popular sermons, homilies, and other literature, such as The Golden Legend and the Cursor Mundi, written during the Middle Ages.⁵⁸ Williams agrees, remarking that the plays are traditional in content and developed from the total experiences of the medieval communities and of the playwrights.⁵⁹ Since reading was synonymous with memorization and knowledge was the property of all men, so that a modern sense of plagiarism did not

⁵⁶Felix E. Schelling, The English Chronicle Play: A Study in the Popular Historical Literature Environing Shakespeare, p. vii.

⁵⁷Craig, English Religious Drama, p. 88; and Bates, op. cit., p. 47.

⁵⁸A. C. Cawley (ed.), The Wakefield Pageants in the Towneley Cycle, pp. xi-xxxiii.

⁵⁹Williams, op. cit., p. 116.

exist, these unknown playwrights surely included material taken from sources other than the liturgy. Bates argues that the material in many of the plays is apocryphal; however, the accounts may be somewhat distorted because the legends of the text were, undoubtedly, caught up in popular art, stories, and current speech.⁶⁰ Perhaps Kolve introduces a significant quotation from St. Gall, who had claimed, "homo est animal rationale, mortale, risus copax," or "man is a rational mortal animal, capable of laughter." Kolve suggests, here, that the people of the Middle Ages were well aware of this quotation, which stood as fact for them. Furthermore, he observes that the Benedictine Rule recognized and defined moderate laughter as desirable.⁶¹ Laughter was held to be basic to man's nature, and these early playwrights, through their lack of literary sophistication, were able to appeal to man's basic nature. Modern playwrights do not dramatize situations as well as medieval dramatists did, because authors no longer possess an unsophisticated earnestness of purpose and faith.⁶² Tickner indicates that the modern world has

⁶⁰Bates, op. cit., p. 175.

⁶¹Kolve, op. cit., p. 127.

⁶²Craig, English Religious Drama, p. 3.

lost the intense kind of religious belief that possessed the medieval populace.⁶³ Indeed, the anonymity of the medieval authors is reflected in their earnestness of purpose, and, of course, in their belief that knowledge was the common property of all men. These authors were not driven by a desire for recognition. No struggle for fame and name was present, nor were there attempts at originality. God had made available to man all that he could possibly know. There was no Copernicus or Galileo to daunt man's mind. Man was secure in his place, and his simple faith was strong. Since the "new science" of the late Renaissance had not appeared, man had as yet no reason to doubt; but, at the same time, discoveries, which enabled authors to realize the limitlessness of imagination, had not been made. For medieval man, life and his place in the microcosm and macrocosm were simple and secure. "Somewhere in the region of this simple naturalness lies the supremacy of the unknown authors and revisers of the mystery plays"64

The audience of the miracle plays included all classes. The plays were not written to instruct only the unlettered

⁶³Tickner (ed.), op. cit., p. viii.

⁶⁴Craig, English Religious Drama, p. 3.

masses. The plays and art served to educate not only the illiterates, but, also, the lay literates, in Scriptural and extra-Scriptural beliefs.⁶⁵ The miracle plays were, perhaps, the most democratic literature in medieval England.⁶⁶ One scholar describes the medieval stage and its audience quite well:

. . . there was once a theatre . . . whose stage was the world instead of a drawing room and whose players were men and women, body and soul, of every walk of life instead of two or three gathered together for luncheon, high tea or even for a cocktail party.⁶⁷

For the spectators, the purpose of the plays was, of course, religious and instructive, not dramatic. The plays were drama, mainly because impersonation, action, and dialogue, the three constituents of drama, were present.⁶⁸ The instruction directed itself more to the heart than to the mind, and somewhere within the appeal to the heart, lay the simple naturalness and humanistic elements, which make the plays art. Art and religion both search for " . . . truth, meaning,

⁶⁵Margaret Deanesly, The Lollard Bible and Other Medieval Biblical Versions, p. 209.

⁶⁶Coffman, op. cit., p. 412.

⁶⁷Wickham, op. cit., I, ix.

⁶⁸Craig, English Religious Drama, p. 19.

[and] reality, through . . . imaginative perception and faith."⁶⁹ The cycle plays of the Middle Ages, however, developed an aspect of art that religion did not possess-- a basic humanistic element, a simple naturalness, which enabled the drama to communicate, intimately, with man and allowed man to see his significance and his place in the macrocosm. The drama was, then, " . . . an immaculate birth" from religion, because its later developments were "wholly unselfconscious," not intentional.⁷⁰ The simple naturalness of the miracle plays is about as unselfconscious, perhaps unconscious, and innocent as literature can be. Indeed, the irony lies in the fact that the drama of the church intended to Christianize humanity; however, the cycle plays humanized Christianity.⁷¹ The humanistic element of the cycle plays is one of the major areas which should be studied. Concentration on typology, characterizations, language, versification, staging, music, costume, and the concepts of time and distance seem necessary and pertinent for, at least, a partial understanding and more thorough

⁶⁹Wickham, op. cit., p. 310.

⁷⁰Loc. cit.

⁷¹Rossiter, op. cit., p. 53.

appreciation of medieval drama. One must remember, however, that he may not apply Classical, Elizabethan, or modern standards to medieval drama. Since it was not a conscious genre, its playwrights did not write with the intention of meeting any preconceived literary standard. Also, at all times, one must consider and remember the type of mind that the medieval man possessed, because the relationship of the audience to the plays is of utmost importance.

CHAPTER II

THE CHESTER CYCLE: THE NATIVITY EPISODE

The date of the Chester cycle is a subject of debate among medieval scholars. After extensive research of ancient manuscripts, Chambers has set the date as c. 1328.⁷² Craig supports Chambers in observing that the Chester is the oldest Corpus Christi cycle in England.⁷³ Salter, in a somewhat convincing study, however, contradicts Chambers's surmise, dating the Chester cycle as c. 1375.⁷⁴ In his revision of the Annals of English Drama, Schoenbaum supports Salter's conjecture, placing the date at 1377-1382.⁷⁵ The cycle was probably presented in Chester or Cheshire until c. 1575.⁷⁶ Even though they disagree over the dating of this cycle, scholars generally concur that these plays were influenced by and bear a great resemblance to the French mystères.⁷⁷

⁷²Chambers, op. cit., II, 348-356.

⁷³Craig, English Religious Drama, pp. 166; 168.

⁷⁴Salter, op. cit., pp. 29-53.

⁷⁵Alfred E. Harbage (ed.), Annals of English Drama 975-1700, p. 6.

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 7.

⁷⁷Craig, English Religious Drama, pp. 170-178.

Traditionally, scholars think that the Chester plays, as well as those of the York and Towneley, were acted upon pageant wagons of two or three stories at least fifteen to twenty feet high and were, presumably, moved down the narrow streets of villages.⁷⁸ However, one thinks that these wagons may have been too cumbersome to pass between the buildings on either side of the street; but, if they did, the crowds that lined the streets probably were pressed against the sides of the buildings for fear of being injured. Another incredible point concerning the use of pageant wagons is related to acoustics. In their progression, these wagons were stopped, ostensibly, at specific locations where a large crowd might, then, gather to watch a performance. The "stage" was, of course, in the open air; in fact, some scholars believe that these wagons had no roofs. Under these circumstances, the range of acoustics may have been limited, especially if one assumes that the spectators were not extremely close to these wagons.⁷⁹ One thinks that all characters, including angels and the Virgin Mary, would have had to shout in order to be heard. The Virgin Mary's having

⁷⁸Wickham, op. cit., I, 150.

⁷⁹Salter, op. cit., p. 68.

to speak loudly would not have been congruous with the gentle, meek image that obviously attended her. This unquestioning scholarly acceptance of the theory related to the pageant wagon seems especially strange, because there are as many records of plays having been performed on fixed stages as on perambulatory ones.⁸⁰ One thinks, therefore, that a concept of a stationary-stage theory is much more logically applied and adapted to the needs of each of the four cycles.

The Chester cycle consists of Banns and twenty-five plays, the sixth of which is The Nativity or the Pagina sexta de salutatione et nativitate Salvatoris Ihesu Christi, presented by the wrights' guild. Among the episodes in The Nativity are three: Gabriel's annunciation to Mary and her conception of Christ, Mary's visit to Elizabeth, and Joseph's anguish over Mary's pregnancy. The Nativity commences with Gabriel's greeting to Mary, "Haile be thou, Mary, maiden free, / full of grace!" (1-2), in which he assures her that God is with her, and explains that she and the fruit of her body are blessed among all women. Mary responds, but apparently addresses the Lord, "Ah! lord, that sitts heighe in see, / that wonderly now mervayles mee . . ." (5-6).

⁸⁰Wickham, op. cit., I, 150.

In speaking to God, she suggests her own unworthiness, adding that she is merely a simple maiden. Gabriel, however, tells her to have no fear and reveals the fact that she will conceive and bear the Son of God, instructing her to call the child "Ihesu" and informing her of Jesus' future. Quite naturally, she is curious to know how such an event may occur: "How may this be? thou arte so bright. / in sinne knewe I no worldlie wight" (25-26). She claims that, since she is a virgin, she does not understand how she can bear a child; and confesses that, since she is human, she knows of only one way in which to become pregnant. Gabriel tells Mary, however, "The holy ghost shall in thee light / from god in maiestye, / and shadowe the semelie in sighte . . ." (27-28). He explains that nothing is impossible with God, informing her that Elizabeth, who was also barren, has in her old age conceived a son through God's grace and is now six months pregnant. Mary, then, consents, saying, "Loe Gods chosen mekelie here! / and lord god, prince of power, 'leeve that it fall in such manere / this word that thou has said" (45-48).

After she indicates her readiness to conceive, she is next discovered at Elizabeth's home, where she greets her cousin, "Elizabeth, Neece, God the see!" (49) Elizabeth's

first words to Mary resemble Gabriel's first greeting: "mary, blessed mot thou be, / and the fruit that comes of thee, / among women all!" (50-52). She continues, "wonderlye now mervailles mee / that mary, Gods mother freye, / greetes me thus of simple degreey. / Lord! how may this befall?" (53-56). Elizabeth's reply resembles her previous response to Gabriel's salutation. Each woman feels humility and indicates that she is unworthy of being greeted by the one saluting her. Elizabeth, next, explains that, when Mary greeted her, the child in her own body stirred with great joy. Thus, it is revealed that Mary's holiness is so eminent as to prompt a sympathetic physical response. John's movement inside Elizabeth's womb also may be an adumbration of the future relationship between Jesus and John. When Elizabeth blesses her, Mary responds, "Elizabeth, therefore will I / thanke the lord, king of mercy, / with joifull mirth and melodye / and lawde to his lykinge" (65-68). Then, Mary sings or chants the magnificat, and the episode concludes with the gloria patri.⁸¹

Elizabeth, who has been venerating Mary in some manner throughout the sequence, perhaps, by kneeling during the

⁸¹The magnificat is taken from Luke I: 47-55.

ritual, now suggests that they seek out Joseph, because she fears that he will believe that Mary has done "amisse," or has sinned. Abruptly, then, the scene shifts, and, by means of taking a few steps, Elizabeth and Mary discover Joseph, whom Elizabeth addresses, explaining that she has brought his wife to him. Immediately, upon sight of Mary, Joseph laments, "Alas, alas! and woe is mee! / who hath made her with childe?" (123-124). He continues to lament that he, an old man, has married a young girl. He also regrets that for many years he has not been able to ". . . playe / ne work no workes wilde" (127-128), admitting that he is impotent because of old age. Then, he observes, "three monethes she hath bene from me, / now has she gotten here, as I see, / a great belie, like to [Elizabeth], / sith she went away" (129-132). He continues, "and myne [the baby] is not, be thou bolde, / for I am both old and colde, / this XXX wynter, though I wold, / I might not plaie no playe" (133-136).⁸² He knows the child is not of his doing, because

⁸²"XXX wynter" is, possibly, some vaguely supported reference to Joseph's age. Supposedly, he is an old man; however, even in the Middle Ages, when life expectancy was shorter, certainly, the age of thirty would not have been too old for procreation. The length of time for man's virility would, seemingly, not be affected by life expectancy;

he is "both old and colde," incapable of procreation. Here, also, he may be punning on colde: i.e., Joseph is cold as opposed to hot, because the season is winter, and because he cannot become sexually stimulated. He mentions that although he desires to "plaie," he cannot do so.

In his anger, he decides to leave Mary "privily," to avoid making a public example of her condition. His following statement, then, is possibly directed to God:

. . . god let never an old man
take him a yonge woman,
ne set his hart her upon,
lest he beguiled be!
for accord there may be none
nor they may never be at one,
and that is seene in many one
as well as on me.

(145-152)

In other words, he rationalizes that marriage between an old man and a young girl cannot be successful, because " . . . they may never be at one"; i.e., they may never be united sexually. He next decides to sleep before he departs, because this entire business has made him "heauie." Before he does, however, he asks the Lord to have mercy upon Mary.

(continued) therefore, the reference to Joseph's age is confusing. Perhaps, a more logical suggestion for the meaning of "XXX wynter" would be the number of years that Joseph and Mary have been married.

While he takes his rest, Angelus, not Gabriel, appears to him in a dream to explain the circumstances surrounding Mary's pregnancy, suggestive of the familiar medieval dream vision. In his address, the angel mentions the prophecy's having been fulfilled. The actual prophecy itself is preserved in the play, Balaam and Balak, which precedes The Nativity in the Chester cycle. Presumably awake, now, Joseph assures the Lord that he will stay with Mary and concludes the episode with a devotional in praise of God: "now christ is in our kind light, / as the prophetes yore beheight; / lord, god, most of nighte / with weale I worshippe thee" (173-176). During the entire episode of Joseph's trouble, Mary has remained silent. Joseph, Elizabeth, and the angel are the only speakers. Mary remains on stage throughout the scene, however.

Two of these three episodes are definitely unlocated, and that for the remaining scene rests merely upon supposition.⁸³ For example, there is no indication as to Mary's station when Gabriel salutes her. She may be in her home, or, possibly, she may be in the country if the scene is

⁸³Craig, English Religious Drama, pp. 9-10. Craig discusses and defines the unlocated scene.

pastoral. Certainly, the episode was not performed without an attention to setting. Perhaps, the account of Mary's visit to Elizabeth is staged at Elizabeth's home. The location of the episode involving Joseph's trouble is, however, more puzzling. Its setting, if there were one, may have represented any type of place; however, logically it is the same location used for the scene of Mary's conception, especially if the conception occurred in or near Mary and Joseph's home. At least, there is no internal evidence to indicate that Mary is not at or near her home when she conceives, or that Joseph is not home when Elizabeth greets him. That Joseph would lie down to rest supports the idea that he is at home where he can take his nap.

Obviously, God is on stage, and Mary's speech indicates that He is stationed at some elevated location: "Ah! lord, that sitts heighe in see, / that wonderly now mervayles mee . . ." (5-6). For that matter, one suspects that both God and Hell's mouth (the head of some serpent or grisly beast) are probably represented during the entire performance of the cycle. Since, in his daily routine, medieval man was constantly made aware of the presence of God and Satan, the drama to be at all real or significant to the masses had to represent both good and evil. The inhabitants of Heaven and

Hell were, of course, symbols, but they became real to the medieval audience. The fact, then, that Mary could look up and address the Lord did not seem at all strange to the minds of the Middle Ages. Also, the fact that God on stage was elevated implies that Gabriel descended to Mary, either by walking down some stairs leading from Heaven, or by means of some stage contrivance, a method that would have given the impression of flight. Moreover, if Gabriel were lowered to Mary's stage level, the possibility that he was portrayed by a young boy is likely, because the construction of a pulley-type mechanism would, possibly, not have been sturdy enough to support the weight of an adult.⁸⁴ Hillebrand also suggests that Gabriel may have been a boy, because his " . . . diminutive appearance [would have] imparted a kind of realism to [a] fairy-like character."⁸⁵ One learns that, in the staging of the tropes in the church, priests were not the

⁸⁴Wickham, op. cit., I, 166; Harold Newcomb Hillebrand, The Child Actors: A Chapter in Elizabethan Stage History, p. 36. Wickham cites the use of pulley devices in the miracle plays, and Hillebrand observes that the construction of such mechanisms in early staging may not have been sturdy enough to support an adult.

⁸⁵Charles E. Walton, "To Maske in Myrthe: Spenser's Theatrical Practices in The Faerie Queene," The Emporia State Research Studies, IX, 1 (September, 1960), 26.

only actors, because frequently choir boys with well-suited voices and appropriate figures were used for particular parts, namely, for the roles of women and angels.⁸⁶ Undoubtedly, Gabriel was a small, slight character, because a big, husky angel would have seemed unrealistic even to medieval man, and, possibly, terrifying. Indeed, the unchanged voice of a lad would have been more appropriate to Gabriel.

In his address to Mary, Gabriel's use of the word shadowe is, perhaps, significant to the staging of the actual conception, which occurs later in the play. In response to Mary's question about the possibility of conceiving, he informs her: "The holy ghost shall in the light / from god in maiesty, / and shadowe the semelie in sighte . . ." (27-29). The conception seems to occur when Mary says, ". . . leeve that it fall in such manere / this word that [Gabriel] hast said" (47-48). Mary does undergo a physical change, but she does not leave the stage; therefore, this point in the episode seems to be the only one possible at which her conception and physical change could occur. There is no indication of the coming of the Holy Ghost, but Gabriel's

⁸⁶T. H. Vail Motter, The School Drama of England, pp. 3-4.

explanation of the conception may be significant, here. Perhaps, the Holy Ghost descends and conceals Mary with his robe, thus hiding her from the audience, so that she can have sufficient time to pad her dress in order to make herself appear to be pregnant. Here, ideally, music may have been useful and appropriate, since no dialogue is present. The descension of the Holy Ghost is, possibly, the cue that starts the music, instrumental or vocal, or both. Perhaps, all heavenly ascensions and descensions, including Gabriel's, were held to be appropriate occasions for musical backgrounds. If the same types of instruments or voices and harmony were used in the cycles for all ascensions and descensions, music could have served these plays as an auditory symbol. Musical instruments, with appropriate tones, were employed at given times to evoke a desired reaction in an audience.⁸⁷ One also thinks that "descension music" may have been played as the angel approach Joseph, as in the case of Gabriel's visit to Mary.

Mary's speech preceding the magnificat supplies further evidence of the employment of music in the Chester plays:

⁸⁷ Edmund A. Bowles, "The Role of Musical Instruments in Medieval Sacred Drama," MQ, XLV (January, 1959), 70.

"Elizabeth, therefore will I / thanke the lord, king of mercy, / with joifull mirth and melodye / and lawde to his lykinge" (65-68). The fact that she uses melodye is strong internal evidence to show that it is Mary who actually sings the magnificat that follows. In the church service, the magnificat was sung twice, once during the censuring of the altars on a feast of dedication where the congregation was large; then, a repeating of the canticle allowed sufficient time in which to perform such a ceremony with a show of dignity.⁸⁸ If the service with which the people associated this canticle were highly respected, certainly, a repetition, here, of the magnificat would have been a vital symbol, influencing the spectators to recall the significance of this ritual. It is possible, as well, that Mary enacts, here, a ritual similar to the one associated with the church service. Obviously, she chants or sings the magnificat, because she proclaims, " . . . to christe that in my kinde now come, / deuoutlie I will singe" (71-72). Within this canticle is contained the characteristically Roman Catholic idea of praise, honor, and worship for the Virgin Mary, " . . .

⁸⁸Edmund Bishop, Liturgica Historica: Papers on the Liturgy of Religious Life of the Western Church, p. 448.

therfore blesse [Mary] well may / all generations for aye . . ." (77-78). Most of the magnificat is, however, devoted to praise of God and to the announcement that man will not suffer eternally in Hell.

Although positive internal evidence for the employment of music is minimal in these plays, the problem of costumes is speculative. One suspects, however, that if the person portraying Gabriel were lowered to Mary by means of some contrivance, his costume had wings. In both medieval art and drama, angels are depicted with wings and are seldom attired in any other color but white.⁸⁹ Also, Mary's reference to Gabriel with "bright" may be an indication of his costume. Moreover, his wings and wig were probably gilded.⁹⁰ Mâle even suggests that faces of especially holy characters may have been painted yellow.⁹¹ However, specific implications of the type of costumes worn by the women or boys portraying Mary and Elizabeth are contained within Joseph's remarks. For example, immediately upon seeing Mary, he groans, "Alas, alas! and woe is mee! / who hath made her

⁸⁹Mâle, op. cit., p. 106.

⁹⁰Artz, op. cit., p. 358.

⁹¹Mâle, op. cit., p. 108.

with childe?" (123-124). Later, he observes, ". . . now has [Mary] gotten here, as I see, / a great belie, like to [Elizabeth], / sith [Mary] went awaye" (130-132). Obviously, the people portraying Mary and Elizabeth look pregnant.

Symbolic time is important to the nature of Mary's pregnancy. She must undergo physical change, not in a matter of a few months, but immediately after she has conceived. Symbolic time and distance are significant, also, in Mary's journey to Elizabeth's home and, later, in both women's journey to Joseph. Here, the spectators may have supplied the necessary verisimilitude both for Mary's conception and immediate pregnancy and for the trips. Indeed, one realizes that symbolic distance is important in the entire arrangement of the setting. The stage, and its various levels, represent the universe, from Heaven, to Earth, to Hell. Although "Heaven" must have been only a few feet above "Earth," because the minds of the spectators supplied verisimilitude, the medieval cycle-play stage became the real universe.

Staging is not all that one must consider, however, in a study of medieval drama. Since these episodes were written in verse, one must also study versification. In the Chester cycle, the rhyme scheme in quatrains is aaab, in all three accounts, and the meter, although it is often irregular, is

at times iambic. Deimling, among others, identifies the rhyme scheme as that of the rime-couée stanza.⁹² Moreover, hardly ever is a quatrain spoken by more than one character, but when a quatrain is divided and assigned to two speakers, the effect produced is significant. For example, the first such division occurs when Mary asks Gabriel how she can possibly conceive. Her question is simple and naturally stated. It demands no lengthy explanation, but only an immediate answer, which Gabriel offers in the last two lines of the quatrain that are assigned to him. Mary's question and Gabriel's answer are extremely important to the episode and, in fact, to the entire narrative in the cycle, because in their exchange man finally learns that the Messiah will be both man and God. This method of the divided quatrain emphasizes Mary's question and Gabriel's answer. Since the rhyme is initiated in Mary's speech, Gabriel must reply without hesitation. A second use of the divided quatrain occurs in the episode of Mary's visit to Elizabeth. Exalted, Mary informs Elizabeth, in one simple line, that she (Mary) is going to bear the holy infant. Immediately, Elizabeth responds to this news, praising Mary and the fruit of her womb, thus,

⁹²Deimling, op. cit., p. xxix.

speaking the final three lines of the quatrain. This division of the quatrain enables Elizabeth to respond without hesitation, without questioning Mary's statement, indicating that she fully understands the significance of Mary's news and possesses an unquestioning faith. The third and last example of a division of a quatrain between two speakers occurs at the beginning of the episode concerned with Joseph's trouble. In the first two lines, Elizabeth tells Joseph that she has brought his wife to him. At once, upon sight of Mary, Joseph wails, asking who is responsible for Mary's condition. Again, his reply is immediate, because Mary is obviously pregnant. The continuation of the rhyme, and the necessity of Joseph's answering promptly so as not to break the pattern of the quatrain are appropriate to the developing situation. Under the circumstances, Joseph is expected to register surprise, as he inquires about the identity of the father. Each of these three instances of divided quatrains requires prompt replies either to questions or provocative statements, because of the situation and because the quatrain itself must unfold smoothly and readily in its rhyme scheme. The fact that quatrains are rarely ever so divided in the text makes these breaks significant, because the actors would probably tend to emphasize such lines, thus producing a stichomythic effect.

Also, after three lines of a, the b line at the end of each quatrain imparts to the reader and listener a sense of finality. The only problem risked with the use of these stanzas is that of monotony.

The natures of these situations do not require much accompanying action or elaborate settings. In fact, a minimal amount of stage movement may have sufficed in these episodes, especially since the audience supplied verisimilitude. Internal evidence for costuming is lacking, and in only one instance does there occur a direct reference to music. One conjectures, however, that the costuming may have been quite elaborate and that music may have been frequently employed. However, since the Chester plays are simple, the religious message of the Chester dramatist is lucid and direct. The meaning and significance of these episodes, in relation to the whole story of man, are especially clear.

CHAPTER III

THE YORK CYCLE: THE ANNUNCIATION AND VISIT OF ELIZABETH TO MARY AND JOSEPH'S TROUBLE ABOUT MARY EPISODES

As in the case of the Chester cycle, scholars have assigned various dates to the York cycle; however, many consider it to be the second oldest cycle. Craig dates it as c. 1328;⁹³ Smith dates it as c. 1340-1350;⁹⁴ and Harbage assigns it a 1352 date.⁹⁵ Also, as with the staging of the Chester plays, the staging of the York plays at Yorkshire upon a fixed stage is considered to be more logical than any argument for a pageant-wagon staging. Perhaps, at times, especially at earlier dates, these plays were performed on pageant wagons, but there is also a strong possibility that they were performed more frequently on a stationary type of stage.

The resemblances between the York and Towneley plays are of concern to medieval scholars who have advanced various

⁹³Craig, English Religious Drama, p. 205.

⁹⁴Lucy Toulmin Smith (ed.), York Plays, p. xlv.

⁹⁵Harbage, op. cit., pp. 6-7.

theories in regard to the relationship between the two cycles. The two most common theories are, first, that one cycle borrowed extensively from the other, and secondly, that the plays have a common liturgical source. For example, Craig holds that, while both theories may be partially correct, the most convincing hypothesis suggests that the Towneley cycle was taken over from York late in its cyclic development.⁹⁶ He observes that in each cycle there are certain plays that appear unrelated to those in the associate cycles. Again, in some instances, the York plays show that they have been revised whereas the Towneley have not. For example, Joseph's Trouble about Mary shows evidence of having been revised in the York cycle, while The Annunciation, and the Visit to Elizabeth have been similarly treated in the Towneley cycle.⁹⁷ Craig argues that at the time the Towneley cycle was taken over from York, the two cycles were virtually the same, and conjectures that even though the Towneley plays underwent great alterations (especially the plays assigned to the Wakefield master), the York plays show evidence of having been subjected to even more extensive revision. He concludes,

⁹⁶Craig, English Religious Drama, p. 215.

⁹⁷Ibid., pp. 216-217.

therefore, that the Towneley plays reveal a greater use of the early vernacular language and meter than do the York plays.⁹⁸

The York cycle consists of forty-eight plays and a fragment. The three episodes under present consideration are merged as two plays, The Annunciation and visit of Elizabeth to Mary, performed by the "spicers," and Joseph's trouble about Mary, presented by the "pewtereres and foun-dours." The first play opens with the Prologue's addressing God, marveling at the history of man who lost Paradise and was thrown into Hell to suffer until God had decided to grant him grace. The Prologue then names some prophets, disclosing what each had foretold about the coming of Christ. Among the prophets, then, who speak are Amos, Abraham, Isaac, Jesse, Joel, Jacob, John the Baptist, and Luke. Craig maintains that at York there was a Prophetæ play, either no longer extant or transformed into this York Prologue affixed to The Annunciation.⁹⁹ The Chester Annunciation has no prologue, but begins with Gabriel's salute to Mary. In Chester, one suspects that the Balaam and Balak play was a Prophetæ play.

⁹⁸Ibid., p. 220.

⁹⁹Ibid., pp. 221-222.

The Prologue concludes by relating Luke's account of Gabriel's having been sent to Nazareth to greet the Virgin Mary:

" . . . Hir name is Marie," þus gan he telle,
 To god his grace þan grayd,
 To man in þis manere,
 And how þe Aungell saide,
 Takes hede, all þat will here.
 (140-144)

Thus, Prologue prepares the audience for the enactment of The Annunciation that follows.

Angelus (Gabriel) salutes Mary much like he does in Chester, telling Mary to have no fear, that she will bear the son of God. Also, as with Chester, Angelus relates to Mary some of Jesus' destiny. Mary asks Angelus how she can conceive a child, maintaining, "I knawe no man þat shulde haue fyled / My maydenhode, the sothe to saye; / Withouten will of werkis wilde, / In chastite I haue ben ay" (173-176). In other words, Mary contends that she is still a virgin; therefore, she could not be with child. Furthermore, she has no desire to lose her virginity, and because she is only human, she does not think in terms of an Immaculate Conception. Angelus answers, "The Halygast in þe shall lighte . . ." (177). Angelus delivers the same message he makes in the Chester play, revealing to Mary that Elizabeth, who was barren, is

six months pregnant, and, thereby, showing that nothing is impossible with God. As in the Chester play, Mary now indicates that she is ready to conceive: "Goddis handmayden, lo! me here, / To his wille all redy grayd, / Be done to me of all manere, / Thurgh they worde als þou hast saide" (189-192).¹⁰⁰ Also, Angelus's final speech suggests that Mary has already conceived:¹⁰¹

Now God, þat all oure hope in in,
 Thur[gh] the myght of þe haly gaste,
 Saue þe, dame, from sak of synne,
 And wisse þe fro all werkis wast!
 (193-196)

The title of the Mary-Elizabeth visit is misleading. Although the account is known as the visit of Elizabeth to Mary, in its context, the opposite is true. Mary visits Elizabeth, as she does in the Chester cycles. She greets Elizabeth, "Elizabeth, myn awne cosyne, / Me thoght I comme

¹⁰⁰Mary's final speech in The Annunciation episode and before the act of the conception parallels the same speech in Chester so closely that either borrowing occurred or the playwrights were using a common source, which could not have been the Bible. The significance of the similarities between these two particular passages will be discussed in the final chapter.

¹⁰¹Angelus' final comment is almost like a benediction. The fact that he begins with the word, Now, may imply that completed action was just accomplished. Also, Angelus asks that Mary be spared guilt, ostensibly because she is invested with child by the Holy Ghost.

þus in þis hast" (197-200).¹⁰² As in the Chester play, Elizabeth blesses Mary and the fruit of her body, and her speech indicates that she knows that Mary will be the mother of Christ:

Þis is ioyfull tydyng
 Ðat I may nowe here see,
 Ðe modyr of my lord kyng,
 Thus-gate come to me.
 Sone als þe voyce of þine haylsing
 Moght myn neres entre and be,
 Ðe childe in my wombe so yenge,
 Makes grete myrthe vnto þe.
 (209-216)

Mary does not inform Elizabeth of the Immaculate Conception, but Elizabeth confesses that she sees the joyful tiding.¹⁰³ The visitation is short, most of it in praise of God by Mary, and of God and Mary by Elizabeth. At the end of the play, the word magnificat is written, suggesting, perhaps, that the two women, or Mary alone, repeat or chant the canticle.

¹⁰²The phrase, ". . . of all my kynne . . .," may have one of two meanings. It may mean that Mary comes to discuss the relatives. In other words, of in the sense of about. In the Towneley cycle, Mary and Elizabeth discuss relatives, but here, they do not. Also, Mary may want to talk to Elizabeth, rather than to any other member of the family.

¹⁰³If Elizabeth is familiar with the prophecies, she may also realize that Mary is the maiden who will bear the Christchild. Also, in both Chester and York, the baby in Elizabeth's womb responds to Mary's presence. Here, there may be a clue to Mary's pregnancy.

Joseph's trouble about Mary, which is, indeed, a humorous account, opens with Joseph's bemoaning the fact that he is old and weak:

of grete mornynge may I me mene,
 And walk full werily be þis way,
 For nowe þan wende I best have bene
 all ease and reste by reasonne ay.
 for I am of grete elde,
 Wayke and al vnwelde

(1-6)

He states that he is ashamed because he has married a young woman:

For shame what sall I saie
 that þus gates nowe on myne alde dase
 Has wedded a yonge wenche to my wiff,
 And may no3t tryne over two strase!

(10-13)

He regrets the fact that he cannot be more active with his wife. The example he cites to illustrate the extent of his weakness is humorous. He explains that he cannot easily step over two straws, implying that if he should do anything that would drain his strength, he would die. Obviously, he is weak and hardly able to walk. Next, he addresses the Lord, "Now lorde! þou me wisse and rede, / or sone me dryue to dede, / þou may best stynte þis striffe" (18-20). In other words, he asks God to counsel and advise him; otherwise, he may be driven to death. Then, he recalls, regretfully, the circumstances that surrounded his marriage, explaining

that because the rod that he was holding had blossomed, he had been forced to marry the young girl. He asserts, twice, that the bargain he has made is "bad." Eventually, he reveals the source of his discontent, "My 3onge wiffe is with childe full grete, / Ðat makes me nowe sorowe vnsoght. / Ðat reproffe nere has slayne me!" (43-45). His realization of this fact has almost killed him. Obviously, he knows that the child does not belong to him, because he is too old and weak. He is also worried that someone will ask him about his wife's pregnancy, because he cannot lie about her condition. He realizes, also, that, if he stays with her, he will not escape public ridicule. He continues to pine, remarking that if he should lose his life, he is without blame for her pregnancy. Here, the implication is that she was supposed to remain a virgin, and Joseph is, consequently, under great stress, because she is now pregnant. Although he is blameless for her pregnancy, as a husband, it is clear that he has failed to control his wife's actions. Moreover, he is ashamed of the fact that Mary is pregnant, because people will know that his wife has lain with another man. Since this problem is too great for him, he leaves home, thus avoiding the shame of his wife's no longer being the virgin that she is supposed to be. Although he plans to leave Mary,

permanently, he decides before leaving to speak with her, but before he does, he comments:

But wele I wote thurgh prophicie,
 a maiden clene suld bere a childe,
 But it is nought sho, sekirly,
 Forthy I wate I am begiled.
 And why ne walde som yonge man ta her,
 For certis I thynke ouer-ga hir
 Into som wodes wilde

(61-67)

He has heard the prophecy concerning an Immaculate Conception, but he refuses to believe that it is his wife who has received the Christchild; rather, he concludes that some young man in his absence has taken her into the woods. Evidently, at this point, Joseph enters his home where one of Mary's handmaidens, designated as i Puella, welcomes him. He asks, "Whare is þat 3onge virgine, / Marie, my berde so bright?" (77-78). Since he has been pining away because his wife is with child, his question, here, is rather facetious, and, perhaps, even intended to be sarcastic. Puella summons Mary, who is sitting " . . . at hir boke full faste prayand . . ." (81). Mary welcomes Joseph, and he enters into polite conversation, finally remarking: "Thy wombe is waxen grete, thynke me, / Ðou arte with barne, allas! for care! / A! maidens, wa worthe 3ou! / Ðat lete hir lere swilke lare" (95-98). When he reproaches her maidens for having allowed her to err, the

second Puella advises him to think no harm of Mary. He, then, becomes angry with the handmaiden and demands that she leave. Possibly gesturing or pointing, he retorts, "Hir sidis shewes she is with child. / Whose is't Marie?" (102-103). His wife replies, "Sir, Goddis and youres" (103). Joseph insists that he is beguiled and argues, "With me flesshely was þou neuere fylid . . ." (106). In other words, he is reminding her that they have never experienced union. He threatens, then, the two handmaidens, prying for the truth. The Second Puella replies that she has nothing to say, regardless of his threats, informing him that the handmaidens were not away from Mary, either by day or night; that Mary was always in their sight, concluding "Come here no man bytwene / to touche þat berde so bright" (121-122). The First Puella agrees, insisting that no man, except an angel, who feeds Mary each day, has been near her; therefore, the Puella reasons that the Holy Ghost is the only one who could have invested Mary with child. However, Joseph remains unconvinced:

Ðanne see I wele youre menyng is,
 Ðe Aungell has made hir with childe.
 Nay, some man in aungellis liknesse
 With somkyn gawde has hir begiled;
 And þat trow I.
 (134-138)

Again, he expresses self-concern, grieving, "I dare loke no

man in þe face, / Derfely for dole why ne were I dede. / Me
lathis my liff!" (147-149). He admits that he is ashamed,
and, again, he speaks of death, as he has done several times.
(One recalls that Death is not mentioned in the Chester play.)
He pities himself, asking, again, why Mary committed such an
act. Mary insists, however, that she did not sin. Inces-
santly, Joseph questions Mary, demanding an answer that will
satisfy him, while Mary persists in explaining that the child
is his and God's. With obvious disgust, Joseph snaps:

Nay, I ne haue nocht a-do with-all.
Neme it na more to me, be still!
Ðou wate als wele as I,
Ðat we two same fleshly
Wroght neuer swilk werkis with ill.
(169-173)

Thus, he declares that they have never consumated their
marriage. Since he is only human, he knows merely of the
biological explanation for pregnancy; therefore, he does not
relent in his efforts to know the father of the child, but
Mary calmly repeats her answer, "None but youre selfe" (178).
He replies, "I did it neuere . . ." (180). When he insists
that he has never taken her maidenhead, Mary tells him, "But
God and yhow . . ." (189), and Joseph confutes her, "Ðou art
yonge and I am alde, / Slike werkis yf I do walde, / Ðase
games fra me are gane" (195-197). He reminds her of his age,

remarking that, even if he would desire to have sexual union with her, he could not. On two more occasions he interrogates her. Finally, he decides to leave, instructing her to ". . . sitte stille here tille I come agayne, / Me bus an erand here beside" (229-230). Undoubtedly, she obeys him, although she may show irritation by responding:

Now, grete God! be you wisse,
 And mende you of your mysse,
 Of me, what so betyde.
 als he is kyng of blysse,
 Sende yhou som seand of þis.
 In truth þat ye might bide.
 (231-236)

Joseph, now, leaves the house and is next discovered in a setting representing a wooded area, asking God to guide him through the wilderness. Since he is weary and has a heavy heart, he settles down to sleep. Gabriel, then, approaches and addresses him, but Joseph tells Gabriel to leave him and let him sleep. The angel persists, "Rise vppe! and slepe na mare, / Ðou makist her herte full sare. / Ðat loues þe alther best" (251-253). Joseph complains that, no matter where he goes, he cannot rest peacefully. For the first time, however, he notices that the creature to whom he is talking is not human, exclaiming, "Say, what arte þou? telle me this thyng" (257). Gabriel identifies himself and relates

the story of Mary's pregnancy, assuring Joseph that Mary is a virgin. Once more, however, Joseph asks, "And is this soth, aungell, þou saise?" (277). Gabriel affirms his statements and instructs Joseph to journey to Bethlehem during the night. Probably, Gabriel then ascends to heaven, and Joseph returns to Mary to beg her forgiveness.

Mary claims that he has done nothing that she needs to forgive. Again, Joseph insists that he is to blame. Next, he orders Mary to pack their poor clothes and help him place them on his back, since Mary cannot carry the clothes to Bethlehem, because a ". . . litill thyng will women dere" (305-306). In other words, a little strenuous activity will injure a woman. For the first time in the play, Joseph is not a mournful, senile old man, overcome with self-pity. One recalls that at the beginning of the episode, he was hardly able to step over two straws, but, here, he is able to carry a pack of clothes to Bethlehem. Ultimately, his sickly state is seen not to have been caused as much by age, as by his being upset over Mary's pregnancy. Joseph is obviously the jealous husband, clearly apparent in his attempt to discover the identity of the child's father by interrogating Mary on eight occasions and the Puellas once. The Chester cycle Joseph is not quite so persistent, asking

Mary only once.

The York and Chester playwrights differ in their handlings of the angels' visits to Mary and Joseph. In the Joseph episode, the Chester dramatist does not identify the angel as Gabriel; however, in The Annunciation, the angel is Gabriel. In York, however, Gabriel is the angel in both episodes. Although the Prologue indicates that the angel, who approaches Mary, is Gabriel, the playwright does not refer to him as Gabriel as the Chester dramatist does. In York, the angel is identified as Angelus. Also, in Chester, the angel appears to Joseph in a dream, as in the Scriptural account; however, in York, he awakens Joseph from sleep. In York, Joseph's question, "Say, what arte þou?" (257), suggests that he realizes suddenly that he is not speaking to a human being. If so, Joseph may make some appropriate gesture, such as getting up rapidly, moving closer to Gabriel, blinking and rubbing his eyes, or changing facial expression. Also, in the York play, obviously, Joseph has seen Mary before the episode of his troubles begins. He is not with her at the beginning of this episode, because he cannot bear the shame of staying with an unfaithful woman. In the Chester play, the audience is a witness to Joseph's first realization that Mary is pregnant.

In York, as in Chester, the angels probably descend or ascend by means of some kind of mechanical apparatus. Possibly, these descensions and ascensions were accompanied by music. Also, one may suppose that the enactments of the conceptions were staged similarly in Chester and York, even though the York dramatist does not mention the Holy Ghost's "shadowing" Mary. In defense of Mary's innocence, one Puella remarks to Joseph that an angel has been feeding Mary, in which comment there is perhaps a clue to the nature of the staging. Gabriel may have placed some food or an object into Mary's mouth, and, then, have blocked the audience's view with his robe, thus enabling her to alter her costume.¹⁰⁴ As in the Chester play, time and distance are symbolic in York, because Mary is at once seen to be pregnant; and, within a few steps, she has journeyed to Elizabeth's home. Moreover, the entire stage represents the microcosm and macrocosm, from Heaven to Earth to Hell; therefore, spectators may have supplied verisimilitude for the locale.

Throughout these three plays in York, one discovers

¹⁰⁴Rossiter, *op. cit.*, p. 65, cites a list of articles purchased for a miracle play, in which is "'Item paide to Robt. Mathews for a pair of Wombes,'" presumably for Mary and Elizabeth.

several examples of internal evidence for costume. For example, obviously, Mary undergoes a physical change, because both Elizabeth and Joseph know, upon seeing her, that Mary is with child. Also, the lad or woman who portrayed Mary may have worn a costume that suggested brightness, because both the second Puella and Joseph describe her with the word bright. Perhaps, she wears a disc, representing a halo, or cosmetics, suggesting a glow. Furthermore, the person who portrays Gabriel may have worn a costume which symbolized holiness, because, in contradicting the Puella's statement about an angel's visiting Mary, Joseph argues that a man, dressed in gawde attire, deceived Mary. Thus, his use of gawde implies that Gabriel's costume may have been garish or, perhaps, gilded. Also, when Gabriel awakens Joseph, his sudden awareness that he is talking to an angel may signify, indeed, that Gabriel was wearing a symbolic costume, similar to the one suggested for the angels in Chester.

Scene locations in York, moreover, are not as vaguely identified as they are in the Chester plays. The location of Prologue is questionable; however, he probably stood towards the front of the stage in an unlocated area. The scene of Gabriel's address to Mary is located near her home, because the Puellas inform Joseph that Mary has not been out

of their sight, and that an angel is the only "man" she has seen. Evidently, the only time during which Mary is not at home involves her visit to Elizabeth. Furthermore, the only logical location for the Mary-Elizabeth episode is Elizabeth's home, which seems to be some distance from Mary's dwelling, because the two women react as if they have not seen each other for some time. The location of the first part of Joseph's trouble about Mary is, probably, an area near Mary and Joseph's home, because Joseph determines to leave, but, before he does, he walks over to the house to question Mary. When Gabriel appears to Joseph, the location is that of a forested area. Joseph specifically prays for God's guidance through the wilderness, and, before he sleeps, he remarks, "Bot or I passe þis hill . . ." (241). Then, he decides to sleep before he surmounts the hill; therefore, a hill, probably, painted or constructed representing a mound, was visible on stage. Possibly, the settings were quite similar for the three episodes in the two cycles.

The versification of York is unlike that of the Chester quatrains. In the first play, The Annunciation, and visit of Elizabeth to Mary, the Prologue is contained in twelve-line stanzas, with an ababababcdcd rhyme scheme and a large amount of alliteration. Most stanzas are divided into three,

four-line segments. Usually, a semicolon or a period comes at the end of four lines. Craig refers to this twelve-line stanza as the northern septenar stanza, which contains eight lines of four accents and four lines of three accents.¹⁰⁵

The ab lines move rapidly, as they should, since Prologue is narrating an account of man's conditions and relating the messages of the various prophets who told of Christ's coming. The four lines of cd, however, slow the pace set by the eight ab lines. The effect is, definitely, not as noticeable and spectacular as that of the "bob and wheel" in the alliterative verse of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, but the results of the cd lines and the bob and wheel are somewhat similar. Although the bob and wheel increases the pace of the line, and the cd line decreases it, both would have an effect upon members of an audience. Certainly, after eight lines of alternate rhyming of the same two sounds, the sudden change to two different sounds would be, at least, noticeable. Also, in some stanzas, the cd lines contain, perhaps, a more significant statement than the preceding part of the stanza. The different sounds and the slowing effect serve, indeed, to emphasize a statement. For example, the most significant

¹⁰⁵Craig, English Religious Drama, p. 236.

and revealing information in the following stanza occurs in the last four lines:

More of þis maiden me meves [he],
 This prophett sais for oure socoure,
 A wande sall brede of Jesse boure;
 And of þis same also sais hee,
 Vpponne þat wande sall springe a floure,
 Where-on þe haly gast sall be,
 To governe it with grete honnoure.
 That wande meynes vntill vs
 Dis mayden, even and morne,
 And þe floure is Jesus,
 Ðat of þat blyst bees borne.
 (73-84)

The flower which blossoms is Jesus. Certainly, the last four lines are the climax of the stanza, which the change in rhyme emphasizes. Also, many lines of the stanzas are alliterative:

With-ou^ten bale, bidand in blisse . . .
 And sithen what sorouse sor warre sene . . .
 Tille god graunted þam grace . . .
 Of helpe, als he hadde hyght.
 (4, 7, 11-12)

Some are quite heavily alliterated; others contain no alliteration. Most of the alliteration is dispensed with, however, in The Annunciation, and the visit of Elizabeth to Mary. Since, in both episodes, conversation exists, the alliteration is not as obvious as it is in scenes with one speaker, like the Prologue. Certainly, the device of alliteration makes listening to one speaker easier and more interesting

than the use of no alliteration. In both The Annunciation, and the Visit, the stanzas are eight lines long, with simple, alternate rhyming. As with the Prologue's narrative, the eight-line stanzas are usually divided either by a semicolon or period into two four-line segments. Only twice, however, in the two episodes does the York playwright allow more than one person to speak a full stanza. The first division occurs when Gabriel addresses Mary, speaking four lines, praising her and telling her that of all women she is blessed. Mary, who is, of course, surprised, immediately inquires as to what is happening. Thus, the rhyme is sustained without interruption from Gabriel's proclamation into Mary's query. The other instance in which a stanza is divided occurs when Gabriel makes his final speech to Mary before she departs for Elizabeth's home. Gabriel is given the first four lines, and the next four are assigned to Mary in her greeting of her cousin. Here, a definite break and hesitation in the stanza is necessary, because, while Gabriel exits, Mary takes her few steps to Elizabeth's home. This short time would not be long enough, however, for the audience to have forgotten the last four lines. At least, one thinks that the rhyming sounds still would be somewhat familiar; therefore, the two scenes would be connected, as the York playwright

intended them to be, since he did not write separate plays. Here, the audience again supplies verisimilitude for distance and time. Since this simple eight-line ab stanza, with a minimal amount of alliteration, occurs in these two accounts, the monotonous tone that might accompany such an obvious rhyme scheme is broken. Although the meter is rather irregular, in general, it is iambic.

The rhyme schemes of the second play, Joseph's trouble about Mary, is much more complex than those found in the first play. The fact that it is complex supports Craig's theory that, in the York cycle, Joseph's trouble about Mary has been revised extensively.¹⁰⁶ Most of the play consists of ten-line stanzas, with the rhyme scheme, ababccbccb, which is, actually, a quatrain succeeded by two triplets. The triplets are, sometimes, shorter lines than the quatrain, and the b line of the triplets is, occasionally, shorter than the c lines. The double c lines in the triplets quicken the pace set by the quatrain, and the b line at the end of each quatrain gives a feeling of finality; therefore, the York dramatist breaks the phrasing, and, sometimes, the thought, after every ccb triplet. The verse is not as

¹⁰⁶Ibid., pp. 216-217.

alliterative as the Prologue section, but more alliterative than The Annunciation or Visit. Some lines are quite alliterative:

Of grete mornynq may I me mene . . .
 I may nowder buske ne belde,
 But owther in frith or felde;
 For shame what sall I saie
 (1, 8-10)

Starting with Joseph's return to interrogate Mary, the length of the stanzas and the rhyme schemes become irregular. Stanzas are eight to eleven lines long, most containing eleven lines. Several of the stanzas follow an abababcdcdc or an ababcabcdcdc rhyme scheme; others are extremely irregular. Also, the lengths of the lines are not as uniform as the lengths in the first part of the play. In fact, line lengths are, in general, extremely erratic. The variances in lengths of lines and stanza rhyme schemes occur during Joseph's cross examination of Mary and the Puellas. Certainly, these irregularities are in accordance with the short answers and questions, and, in general, the fast-moving, stichomythic conversation. Indeed, the poet could not have created a realistic conversation had he been trying to keep meter and rhyme scheme regular. Also, the playwright dispenses with most of the alliteration present in the first part of the play. These erratic lengths of lines and rhyme

schemes aid the playwright in depicting an emotionally upset husband who wants to know to whom his wife has given herself. In Smith's edition, the irregularities commence in stanza eight and end in stanza nineteen. From the twentieth stanza to the end of the play, with the exception of stanza twenty-two, the rhyme scheme reverts again to ababccbccb. The return of the original stanzaic pattern occurs at the end of Joseph's interrogation and during his conversation with Gabriel. The twenty-second stanza contains, again, shorter, faster answers between Joseph and Mary than one finds in the rest of the stanzas in the last section.

The versification in York varies, therefore, from event to event. The alternate rhyming without alliteration is, perhaps, even more simple than the Chester quatrain, but the alliterative verse, especially the complex stanzas of the Joseph play, is much more sophisticated and, of course, is contained in a later stanzaic form than that used in the Chester play. One notes that the stanzaic pattern in Chester remains the same throughout the three episodes, suggesting that either the same playwright wrote all three plays, or that the same reviser reworked them. The York plays, however, reflect the work of several dramatists and revisers.

Even though versification in the two cycles differs, the music and costuming may have been quite similar. In Chester, the internal evidence for use of music is more substantial than in York. Similarly, one finds more internal evidence concerning costuming in York, than in Chester. Actually, one must base judgments on music and costume, chiefly, upon implications within the speeches, knowledge of the art of the period, and opinions of scholars; therefore, conclusions are not always attainable. One assumes, however, that the two (or more) playwrights employed similar music and costume, probably symbolically.

In York, The Annunciation, and visit of Elizabeth to Mary is simple in form, and does not possess, perhaps, the extremely religious tone that pervades the Chester plays. Joseph's trouble about Mary, however, is not as simple, religious, and serious as its counterpart in Chester, or as the other two accounts in York. Obviously, the York Joseph play has been revised. Since a comic, humanistic element is present, along with the religious element, it is characteristic of the later cycle plays. Because Joseph is a self-centered, jealous, and emotional husband until Gabriel informs him of the real situation, his acceptance of Gabriel's message, then, emphasizes the religious purpose of the play.

CHAPTER IV

THE TOWNELEY-WAKEFIELD CYCLE: INCIPIIT ANNUNCIACIO AND INCIPIIT SALUTACIO ELEZABETH EPISODES

The problem of a date for the Towneley cycle, its name having been derived from the family that owned the manuscript, is less controversial than in the case of the Chester and York cycles. Harbage lists the origin of this cycle as c. 1390-1450;¹⁰⁷ Craig dates it as c. 1450.¹⁰⁸ Presented both at Yorkshire and Wakefield, the cycle consists of thirty-two plays.¹⁰⁹ The Incipit Annunciatio includes the events of the Annunciation and the Return of Joseph; and the Incipit Salutacio Elezabeth is a separate play. One recalls that in Chester, these three plays were part of a large Nativity play; while in York, The Annunciation, and visit of Elizabeth to Mary was one play and Joseph's trouble about Mary a separate play. In the Towneley cycle, the order of these plays is reversed. For example, Joseph returns home before Mary journeys to Elizabeth's home. However, the order of

¹⁰⁷Harbage, op. cit., p. 8.

¹⁰⁸Craig, English Religious Drama, p. 207.

¹⁰⁹Harbage, op. cit., p. 9.

the three episodes is more logically presented in the Towneley cycle than in the Chester or York. In the Wakefield play, Mary does not go to Elizabeth to confirm what Gabriel has said, because she believes him.¹¹⁰ On the other hand, her visit to Elizabeth's home in the Towneley play seems warranted, because she and Elizabeth have something in common; both are expecting babies under unusual circumstances. For its religious purposes, then, one thinks the order of the Wakefield play the more logical, while that of the Chester and York plays is, perhaps, more credible if one takes into his consideration human nature.

The Towneley play, the Incipit Annunciacio, opens with God's recalling the history of the Creation of man and his Fall. Next, He reveals that the time has come for man to be redeemed:

ffor he has boght his syn full sore,
 Thise fyfe thowsand yeris and more,
 ffyrst inerte and sythen in hell;
 Bot long therin shall he not dwell.
 (11-14)

He reveals that man has suffered in Hell for five thousand years, a long enough time. He clearly admits that, because

¹¹⁰Martin Stevens, "The Dramatic Setting of the Wakefield Annunciation," PMLA, LXXXI (June, 1966), 197.

man was deceived, he had eaten the forbidden fruit. Consequently, God announces that He will send forth His son to save humanity in the form of man:

I wyll that my son manhede take,
 ffor reson syll that ther be thre,
 A man, a madyn, and a tre:
 Man for man, tre for tre,
 Madyn for madyn; thus shall it be.
 (30-34)

Next, God catalogues the predictions which have been made by the prophets.¹¹¹ The Wakefield master employs the character, Sybyll, to tell of Christ's coming among the pagans, thereby teaching the heathens that their world had presentiments of Christianity.¹¹² God addresses Gabriel, bidding him to go to Mary: "Ryse vp, gabriell, and weynd / vnto a madyn that is heynd . . ." (53-54) "Angell must to mary go, / ffor the feynd was eue fo . . ." (61-62).¹¹³ Thus, God motivates

¹¹¹Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 120, cites the source, as it was in the York Prologue and the Chester Balaam and Balak, as, probably, a Prophetae play. In the Towneley play, one of the prophets is named Sybyll, whom the Chester playwright employs in a scene between Octavian and Sibyle, the source of which is, possibly, French.

¹¹²Mâle, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

¹¹³When God makes His command, it is clear that Gabriel is sitting, lying, or stationed at a lower level than God, because God orders him to rise.

Gabriel, giving him further instructions by reminding him that he is acting in the capacity of His surrogate. Moreover, God discloses the mystery of this mission, "In hyr body wyll I lyght, / That is to me clenly dyght; / She shall of hyr body bere / God and man wythouten dere" (71-74). Herein, He does not mention the Holy Ghost, but He emphasizes once more Mary's giving birth to God and man in purity. Indeed, at the conclusion of this account of the history of man with its enumeration of prophecies and instructions to Gabriel, the audience should have been made fully aware of the fact that Jesus, both as man and God, links man to God again. When God concludes, Gabriel then descends, in an undesignated manner, from Heaven, hailing Mary:

hayll, mary, gracyouse!
 hayll, madyn and godis spouse!
 Vnto the I lowte;
 Of all vyrgyns thou art qwene,
 That euer was, or shall be seyn,
 wythouten dowte.¹¹⁴

(77-82)

Before Mary has uttered a word, Gabriel informs her that she will conceive and bear Jesus, the son of God. After Gabriel's dialogue of five stanzas, each of which contains six lines

¹¹⁴George England (ed.), The Towneley Plays, p. 405. Obviously, Gabriel first bows to Mary as indicated by lowte, meaning to "bow the head."

of revelation, Mary asks, "What is thi name?" (107). Gabriel, then, introduces himself, and Mary inquires,

. . . how shuld it be?
 I cam neuer by man's syde,
 Bot has avowed my madynhede,
 ffrom fleshly gett.
 Therfor I wote not how
 That this be brokyn, as a vow
 That I haue hett
 (112-118)

She confesses that she has never had intercourse and that she has made a vow to remain a virgin. She does not understand, therefore, how she can be invested with child.

Gabriel answers:

lady, this is the preuate;
 The holy gost shall light in the,
 And his vertue,
 he shall vmshade and fulfyll
 That thi madynhede shall neuer spyll,
 Bot ay be new.¹¹⁵
 (125-130)

Again, Gabriel explains that her child will be God's, and then refers to the miracle of Elizabeth's six months'

¹¹⁵As in the Chester play, the Holy Ghost is supposed to "shadow over" Mary. However, when God gives instructions to Gabriel about explaining the annunciation to Mary, He does not mention the Holy Ghost's "lighting" in Mary; rather, He states that He will invest her with child. Also, the Holy Ghost performs the act. The special office of the Holy Ghost may be that of working miracles such as the Immaculate Conception. At any rate, Gabriel knows, without being told, that the Holy Ghost will impregnate Mary. Perhaps, here, the playwright has been slightly anachronistic.

pregnancy in her old age, a statement also occurring in both the Chester and York plays to emphasize that nothing is impossible for God.¹¹⁶ Unlike the Gabriel of the York or Chester plays, the Towneley Gabriel mentions Zacharias, Elizabeth's husband. Praising God, Mary then agrees to conceive:

I lofe my lord all weldand,
 I am his madyn at his hand,
 And in his wold;
 I trow bodword that thou me bryng,
 Be done to me in all thyng,
 As thou has told.

(143-148)

At this point in both the York and Chester plays, the act of the conception seems to occur, immediately. In the Towneley version, however, Gabriel leaves Mary, explaining, ". . . me behovys to seynd . . ." (150). Before he ascends, Mary avers, "ffar to my freynd, / Who the can send, / ffor man-kynde sake" (152-154).¹¹⁷

The account of Joseph's tribulation follows, immediately, after Mary has undergone physical change. When Joseph first

¹¹⁶Again, Gabriel was not informed of this fact by God. He simply supports his general statement, that nothing is impossible for God, with the specific example of Elizabeth's pregnancy.

¹¹⁷Freynd is, evidently, Christ; therefore, the Holy Ghost may not invest Mary with Jesus, until Gabriel has returned to Heaven.

sees her, he exclaims:

All myghty god, what may this be!
 Of mary my wyfe meruels me,
 Alas, what has she wroght?
 A, hyr body is grete and she with childe!
 ffor me was she neuer fylyd,
 Therfor myin is it noght.
 (155-160)

Instantly, he realizes that she is pregnant, since he notes that her body is great. Joseph, upset because he has never copulated with her, bemoans the fact that he married a young woman and mentions the bargain, again, as he does in the York version. The Towneley play contains, however, an idea not present in either the Chester or York episode, in which Joseph reasons, "I myght well wyt that yowthede / wold haue lykyng of man" (165-166). In other words, he admits that he should have known that young women are attracted to men. Obviously befuddled, he decides to question his wife about the identity of the child's father. Therefore, he greets her, facetiously and tauntingly, although she does not realize that he is doing so. The tone in the York play, when Joseph asks the Puella about the "virgin," is only a little more humorous and invective than the tone of the Towneley sequence. Here, he exclaims, mockingly, "hayll, mary, and well ye be! / why, bot woman, what chere with the?" (179-180). Mary replies, "The better, sir, for you" (181).

Joseph then asks her to whom the child belongs, and she responds, "Syr, ye, and god of heuen" (187). He denies, then, that he had anything to do with the pregnancy, retorting, "I had neuer with the to do, / how shuld it then be myne? / whos is that chyld, so god the spede?" (192-194). Although Mary repeats that the child is Joseph's and God's, Joseph does not believe her, however, telling her that she is not to blame, because all women desire intercourse. He reminds her, nevertheless, that her condition indicates, obviously, that she has sinned. She reiterates that God knows all of her actions. Although the confused Joseph does not know what to do, he is determined not to be known as the father of the child; and, therefore, he leaves.¹¹⁸ Then, he recalls the circumstances in which the bishops of the temple had decided that Mary should wed. Although God was the only one whom she said she would marry, the law had made her marriage mandatory. At the time, Joseph was among those bachelors who were summoned to the temple and given a white wand to offer. All but Joseph, who stood aside, offered a wand. Later, however, when he was forced to offer his rod, it

¹¹⁸At times, directing his speeches to the audience, Joseph may move from Mary to another part of the stage, because Mary is given no more lines to speak.

blossomed. Hone notes that the source for this episode is apocryphal.¹¹⁹ Thus, because the wand had blossomed, the reluctant Joseph had been compelled to wed Mary:

when I all thus had wed hir thare,
 we and my madyns home can fare,
 That kyngys doghters were;
 All wroght thay sylk to fund them on,
 Marie wroght purpyll, the oder none
 bot othere colers sere.¹²⁰
 (269-274)

Joseph recalls that he had asked Mary's handmaidens about the father of the child, at which time they had replied that only an angel had visited her. However, Joseph reasons, "A heuenly thyng, for sothe, is [an angel], / And she is erthly; this may not be, / it is som othere man" (296-298). Obviously, since Joseph is accustomed to the Old Testament concepts of an awesome God, he cannot reconcile God as man. Once more, he insists that, even though Mary's age does not excuse her sin, he realizes that young women are, naturally, wanton and ". . . wyll nedys play them / with yong men, if old forsake them . . ." (302-303). Nevertheless, since he and Mary have never "played," she is pure for him, and always

¹¹⁹William Hone, Ancient Mysteries Described, pp. 108-109.

¹²⁰The Maidens are, undoubtedly, like the Puellas in the York play.

will remain so. However, if the child is really God's son, he considers himself unworthy of even being close to her. Finally, he decides to journey into the wilderness.

Promptly, Angelus descends to him. Here, as in the Chester play, the angel is not identified; however, the angel who previously visited Mary was definitely Gabriel. Evidently, Joseph has not reached the wilderness before the angel descends to him, because Angelus advises, ". . . weynd thou nocht, / To wyldernes so wylde; / Turne home to thi spouse agane, / look thou deme in hir no trane, / ffor she was neuer ffylde" (327-331). Thus, the angel reveals to Joseph that the Holy Ghost has made Mary with child. At once, Joseph praises God for entrusting him with the care of Jesus, grieves because he has distrusted Mary, and admits that he will beg her forgiveness. He returns to her at once, inquiring, ". . . what chere?" (350). His greeting is no longer facetious as it was earlier in the play. He admits his sinning against Mary and God and begs forgiveness, which she grants him without hesitation. He tells her, then, that he is satisfied with her as his wife even though she is not wealthy. Then, the episode concludes with Joseph's looking to God, beseeching Him to grant him the grace, power, and might to keep his wife and child until his life's end.

After Joseph's last speech, Mary journeys to Elizabeth's home. In the Towneley play, it is obvious that the two women are not neighbors, because Elizabeth inquires of Mary about friends and relatives whom she has not seen for some time. Mary salutes Elizabeth, "My lord of heuen, that sytts he, / And all thyng seys with ee, / The safe, Elezabeth" (1-3). Elizabeth then welcomes her, "Welcom, mary, blyssed blome, / Ioyfull am I of thi com / To me, from nazareth" (4-6). Mary inquires about Elizabeth's well-being, and Elizabeth replies that she is getting along as well as an old woman can. Mary admits that she has wanted to speak with Elizabeth for a long time, especially since Elizabeth, an old woman, is expecting a child. Elizabeth, then, asks Mary about her friends, and her parents, and is informed that everyone is well and that both "Ioachym and Anna" are still alive, to which Elizabeth replies, "Els were my hart full sore" (27). As in the Chester and York plays, Elizabeth blesses Mary and the fruit of her body, the first dialogic mention of Mary's pregnancy. Evidently, since Mary has not spoken to Elizabeth of the Christchild, Elizabeth already knows about the child that Mary carries as revealed in her reference to Mary's "stevyn [voice] of angell" (38), and because Elizabeth's child, at this point, within her womb

leaps with joy. Elizabeth then blesses Mary, who, in turn, repeats the magnificat and gloria patri, explaining that she must depart, because she has stayed for a long time, for which the audience must, once again, provide verisimilitude. Before Mary leaves, the women indulge in typical social amenities. For example, Elizabeth requests that Mary kiss her and sends her regards to the relatives. Thus, the play begins and ends on this human element.

There are unlocated scenes in these Towneley plays, just as there were in the Chester and York plays. For example, the location of God at the beginning of the Incipit Annunciacio is obvious. He is speaking from Heaven, an area above the stage proper, or the world. Also, one sees that time and distance are, again, symbolic when one considers that the stage represented the entire universe. That God sat "high" on stage is obvious, as revealed in Mary's salutation to Elizabeth, "My lord of heuen, that syttys he . . ." (1). Furthermore, if, as Elizabeth declares, God sees "all things," He is not only elevated so that He is able to see all events on the stage, and possibly the audience, but He is, also, present at all times. This God was omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent, just as He was in the Chester and York plays. The location of Gabriel's salutation to Mary, however, is

vague. As in the York and Chester episodes, however, a locale in the vicinity of Mary and Joseph's home seems to be a reasonable conjecture for the scene of the conception, especially since Joseph remarks, "I askyd [the handmaidens] who that had done, / And thay me sayde an angell sone, / syn that I went from hame . . ." (284-286). Perhaps, the same general area near to Joseph's home would be a reasonable suggestion for the locale of his lament which he renders before he converses with Mary. Gabriel would ascend, Mary would walk over to the house, and Joseph would come upon the stage. Noticing her pregnancy from a "distance," he would begin his lament. Even though, in reality, Joseph would be within hearing range of Mary, she would have to pretend as if she did not hear him, until he addressed her. Here, symbolic distance, once more, becomes especially significant. The verisimilitude supplied by the spectators is absolutely necessary for the drama to become, not drama, but reality to the audience. Also, in the course of Joseph's later lament, he remarks that he has asked the handmaidens to identify the man who has visited Mary. He does not, however, question them when he is talking to Mary, seemingly, the only opportunity for him to interrogate the handmaidens. Probably, this discrepancy did not disturb the spectators whose minds

were imaginative enough to supply verisimilitude in such instances and did not require that every detail be logically accounted for and explained. When Joseph returns after Angelus' revelation, Mary asks where he has been, because the Wakefield dramatist wants the audience to realize that Joseph has been gone, perhaps, for a time longer than the action in the play has suggested. Again, the spectators must provide verisimilitude for a temporal matter. The example, here, however, is minor. Finally, as in the previous cycles, the only probable location for the scene between Mary and Elizabeth is that of Elizabeth's home. In her first address to Mary, Elizabeth suggests that Mary has traveled a lengthy distance out of Nazareth.

In his investigation of the staging of the Wakefield cycle plays, Rose suggests a fixed stage.¹²¹ He bases his hypothesis, partially, upon an analogy to Craig's fixed-stage theory for the Ludus Coventriae cycle. One recalls that both the York and Chester plays were associated with the trade guilds, but the Wakefield and Ludus Coventriae cycles were not; rather, they were the responsibility of the

¹²¹Martial Rose (ed.), The Wakefield Mystery Plays, pp. 29-48.

religious guilds. It is important to remember that all people were members of city's religious guild.¹²² Craig maintains that pageant wagon processions may have passed through the city, but that since all guild members were required to attend the presentations of these plays, the only place which could have accommodated such a concourse of people was the cathedral and the area surrounding it.¹²³ Rose suggests, also, that the Wakefield plays would have required a stationary stage on which a variety of levels could be used to represent Heaven, Earth, and Hell; where the journey motif could be effectively represented; and where messengers, used frequently in the plays, could run back and forth between acting areas.¹²⁴ Possibly, a logical type of stage that the Towneley cycle seems to require would be one similar to the Valenciennes stage, as Southern's description of it seems to accommodate the Wakefield needs.¹²⁵ On the other hand, Rose holds that, in the Towneley cycle,

¹²²Ibid., pp. 29-30.

¹²³Craig, English Religious Drama, p. 275.

¹²⁴Rose, op. cit., pp. 33-34.

¹²⁵Richard Southern, The Seven Ages of the Theatre, pp. 106-108.

the pageant procession wound through town, stopping at various stations and presenting the plays. The procession continued to the churchyard, where the plays were performed on three consecutive days.¹²⁶

In the Incipit Annunciacio, God's "prologue" is contained in rhymed couplets. Many of the lines are iambic tetrameter; however, the meter varies greatly in some lines. The couplets seem to serve no purpose other than to make God's message easy to follow. At one point, in His address, a change from iambic to trochaic and dactyllic seems to have been made in order to emphasize an important line:

I wyll that my son manhede take,
ffor reson wyll that ther be thre,
A man, a madyn, and a tre:
Man for man, tre for tre,
Madyn for madyn; thus shal it be.

(30-34)

The change in meter serves to accentuate the last two lines. The colon, immediately before the last two lines, also, stresses their significance. The fact that the rhyme is self-continued in these four lines merely also aids in closely relating the lines, which deal, specifically, with the same subject. Also, there is some alliteration, however,

¹²⁶Rose, op. cit., pp. 46-47.

not to the extent that there is in Prologue's introduction in the York cycle. The meter and rhyme scheme change, however, when the scene shifts to Gabriel's pronouncement to Mary. The stanza, used throughout the remainder of the Incipit Annunciatio and in the Incipit Salutacio Elezabeth, consists of six lines, rhyming as aabccb. The b lines are shorter than either the a or c lines, and, as in Chester, the b lines slow the pace and give the reader or listener a sense of finality, or, at least, the effect of a pause. The Wakefield dramatist, who achieves a natural pause after the third and sixth lines of each stanza, usually ends his lines with colons, semicolons, or periods. In some instances, however, he concludes an idea at the end of the second line, and uses the first b line (the third line of the stanza) to introduce a different idea:

The child that thou shall bere, madame,
 Shall godys son be callid by name;
 And se, mary,
 Elezabeth, thi cosyn, that is cald geld,
 She has condeyffed a son in elde,
 of zacary

(31-36)

The break occurs after name, and the third line is related to the succeeding three lines. Also, the Towneley playwright uses run-on lines, as for example: "Therfor I wote not how / That this be brokyn, as a vow / That I haue hett . . ."

(116-118). Here, three lines are merged. Although the York and Chester dramatists use the method of an open line to a certain extent, they do not employ it as often as does the Wakefield master. Moreover, unlike the Chester and York playwrights, the Wakefield dramatist often changes speakers in the middle of a line, a feat requiring the second speaker to continue the line rapidly. For example, Mary asks Gabriel "What is thi name?", and Gabriel responds, "gabriell" (107). Mary's question is simple and requires an immediate answer, and the incomplete line demands rapid fulfillment. Only two significant deviations from the aabcch pattern occur in the three accounts, one in the last stanza of Gabriel's salute to Mary, in which the rhyme is aabaab. Gabriel speaks the first three lines, and Mary concludes the stanza. The rhyme scheme, therefore, intimately connects both halves of the stanza. Mary's lines are, in a sense, a continuation of Gabriel's last lines before his departure, because she indicates whom Gabriel will see and what he will do after he has departed, as follows:

Gabriell. Mary, madyn heynd,
me behovys to weynd,
my leyf at the I take.

Marie. ffar to my freynd,
Who the can send,
ffor mankynde sake.

(149-154)

The one other irregular stanza in the text is accounted for as an incomplete or partially lost stanza. Finally, in the Joseph play, one stanza has only three lines.¹²⁷ Indeed, an outstanding characteristic of the Wakefield poet is his ability to sustain his rhyme scheme, rhythmic pattern, and logical conversational word order.

In considering costuming, one must, in certain instances, resort to speculation; however, the three Towneley plays contain much more substantial internal evidence concerning Mary's important costume than do the York and, especially, Chester plays. For example, in recalling his betrothal, Joseph speaks of the events immediately succeeding it:

"[Mary and the handmaidens] wroght thay sylk to fynd them on, / Marie wroght purpyll, the oder none / bot othere colers sere" (272-274). Neither the Chester nor the York dramatist refers to the specific color of a costume. Evidently, Mary has been sewing or fashioning a purple gown; however, Joseph recalls that, at this time, he had to journey into the country to find work, and he departs, of course, before Mary's encounter with Gabriel. Therefore, a logical assumption

¹²⁷Stanza forty, p. 95, contains three lines. England footnotes the stanza, asking whether or not one-half of a stanza of the original were omitted.

would be that Mary had completed and is wearing a purple gown when The Annunciation play commences. As in the Chester and York plays, her costume suggests that she is pregnant, because, upon sight of her, Joseph knows at once that she is pregnant.

Following Mary's speech and Gabriel's ascension in The Annunciation, there is a logical pause; therefore, as she was depicted in the Chester play, she may be "overshadowed" or concealed by the Holy Ghost, thus, enabling her to alter her costume. Also, Elizabeth's reaction to Mary's holiness may indicate that the costume and, perhaps, cosmetics suggest a glowing effect. Gabriel's proclamation, "of all vyrgyns thou art qwene" (80), implies that she may also have worn a crown. Similarly, the references to God as King of Heaven and implications that He sits on a "high throne" suggest that He may, also, have a crown. Certainly, God and Mary, King and Queen of Heaven, may wear crowns, and many medieval and Renaissance artists represent her as wearing a crown. As the York dramatist does not, and the Chester playwright does, the Wakefield master refers to Gabriel as a "bright" angel, suggesting that his costume may have implied his brightness. Perhaps, he may have been dressed in a costume similar to the one used in the Chester play. For

example, he may have been attired in a white robe, may have had gilded hair and wings, may have worn brightly a golden or yellow "halo" about his head, and may have had his face painted with gold or yellow cosmetics, thus, giving it the appearance of glowing, although there is no specific evidence for such an array in the text.

As with costume, one may speculate that the music was handled similarly in the Chester, York, and Towneley plays under consideration. In both Towneley and Chester cycles, one finds much more internal evidence for the use of music, than in York. However, there is more substantial evidence of costume in York and Towneley, than in Chester. For example, in the Towneley Visit play, the fact that Elizabeth tells Mary that she (Mary) has an angel's voice supports the idea that it is Mary who sings or chants the magnificat that follows. Also, as with the Chester and York versions, Mary may initiate a ritual, perhaps, similar to the one enacted in the church, when she sings the canticle. The Towneley and Chester Visit plays contain strong internal evidence of her singing the magnificat; however, in the York play, one may only presume that she may have sung the canticle, since the word magnificat occurs at the conclusion of the play. Moreover, music would seem to have been used, because of the

absence of dialogue, during the act of conception. In the case of the conception episode in the Chester, York, and Towneley cycles, Gabriel's descending may have been associated with conventional music. Ideally, this music would have been consonantal, rather than dissonantal; voices would have been those of castrati tenors, choir boys, or women; and the musical instruments would be high strings or woodwinds, rather than those of a brass choir, unless, of course, Gabriel plays upon the horn which he is supposed to blow on Judgment Day. Surely, brass would be appropriate to a representation of the whole majesty of Heaven, and an instrument similar to a clavichord, harpsichord, or organ, which, because of the church, was the most popular and most respected of all medieval instruments, may have been used only for the purpose of introducing or concluding God's speeches. Indeed, one thinks that certain instruments, tones, and melodies may have represented specific characters or actions. For example, while consonance would be representative of Heaven, dissonance would symbolize chaos and the tortures of Hell. Furthermore, an extremely contrapuntal line may have been employed as "Hell" music.

In connection with stage effects, Rose proposes, also, that Gabriel sings "Hail Mary" when he descends to Mary in

The Annunciation, and that, located in the tower of Heaven, are choirs and instruments that produced appropriate tones for heavenly music. He believes, also, that boys may have been used for angels.¹²⁸ Indeed, Gabriel's "Hail Marys" may have been sung, angels may have been boys, and choirs and instruments may have been used in Heaven in all of the cycle plays. While angels descend and ascend, the vocal and instrumental choirs, possibly, accompanying their journeys, may, have been located in the stage heavens. Furthermore, since the play was performed in the churchyard, the chimes, bells, and organ music in the church may have been employed during the enactment.

The situations in these three episodes in the Chester and York plays are more simple than they are in the Towneley version. The Towneley dramatist amplifies or adds at least six topics other than those previously mentioned in the consideration of staging (time and distance), versification, music, and costume. For example, one finds the most significant amplification in the Towneley playwright's treatment of the human element in the drama. Joseph believes that young women desire, naturally, to fornicate. Consequently, he

¹²⁸Rose, op. cit., pp. 48, 51.

regrets that he married a young woman, since he is no longer virile. Here, the Towneley dramatist is incorporating the human element into his play. Joseph is convinced that, since he is too old to satisfy Mary's sexual drives, she has sought and found fulfillment in another man. Joseph's logic, here, is not defective, but purely humanistic, because he knows nothing about immaculate conceptions, and, indeed, would not have accepted parthenogenesis, because its basis is in pagan literature. He tries to imagine what kind of man would do such a thing and concludes that the man would be evil. Perhaps, his remarking that the sexual drive is only natural for women is simply an attempt by the playwright to make the play humanistic, so that the spectators will realize that the problems which perplexed Biblical man were not different than those of medieval man. Also, the Wakefield dramatist gives the spectators two unimpeachable reasons for Joseph's not being the father of Mary's child. Both reasons are biological and, therefore, extremely easy for man to understand and accept. Joseph laments the fact that he and Mary ever met, which thought leads to his recollection of their betrothal and how he had to leave her for nine months (a significant number of months) to earn their livelihood. Even if Joseph were capable of copulation, the child could not be his.

Since he has been gone nine months and Mary has not given birth, yet, she would have had to have conceived while Joseph was away. Perhaps, to narrow the separation between Biblical man and the sometimes poverty-stricken, illiterate medieval man, the Towneley dramatist stresses Joseph and Mary's lack of wealth, just as the York dramatist does when Joseph tells Mary to pack their poor clothes, in order to travel to Bethlehem. However, this idea does not occur in the Chester play. Finally, the conversation between Mary and Elizabeth contains a large amount of the human element, besides the religious. Their conversation indicates an attempt by the playwright to emphasize not only the religious, but, also, the social, humanistic side of life. Their polite exchanges are both charmingly real and typically trite. Two women who have not talked for a long time must show their "gracious" natures by inquiring about everyone's well-being. In most instances, such questions lead to gossip, but Mary and Elizabeth end their conversation, and focus their full attention upon the religious aspects of life. Indeed, Elizabeth plays the role of the gracious hostess in the Towneley Incipit Salutacio Elezabeth.

The second major amplification is closely related to, and possibly a part of the human element. In some instances,

these plays are obviously humorous. For example, Joseph is the typically humorous, befuddled old cuckold. Also, Mary's simple question, "What is thi name?" (107), after Gabriel's lengthy and verbose explanation of his visit, is humorously effective. With the possible exception of the York Joseph play, even though the York and Chester plays are somewhat humanistic and, perhaps, humorous, the Towneley episodes indicate much more extensive amplification of the human and humorous elements.

The third amplification which occurs in these Towneley plays concerns an emphasis upon the change from Old Testament to New Testament philosophy, and the resulting unity of man and God. In the "prologue" by God, the Towneley dramatist indicates a change from the Old Testament to the New Testament philosophy, showing in God the inversion of character from a wrathful, justice-seeking God to a Lord of mercy and compassion. Possibly, God's man-for-man, maiden-for-maiden, and tree-for-tree (32-34) reference is intended, here, as a parallel between Old and New Testament beginnings. For example, Jesus will be sent to save man, even though Adam was the cause of man's Fall; Mary's chastity will supplant Eve's sin; and the tree from which the Cross (the sign of redemption) is made will replace the Tree of Knowledge that

symbolizes man's Original Sin. More than in the Chester or York versions, the Wakefield dramatist emphasizes the fact that God's Son will be both God and man and that He will be born of a virgin. This paradox, then, bridges the gap that the Fall created between man and God. Also, in connection with God's "prologue," one observes a fourth amplification. In neither the Chester nor the York cycle does God speak during the three plays under investigation, even though He is visible at all times. The Towneley dramatist treats, briefly, a new idea, the circumcision of Christ. Neither the York nor the Chester dramatist alludes to this idea.

The final obvious amplification occurs in the Joseph play. Joseph's recapitulation of the events in Mary's and his betrothal is a detailed account. Such a description is not present in Chester, and their betrothal is only mentioned in York. Herein, the Towneley playwright indicates that Mary is an avowed virgin. One recalls that her allusions to a vow are not, specifically, referred to in the Chester or York plays, but in the York Joseph's troubles about Mary, allusions within Joseph's statements suggest that Mary is pledged to keep her maidenhead.

The Chester and Towneley playwrights treat the appearances of the angels differently than the York dramatist does.

In the Chester and Towneley versions, two different angels appear: Gabriel to Mary, and an unnamed one to Joseph. Had the playwrights intended for both angels to be Gabriel, certainly, they would have indicated this fact either in a listing of speakers or in the course of the unfolding dialogue, as the York dramatist does. Within these Towneley plays, however, some omissions occur. For example, contrary to Joseph's actions in the Chester and York plays, in Wakefield, Joseph does not mention sleep in connection with his trip, the aim of which is to leave Mary. Also, on at least one significant point, the York Joseph play indicates more amplification than the corresponding Towneley version. In the York play, Joseph's interrogation of Mary and the handmaidens is much more fully developed than it is in the Towneley play, wherein Joseph simply narrates the incident. This is, perhaps, evidence of the revision to which Craig refers.¹²⁹ One recalls that in the Towneley Joseph episode, a slight discrepancy occurs when Joseph remarks that he has quizzed the handmaidens about Mary. In the narrative, he does not interrogate them. Possibly, the reviser realized this discrepancy.

¹²⁹Craig, English Religious Drama, p. 216.

Again, however, one realizes that the basic action, settings, costuming, music, and story were the same in the Chester, York, and Towneley cycles. In general, more amplifications of the Biblical account occur in these Towneley plays, than in the Chester or York episodes. The Towneley poet's verse is, also, more complex than the verse of the Chester or York poet. The amplification of incidents in this later Towneley cycle, however, do not pervert or distort, extensively, the original religious purpose of the plays.

CHAPTER V

THE HEGGE CYCLE: THE PARLIAMENT OF HEAVEN, THE SALUTATION AND CONCEPTION, JOSEPH'S RETURN, AND THE VISIT TO ELIZABETH

The date for the Ludus Coventriae plays is not so much a subject of dispute among medieval scholars as are the dates for the Chester and York cycles. For example, Harbage dates Ludus Coventriae as c. 1400-1450.¹³⁰ Craig places it later, however, at c. 1468.¹³¹ The Ludus Coventriae cycle is also referred to as the Hegge or the Coventry plays. Craig maintains that the name, Ludus Coventriae, for the entire cycle is misleading, since the plays therein are not associated with Coventry. Therefore, to refer to them as the Coventry plays is incorrect. He believes that the most acceptable name for these plays is the "Hegge Cycle."¹³² Moreover, he leaves no room for doubt that the cycle was performed at Lincoln and has no connection with Coventry.¹³³

The Hegge cycle consists of forty-two plays.¹³⁴ The four that are of importance to this present investigation are

¹³⁰Harbage (ed.), op. cit., p. 10.

¹³¹Craig, English Religious Drama, p. 242.

¹³²Ibid., p. 239.

¹³³Ibid., pp. 265-280.

¹³⁴Harbage (ed.), op. cit., p. 10.

The Parliament of Heaven, The Salutation and Conception, Joseph's Return, and The Visit to Elizabeth. One includes The Parliament of Heaven in this grouping, because this play, which is actually an allegory, introduces the initial events in the New Testament. The "Prologue" in York and God's "history of man" in Towneley serve a similar purpose and, thus, in application, resemble The Parliament of Heaven. Actually, The Parliament of Heaven is an expansion of the eighty-fifth Psalm.¹³⁵ Unlike the approach taken by playwrights of the Chester, York, and Towneley cycles, the plan of the Hegge plays treats the episodes in question as three separate plays with The Parliament of Heaven as a possible separate play. The order of the Hegge plays is the same as in Towneley in which the Joseph play is inserted between The Annunciation and the Visit.

In The Parliament of Heaven, containing a supplication of prophets, Contemplacio speaks first, pleading with God to have pity on man who has suffered for 4,604 years:

wolds god þou woldyst breke þin hefne myghtye
 and com down here in to erth
 And levyn 3erys thre and threttye
 thyn famyt ffolke with þi fode to fede
 To staunche þi thryste lete þi syde blede
 ffor erste wole not be mad redempcion

¹³⁵W. Roy Mackenzie, The English Moralities from the Point of View of Allegory, p. 26.

Cum vesyte vs in þis tyme of nede
 of þi careful creaturys haue compassyon.¹³⁶
 (9-16)

He is imploring God to come to earth in order to release man from his continued suffering in Hell. The reference to thirty-three years, "3erys thre and threttye," may suggest the probable age of Christ at His death and, here, may serve as an adumbration of the length of time that Christ will be incarnate. For thirty-three years, Jesus will, figuratively speaking, feed His famished people and quench their thirsts with blood from His side. Here, the reference may be to the Crucifixion and possibly the Last Supper. Contemplacio remarks that if God does not come incarnate to earth and let His side bleed, redemption for mankind may not be possible. The "careful creaturys" are, of course, man--careful meaning "full of care." Man is "full of care" for God, although God is punishing him. Contemplacio persists in his attempt to persuade God to free man from his plight:

A woo to vs wrecchis of wrecchis be
 ffor god hath haddyd ssorwe to sorwe
 I prey þe lord þi sowlys com se
 How þei ly and sobbe ffor syknes and sorwe
 (17-24)

Man is comeryd in sinne. I crye to þi syght
 Gracyous lord come downe.
 (31-32)

Next, three Virtutes (possibly, faith, hope, and charity or love), Archangels in the "fyrst ierarchie," in

¹³⁶Unless otherwise noted, Block's Ludus Coventriae text will be the source for the present study.

unison plead with God to have mercy on man. As with Contemplacio's culminating line, the last line of the Virtutes' first stanza vibrates with their plaint, "Mercy. mercy. mercy we crye" (40). When the Virtutes explain to God that man was merely the victim of Satan's perfidy, Pater, or God, replies:

. . . now xal I ryse þat am Almyghty
 tyme is come of reconcyliacion
 My prophetys with prayers haue made supplicacion
 my contryte creaturys crye all for comferte
 All myn Aungellys in hefne . with-owte cessacion
 they crye þat grace to man myght exorte.
 (51-56)

God recognizes that the time has come for a reconciliation of man and God. There follows, then, a debate on whether or not man should be restored to God's grace. The principal debaters are Veritas, Misericordia, and Justicia. Veritas does not want God to have mercy upon man in his fallen condition.¹³⁷ She does not understand how it is that God can bless man, because " . . . twey contraryes mow not to-gedyr dwelle" (64). Truth reasons that, since God ordered man to go into Hell, to extend blessings to him, now, would be to act contrary to His word. If He reneges, God is not upholding truth. On the other hand, Truth does not like man, because he was not true to God. Veritas concludes, " . . . þou God hast lovyd trewthe . it is seyð evyr mo / þerfore in peynes : lete him

¹³⁷Veritas and the other three sisters, who refer to themselves as God's "dowteres," were either female actors or boys dressed as women.

evyr more endure" (71-72). In other words, Veritas believes that, since God has loved truth, man should suffer eternal damnation.

Misericordia, next, presents her plea for man's redemption, imploring God:

. . . lete 3our dowtere mercy to 3ow resorte
 And on man þat is myschevyd haue compassyon.
 hym grevyth fful gretly his transgressyon
 all hefne and erthe crye ffor mercy.
 (75-78)

She argues that, even though Veritas has always been with God, God has, also, kept mercy for man; therefore, God, who loves man, should acknowledge man's contrition by freeing him from agony. She reasons that God would be able to maintain both truth and mercy, if He would grant man the mercy which He has always reserved for man.

As with Veritas and Misericordia, Justicia, although an allegorical character, is in keeping with the abstract quality that she parallels. She maintains that, since man has offended God, he should suffer eternal punishment. Her first stanza ends with her throbbing repetition, ". . . xulde he be savyd . nay nay nay" (96). Since the right-wiseness of God has no limitations, Justicia believes that man should endure, perpetually excluded from a communion with God. The debate continues with another session in logic from Misericordia:

Syster Ryghtwysnes 3e Are to vengeabyl
 Endles synne god endles may restore

Above all hese werkys god is mercyabl
 þow he for-sook god be synne . be feyth he for-sook
 hym neuer
 þe more
 And þow he presumyd nevyr so sore
 3e must consyder þe frelnes of mankende
 (105-110)

According to Misericordia, Justicia is too vengeful. Indeed, God, who is endless, may restore man to a life without damnation. Misericordia reminds her sisters that, above all, God is merciful. She points out that man has not forsaken God since it was Satan who had deceived man. Indeed, she notes that man is penitent. Then, because the debate may become too fierce for daughters of God, Pax declares:

To spare 3our speches systerys it syt
 It is not onest in vertuys to ben dyscencion
 the pes of god ovyr comyth all wytt
 þow trewth and ryght sey grett reson
 3ett mercy seyth best to my pleson
 ffor yf manns sowle xulde abyde in helle
 be-twen God and man evyr xulde be dyvysyon
 And than myght not I pes dwelle.
 (113-120)

Pax, who, of course, is interested in universal accord, holds that the sisters should not disagree, because their virtues are not "onest," which, possibly, may mean either honest or oneness. She notes that God's peace overcomes all "wit," or, here, probably, "reason." Although Veritas and Justicia present logical arguments, Pax finds Misericordia's words to be more pleasing to her, because peace cannot exist if God and man remain divorced. Pax suggests, therefore, that the four sisters allow God to decide what He should do. The other three agree. Here, Jesus appears to the four sisters;

Pax remarks, "Here is god now . here is vnyte / hefne and erth is plesyd with pes" (135-156).¹³⁸ Jesus informs God's daughters that he intends to end their controversy, because he thinks the thoughts of peace. He explains that, if Adam had not died, justice and truth would be forever lost, but he warns that if a second death does not come, mercy will perish, and peace will be exiled:

But he þat deye 3e must knawe
 þat in hym may ben non iniquyte
 þat helle may holde hum be no lawe
 But þat he may pas at hese lyberte
 Qwere swyche on his prevyde and se
 And hese deth . for mannys deth xal be redempcion
 All hefne and erth seke now 3e
 Plesyth it 3ow þis conclusyon.
 (145-152)

Herein may lie the basic theme of the Hegge episodes under consideration.¹³⁹

¹³⁸Pax realizes either that in the person of Filius, or Jesus, Heaven and Earth may be unified, or else all of the characters are on Earth and Christ on Earth represents unity between God and man. However, the latter seems improbable, because the daughters of God were probably located on a level of the stage somewhere below God, but above Earth, because of the hierarchical pattern of the Chain of Being.

¹³⁹Timothy Fry, O. S. B., "The Unity of the Ludus Coventriae," SP, XLVIII (1951), 529-534. Here, possibly, is part of the basis of Fry's conjecture that the Hegge plays reflect the redemption theory of "abuse-of-power," which justifies Satan's losing the souls that he had captured in Hell. Since, as Jesus remarks, ". . . helle may holde [Christ] be no lawe . . .," when Satan tries to bring death upon One who has eternal life, Satan abuses his power, and therefore, loses his captured souls. In order to deceive Satan, Jesus must be conceived by a woman, and he must appear as a human. Since Satan does not know that Jesus is God, he tries to bring death upon Jesus; however, he is not subject to Satan's powers. Hence, Satan abuses his power by trying

Veritas, next, tells Jesus that she has sought throughout the world for a man born without sin, but has discovered that such a man does not exist. Misericordia, in turn, observes that no man is so charitable that he is willing to die for mankind. Justicia remarks that such a person would have to love man completely. Pax, then, realizes that only God may be the redeemer. At this point, Filius calls a council of the Trinity to decide which of the Three shall restore man. Pater informs Jesus that he must determine the nature of man's salvation. At once, Christ realizes that a reconciliation cannot occur, unless the Savior is both God and man; thus, Christ volunteers to save mankind. Spiritus Sanctus, the Holy Ghost, offers to make Jesus both God and man, and announces, " . . . I love to 3our lover [man] xal 3ow lede / þis is þe Assent of oure vnyte" (183-184). Misericordia, then, realizes that the "love-day," or the day of legal accordance and reconciliation, has come for the sisters, and they embrace and kiss. Pater, then, instructs Gabriel, telling him where to go and whom to seek. Anticipating Mary's question concerning the accomplishment of the act, the Holy Ghost asks Gabriel to reveal to Mary that Holy Ghost will work the miracle which may be exemplified by showing that Elizabeth, an old woman, is also with child.

(continued) to inflict death on One who cannot die. Satan's abuse justifies his loss of the captured souls. Actually, the whole of The Parliament of Heaven supplies the basis of Fry's theory.

Gabriel's first line to Mary is couched in Latin; however, the following line is a translation. As in all of the other cycles, Gabriel informs Mary that she is blessed among all women; in addition, the Hegge dramatist introduces a new element into the first speech of the Salutation and Conception, emphasizing that man is saved. Gabriel comments, ". . . here þis name Eva . is turnyd Aue / þat is to say with-owte sorwe ar 3e now" (219-220). This concept is basically the same as the man-for-man, maiden-for-maiden, and tree-for-tree idea expressed in the Towneley cycle. In essence, Mary will replace Eve. Gabriel then praises Mary, but she admits that she is troubled by Gabriel's words. She explains that, although angels appear to her daily, none has ever come, as Gabriel has, in the likeness of a man; consequently, she is frightened. Moreover, she confesses that she has never before been so highly commended; thus, she does not know what to say to Gabriel, because she believes herself unworthy of such praise. She concludes, ". . . grett shamfastnes and grett dred is in me" (236).¹⁴⁰

Gabriel, then, reveals to her that she will conceive and bear God's Son. At once, she questions the credibility of such an act, because she has always preserved and always

¹⁴⁰ Possibly, shamefastness means extreme modesty, the same sense that Spenser assigns to the word in The Faerie Queene. If so, the word has a Ciceronian or Aristotelian basis, and the use of it may suggest that the Hegge playwright was a well-educated individual.

will maintain her virginity. She adds, however, that she does not doubt Gabriel, but merely wants to know how she can be made pregnant without the loss of her virginity. Gabriel answers, "The holy gost xal come from A-bove to the / and þe vertu of hym hyst xal schadu þe so" (251-252). Again, as in the Chester and Towneley cycles, the Holy Ghost will "schadu" Mary. Gabriel follows his instructions well, next imparting the news of Elizabeth's six months' pregnancy. He also gestures towards Heaven, asking Mary to observe the Holy Ghost who is abiding her answer. He reminds her that the blessed spirits plead for man before God in Heaven, that men on Earth want the condemned souls to be saved, and that, in Hell, souls are awaiting salvation. His examples to Mary are extremely persuasive, appealing to her sense of compassion. He concludes, noting that all of the creatures are abiding her affirmative reply. Thus, the future happiness of the entire universe, from God to the condemned souls in Hell, rests upon Mary's decision. Since she can hardly deny salvation to the imprisoned souls and man's reconciliation with God, she replies:

With All mekenes I clyne to þis A-corde
Bowynge down my face with all benygnyte
Se here þe hand-mayden of oure lorde
Aftyr þi worde . be it don to me.
(285-288)

She bows her head, consenting to bear God's son. Gabriel's gratitude and relief are apparent in his response:

Gramercy my lady ffre
 Gramercy of 3our Answere on hyght
 Gramercy of 3our grett humylyte
 Gramercy 3e lanterne off lyght.
 (289-292)

The Hegge dramatist is the only one of the four or more playwrights who gives a definite, detailed stage direction for the act of conception, as follows:

here þe holy gost discendit with iiij bemys to our lady .
the son of þe godhed nest with iiij bemys . to þe holy
gost . the fadyr godly with iiij bemys to þe son . And
so entre All thre to here bosom
 (293)

Immediately, she explains that she feels both God and man within her. She indicates that she is exalted and frenzied over experiencing such pure pleasure with no pain in conception:

. . . now 3e haue mad 3our modyr
 With-owte peyne in Fflesche and bon
 Thus conceyve nevyr woman non
 þat evyr was beyng in þis lyff
 O myn hyst ffadyr in 3our tron
 It is worthy 3our son . now my son . haue A
 prerogatyff.
 (299-304)

Moreover, she adds, "I can not telle what joy what blysse / now I fele in my body . . ." (305-306).

Mary thanks Gabriel, explaining that she would like now to see Elizabeth, because she is curious about Elizabeth's ability to conceive in old age. In no other cycle is she so concerned about Elizabeth. As Gabriel repeated Grammercy four times to Mary when she consented to bear Christ, he now repeats Ffare wel four times before he ascends:

Ffare weyl turtyl . goddys dowtere dere
 Ffare wel goddys modyr . I þe honowre

Ffare wel goddys sustyr . and his pleyng fere
 Ffare wel goddys chawmere and his bowre.
 (313-316)

She replies, "Ffare wel Gabryel specyalye / Ffare wel goddys
 masangere expresse / I thank 3ow for 3our traveyl hye /
 Gramercy of 3our gret goodness" (317-320). Mary, then invites
 Gabriel to return, because his presence has been a comfort
 to her. In his final speech, he emphasizes the theme of the
 reconciliation of God and man and refers to Mary as the
 ". . . qwen of hefne . lady of erth . and empres of
 helle . . ." (335).

Joseph's Return opens with his act of pounding violently
 upon the door to his home, demanding, "How dame how . vn-do
 3oure dore vn-do / Are 3e at hom why speke 3e notht" (1-2).
 Susanna, one of Mary's handmaidens, wishes to know who is
 responsible for the noise. Joseph, a gruff and harsh man,
 does not give his name, but demands entrance. Recognizing
 his voice, Mary tells Susanna to open the door and welcome
 him. Joseph, then, informs Mary about his laboring to earn
 their livelihood, but he suddenly remarks, "Me merveylyth
 wyff surely . 3our face I can not se / but as þe sonne with
 his bemys . quan he is most bryth" (15-16). At this point,
 Joseph notices, however, that his wife is pregnant:

That semyth evyl I am afrayd
 þi wombe to hy3e doth stonde
 I drede me sor I am be-trayd
 Sum other man þe had in honde
 Hens sythe þat I went
 Thy Wombe is gret it gynnyth to ryse
 than hast pou be-gownne a synfull gyse

telle me now is what wyse
 thy self þou Ast þus schent.
 (25-33)

He demands to know the father's name, and Mary replies that God and he (Joseph) are the father. Joseph, then, retorts:

Goddys childe þou lyst in fay
 God dede nevyr jape so with may
 And I cam nevyr ther I dare well say
 3itt so nyh þi boure
 But 3it I sey mary whoos chile is this.
 (43-47)

In his reply to Mary, he is especially harsh, using jape in an obscene sense. Once more, Mary insists that the child is Joseph's and God's. Evidently turning to the audience, Joseph now warns all old men not to marry young women. Addressing Mary, once more, he asks why she has betrayed him and tells her that he will forsake her. With the help of a second handmaiden, she explains that the unborn Jesus will be the Savior, accentuating the major themes of reconciliation and salvation. Because he is shocked to think that Sephor would try ". . . to puttyn an Aungel in so gret blame . . ." (73), Joseph reasons, "It was sum boy be-gan þis game / þat clothyd was clene and gay / and 3e 3eve hum now au Aungel name . . ." (75-77). Since he cannot comprehend a unity between man and heavenly creatures, he is shown to be extremely logical in reasoning that the father of the unborn child is a local young man who resembles an angel, a statement that supports the belief that angels were portrayed by young boys. He does not know of any explanation for pregnancy other than

that of biology. Possibly, he turns again to address the audience: "Here may all men þis proverbe trow / þat many a man doth bete þe bow / another man hath þe brydde" (81-83). His choice of proverb, here, means that, while one man is working for a livelihood, another man is enjoying the company of the former man's wife.

Mary pleads with God to comfort Joseph, who has decided to inform the bishop of her pregnancy, so that she may be stoned according to law. He soon changes his mind, however, and decides not to be vengeful, but he insists, again, that "With-owth mannys company / she myght not be with childe" (106-107). In other words, he is certain that Mary is pregnant because she has indulged in the sexual act. He asserts that her child is not his, because she still remains a virgin as far as he is concerned. Then, because he is ashamed, he threatens to leave the country and remove himself from Mary's company, adding, "Ffor and men knew þis velany / In repreff þei wolde me holde / and 3ett many bettyr than I / 3a . hath ben made cokolde" (114-117). Clearly, he is ashamed, knowing that people will reprove him, although he admits that many men have been married to an adultress. Thus, he reasons that Mary has committed adultery during his long absence, and he asks that all men have pity on him.

Once again, possibly looking up to God, Mary prays that He will reveal to Joseph the truth of the Immaculate Conception. Here, the Hegge play differs from the play

followed in the other cycles, because God speaks, ordering "Aungelle" (not Gabriel, as in York) to descend to Joseph. Angelus avers, "Joseph Joseph þou wepyst shyrlle / ffro þi wyff why comyst þou owte" (147-148). The word owte suggests that Joseph, now, has come out of his house and is preparing to leave Mary as he has said he would do. Moreover, he is weeping loudly when Angelus approaches him. Between laments, Joseph tells Angelus to depart and allow him to weep, but Angelus reveals the truth about Mary's conception, and Joseph accepts these words without question. Promptly, he thanks the Lord for this revelation, confessing that he should have known that Mary would never trespass against him. Since he now realizes that the prophets were correct, he asks forgiveness.

Evidently, Joseph returns to his house, where he implores Mary to have mercy upon him. He offers, as well, to kiss her feet, but she refuses him, saying, "Nay lett by my fete not þo 3e take / my mowthe 3e may kys i-wys / and welcom on to me" (186-188). Actually, she is suggesting "let's kiss and make up." Joseph thanks her, promising never again to cause strife. He concludes that Mary must somehow be virtuous, else the Lord would not be within her. He pledges himself to serve her and the child, and then, inquires about the nature of the Holy Conception, which Mary attempts to explain. He thanks God for Mary.

Since Mary is still curious about Elizabeth's pregnancy that has been achieved in old age, she and Joseph journey to Montana where Elizabeth resides. Joseph notes:

In Montana they dwelle . fer hens so moty the
 In þe city of juda . I know it veryly
 It is hens I trowe myles two and ffyfty
 We are lyke to be wery or we come at þat same
 I wole with a good wyl . blyssyd wyff Mary
 now go we forthe than in goddys name.

(7-12)

For the first time, Mary is embarrassed by her condition:

Goth husbond, thow it be to 3ow peyne,
 This jurny I pray 3ow . lete us go fast,
 ffor I am schamfast of the pepyl to be seyne
 And namely of men, therof I am agast.

(13-16)

She suggests that they say devotions, and they undoubtedly do before they depart. During their journey, Contemplacio relates to the audience the circumstances of Elizabeth's barrenness and conception. The Hegge playwright is the only one who recounts the Biblical story in which Gabriel appears to Zacharias revealing that Elizabeth, who was, ostensibly, barren, will be able to conceive. One learns that, since Zacharias did not believe Gabriel, he was stricken with an inability to speak.

When Contemplacio concludes, the scene shifts, and Joseph is shown to be weary because of the fifty-two miles he has journeyed:

A! A! wyff, in feyth I am wery,
 Therefore I wole sytt downe and rest me right here.
 Lo! wyff, here is the house of zakary,
 Wole 3e I clepe Elizabeth to 3ow to apere.

(Halliwell, 43-46)

He offers to summon Elizabeth to Mary, but she prefers to go to the house to greet Elizabeth: "A! cosyn Elizabeth, swete modyr, what cher? / 3e grow gret, a! my God! how 3e be gracuous" (Halliwell, 49-50). It is obvious that Elizabeth is also pregnant. As in the other cycles, she explains that the child in her body has responded to Mary's presence. However, the Hegge dramatist is probably more descriptive, here:

. . . Be 3our breth the Holy Gost us was inspyrynge,
 That the childe in my body enjoyd gretly,
 And turnyd downe on his knees to oure God reverently,
 Whom 3e bere in your body this veryly I ken,
 ffulfylyd with the Holy Gost thus lowde I cry,
 Blyssyd by thou amonge alle women.
 (Halliwell, 53-58)

Apparently, the embryo in Elizabeth's body moves in reverence of the Christchild in Mary's womb. Nevertheless, she cannot understand why the mother of God should visit her.¹⁴¹ For the first time in any of the cycles, Mary repeats Gabriel's messages for Elizabeth's benefit, in order to justify her visit to Elizabeth. Moreover, Elizabeth discloses the details of her own conception and alludes to Zacharias' disbelief.

Following the singing of the magnificat and gloria patri, Mary informs Elizabeth that she (Mary) will stay with Elizabeth for the three months, or until Elizabeth's child is born. Obviously, Zacharias is standing close to Mary and

¹⁴¹The Chester playwright develops a similar idea of Elizabeth's unworthiness in the presence of Mary, as well as the idea of Mary's sense of unworthiness in the presence of Gabriel.

Elizabeth during this conversation and their delivery of the canticle, because Joseph, evidently rising from rest, approaches Mary and Elizabeth to address Zacharias:

A how do 3e . how do 3e . ffadyr zacharye
 we ffalle ffast in Age with-owte oth
 why shake 3e so 3our hed . haue 3e þe palsey
 Why speke 3e not sere I trowe 3e are not wroth.
 (117-120)

Even though Joseph realizes that Zacharias cannot utter a word, he asks the man to tell him why he is not speaking. It is Elizabeth who explains that God will remedy Zacharias' "palsy" " . . . when it plesyth his mercy" (126). Joseph replies that Zacharias should thank God for all adversity, because He will, eventually, show mercy.

Joseph suggests that he and Mary depart upon their return journey. As a "good" wife should, Mary obeys, and Elizabeth, although she is sorry that they must leave, prays to God to lead them. Contemplacio terminates The Visit to Elizabeth with an epilogue. Probably addressing the audience, he begins:

lystenyth sovereynys here is conclusyon
 how þe Aue was mad . here is lernyd vs
 þe Aungel seyð . et benedictus .
 fructus uentris tui . thus þe chirch addyd Maria
 And Jhesus . her
 who seyth oure ladyes sawtere dayly . ffor A3er þus
 he hath pardon . ten thousand And eyte hundryd 3er.
 (1-8)

He discloses that "Mary with elizabeth abod þer styлле / iij monthys fully as we rede" (10-11) and emphasizes the fact that he began and, now, concludes with Ave. Obviously,

Contemplacio means, "as we read in the Bible." Certainly, his statement contradicts the events in the play. Mary and Joseph depart, before Elizabeth gives birth to John. The confusion may be the result of several events. For example, the playwright may not have believed that a "three-months" stay with Elizabeth could be represented effectively. A further possibility that The Visit to Elizabeth is a later addition to the cycle is also interesting, which contains more details concerning Mary's visit than the Epilogue. Indeed, Contemplacio's Epilogue could stand alone as a cursory and early account of the significance of Elizabeth to the Conception story. Moreover, the details in Contemplacio's account are not in accordance with Scriptural story. For example, in Luke, Mary departs before Elizabeth gives birth to John; however, Contemplacio explains that Mary remains with Elizabeth. Parts of The Visit to Elizabeth may have been removed from the manuscript. Moreover, The Visit either may have been revised, or the playwrights may have been dealing with more than one source. Early in the play, Mary informs Elizabeth that she (Mary) will stay with her until John is born. Since Joseph and Mary leave before Elizabeth gives birth, the plot may have been revised so as to uphold the Biblical account. A religious guild may have been particular about obvious variations from the Biblical text. Although additions and amplifications to make the play more humanistic were often accepted, one thinks that definite contradictions

of the Scripture would have been contrary to the purpose of the drama. On the other hand, the confusion may be simply the result of the playwright's having used more than one source.

The scene for The Salutation and Conception, Joseph's Return, and The Visit to Elizabeth are similar to the locale in the same episodes in the other three cycles. Mary's station during the conception is, probably, next to a structure representing her home. Joseph's Return is definitely located at home, inasmuch as he is shown demanding entrance to the house. When Gabriel appears or descends to Joseph, he is in an area of the stage near the home, because Gabriel warns him not to leave Mary. Then, Joseph returns to the house, again, and he and Mary prepare to depart for Montana.

The Visit to Elizabeth is located before a structure representing Elizabeth's home. Although Joseph does not enter the house when Mary does, he rests near the home, because he remarks that he can see the house, in fact, he is within calling distance. Contemplacio's place on the stage is unlocated. Possibly, he is removed from any of the main action or settings; therefore, he may be in the platea, or "general playing-place."¹⁴² Finally, scenes in The Parliament of Heaven are located on Earth near Hell's mouth, and in Heaven. Contemplacio is probably on Earth, but the sisters

¹⁴²Craig, English Religious Drama, p. 278.

hold their debate in Heaven or in an area close by.

Craig notes several resemblances between the Hegge plays and The Castle of Perseverance, showing that the dialects are similar and that both contain the Parliament of Heaven with the four sisters.¹⁴³ Also, scholars have observed that The Castle of Perseverance and the Hegge plays may have been staged in somewhat similar ways. Southern, for example, argues that The Castle of Perseverance was presented in the "round."¹⁴⁴ Speeches in the Hegge plays suggest that this cycle, as well, may have been performed in the round.¹⁴⁵ Southern proposes that, when Mary and Joseph journey to Elizabeth's home, they do not walk across the "place," because the distance would have been too short and would have taken up too little time. Rather, he thinks that they travelled around the outer rim of the "place."¹⁴⁶ On the other hand, Craig conjectures that the Hegge plays were played upon a fixed stage, with evidence for the use of movable pageant in two instances.¹⁴⁷ He does not, as Southern does, specifically name the round as the kind of stage. The round, however, seems not at all impossible, but, perhaps, improbable, when

¹⁴³ Ibid., pp. 266-267.

¹⁴⁴ Southern, Medieval Theatre, pp. 17-27.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 220.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 222.

¹⁴⁷ Craig, English Religious Drama, pp. 277-278.

one considers the necessary lay-out of the stage. Had the plays been set up in the round, one scaffold would have represented Heaven, another Hell, another Elizabeth's home, and another Mary's home. Thus, because of the distance between scaffolds and across the platea, this kind of staging is doubtful, for cycle plays. God's Omnipresence, which is undeniable in all four of the cycles, would not be impressed upon the spectators as explicitly as it would have been if they were in a position to view God in relation to all of the action. In the round, however, the spectators would have had to turn their backs upon God to see the stages on the other sides of the circle. Also, when God instructs Gabriel to descend to Mary, Gabriel would have had to charge to the scaffold wherein Mary was located, and his descension effect would have been lost. The fact that Gabriel tells God that he will take his flight from Heaven, and, then, surely does so, contradicts the argument that another person playing Gabriel in another scaffold was lowered to Mary. Also, most scholars agree that in the later plays, such as *Hegge*, which were presented by the religious guilds and on a fixed stage, usually, one actor was used for one part. The act of Mary's conception would seem to have been much more logically staged if God were to remain in Heaven, Jesus at a lower level, between Heaven and Earth, and the Holy Ghost either on Earth or a short distance above Mary. This act, however, could have been produced effectively on a stage similar to the

Valenciennes, where the action is closer together, and Heaven could be located in the front and middle of the stage, and, of course, elevated above all action, so that God, at all times, could be viewed and addressed from any point on stage.

The rhyme scheme of The Parliament of Heaven is that of ababbcbc, two quatrains in which the fourth and fifth lines are rhymed. Craig asserts that this scheme may be a characteristic of the poetry where the cycle originated, since this stanza form appears in plays that comprise the "heart" of the cycle.¹⁴⁸ Contemplacio's speech is termed the "tumbling measure" by Craig, who suggests that this measure, the result of metrical confusion, found with or without alliteration in various stanza forms throughout the play, is characteristic of the newer parts of these plays.¹⁴⁹ One recalls that some alliteration occurs in The Parliament of Heaven and The Salutation and Conception, but not to the extent that it does in the York cycle. The Salutation and Conception, with some variance, follows the same stanza form. After Gabriel " . . . makyth a lytyl restynge . . ." (261), while waiting for Mary's decision, the rhyme scheme changes to an alternating ab pattern. Perhaps, significant, also, is the slight change in stanza form in the speeches surrounding the act of conception. Mary consents in rhymes abab; Gabriel thanks her in rhymes

¹⁴⁸Ibid., p. 247.

¹⁴⁹Ibid., p. 248.

bcbc; the conception occurs, and Mary speaks, evidently talking during her conception, about the sensation in her body, in rhymes bdbd. All of these speeches have in common the b line sound; therefore, all of the action is connected and there is no pause. Furthermore, the dialogue continues even during the act of conception. The connection of the stanzas is, indeed, congruous with the symbolic sexual union of the act of conception. Moreover, the change in rhyme scheme, after the three stanzas of strict ab, certainly, would serve to emphasize the conception and dialogue surrounding and during it. The verse pattern returns to the linked quatrain, and, then, alternates between the ab and the quatrains. Moreover, both the Parliament and the Salutation contain some iteration which the Hegge playwright employs rather effectively for emphasis in cases of pleading and praises. For example, Contemplacio implores God to unite with man, " . . . Gracyous Lord . Gracyous lord . Gracyous lord come downe" (32), and Virtutes follow with a plea, " . . . Mercy . mercy . mercy we cry" (40). Justicia emphasizes her negative argument with " . . . xulds he be savvyd . nay nay nay" (96). Two other examples are Gabriel's four "Gramercies" to Mary for having agreed to conceive, and his four "Ffare wels" to her before he ascends to Heaven. Both the "Gramercies" and the "Ffare wels" are, in essence, praises to Mary.

Joseph's Return contains several different stanza forms, one of which is a thirteen-line stanza, rhyming ababababcbdddc.

Craig regards this rhyme scheme as the oldest and most fundamental to the original Corpus Christi play.¹⁵⁰ The presence of this rhyme scheme in the Joseph play is, probably, one of the reasons for his surmise that this play in the Hegge cycle has been subjected to fewer revisions than the corresponding play in the Towneley cycle.¹⁵¹ Other stanzas are linked-quatrain, single quatrains of abab, longer stanzas of alternating ab rhyme, and a few rather irregular stanzas. Again, the tumbling meter with some alliteration is present. The stanzas are intermingled. The part of the play which may have been added or revised to follow the Biblical account more precisely changes in stanza form with the first line that suggests Mary and Joseph's departure. The twelve-line stanza commences, rhyming abab and changes abruptly to cdcd, with the first line Joseph utters concerning his and Mary's return home. The cd rhyme continues through Mary's affirmative reply. At no other point in any of the four Hegge plays does the rhyme scheme change so abruptly within a stanza, as it does, here, unless two unconnected sets of quatrains are involved. Here, the lines of cd seem hastily added to the ab quatrain, which Joseph speaks, and then, the cd is continued throughout Mary's pursuing lines.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 247.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., p. 216.

These Hegge plays contain more stage directions and internal evidence of staging than the Chester, York, or Towneley plays. For example, in treating the other three cycles, one may only speculate upon the staging of the act of conception. The Hegge playwright provides, however, specific directions for the act. Williams suggests that the "beams" referred to in these stage directions are gilded rods.¹⁵² One may, also, assume that the three rods, which the Holy Ghost holds, extend to Mary's bosom; Jesus' three rods extend to the Holy Ghost's back; and God's three beams touch upon Christ's back. Thus, Mary and the Trinity form a catena.

Other specific stage directions occur when Gabriel awaits Mary's decision concerning the Immaculage Conception and when Mary and Joseph depart from Elizabeth's home. Gabriel pauses, and, perhaps, relaxes, as Mary beholds him and makes her decision, because the stage direction reads: "here be Aungel makyth a lytyl restynge and mary be-holdyth hym . . ." (261). In The Visit, the dramatist directs: "here mary and elizabet partyn and elizabeth goth to zakarie . . ." (145). Also, Zacharias is either sitting or reclining, because Elizabeth instructs him to rise and go to the temple to worship God. Further evidence of staging rest within implications in the speeches. As in the Chester, York, and Towneley cycles, God's station is, evidently, elevated. For

¹⁵²Williams, op. cit., p. 103.

example, in thanking the Lord for blessing his wife with the Christchild Joseph observes that God " . . . syttys on hye . . ." (174), thus supporting the contention that God was situated above the stage proper. Also, the fact that Contemplacio implores God to "come down" indicates that God was located above the stage proper, that, in turn, represented Earth. Later, Contemplacio beseeches God to "com se," terminology which suggests that God is not on Earth. Moreover, the use of us suggests that Contemplacio is suffering on Earth along with man. Contemplacio notes, however, that men lie and sob, thus divorcing himself from man's torture. His position as a man or an observer is not made explicit, because, again, he complains:

Ffrom oure hed is falle þe crowne
 Man is comeryd in synne . I crye to þi sight
 Gracyous lord . Gracyous lord . Gracyous lord come
 downe.
 (30-32)

His use of oure indicates that Contemplacio is a man. His pleadings are climaxed by his repetition, "Gracyous lord," and his imploring God to "come downe," once again suggesting that God is stationed above Earth. One recalls that Contemplacio, whether or not he is man, is located upon Earth and near to or within the area of Hell's mouth. During the course of Contemplacio's appeal for mercy, horrible sounds, such as groans, moans, clanking noises, and screams to the accompaniment of smoke may have emanated from the depths of Hell through a stage demon's mouth. Writhing, wailing, and

physically distorted people, perhaps, may have been visible in the mouth of Hell, although there is a minimal amount of internal evidence to support these ideas. In making her complaint, Misericordia observes that ". . . all hefne and erthe crye ffor mercy . . ." (78). Moreover, God's observation that His ". . . contryte creaturys crye all for comferte . . ." (54) supports the contention that "cries" and "wails" issue from the mouth of Hell. The Hegge playwright is the only one of the four dramatists who refers extensively to Hell and the condemned souls, and implies the depiction of both.

Also, the Hegge dramatist amplifies the staging of the journey to Elizabeth's home. None of the other three or more playwrights pay attention to distance as much as does the Hegge dramatist. Contemplacio's narration allows Mary and Joseph time in which to move to a setting that is a farther distance from their home and is an interlude of a greater length than occurs in the other three cycles. Thus, the Hegge dramatist stresses the time and distance involved in the journey to Montana, demanding that the audience provide verisimilitude needed to effect a long journey. One may assume that the staging of Gabriel's (or Angelus') descensions and ascensions is similar in all four cycles. Again, in the Hegge episodes, Gabriel may descend and ascend by way of stairs or with the aid of a pulley device. At any rate, Gabriel moves from a higher level to a lower one when he

visits Mary, because he informs God that he will ascend. One of Gabriel's succeeding statements supports the conjecture that he is lowered to Mary by means of a contrivance: ". . . be-holde now lord I go here to / I take my fflyth and byde nowth . . ." (215-216). Obviously, Gabriel is moving, probably, to the edge of the platform, so that he can leap and be lowered, an act that would give the impression of flight.

One supposes that the attire worn by the lad portraying Gabriel was quite similar to the costumes possibly worn by the angels in the Chester, York, and Towneley episodes. The Towneley dramatist provides, perhaps, more specific internal evidence of costume than the Chester, York, or Hegge playwright; however, the Hegge playwright emphasizes Mary's "glow" or "brightness," which suggests holiness, more than the other three dramatists do. Gabriel's reference to Mary as a "lantern of light" indicates that her costume and general appearance suggest that there is a glow about her person. Indeed, she may have worn a partially gilded gown or an "halo" upon her head. Also, Joseph does not notice Mary's pregnancy sooner, because he may be blinded by the bright "glow" that surrounds her. The internal evidence in this passage indicates that she has undergone a physical change. Moreover, the implication is that Mary wears an halo upon her head, and she explains to Joseph that whoever beholds her verily shall be stirred to virtue. In addition, Gabriel's reference to Mary as ". . . qwen of hefne . lady of erth . and empres

of helle . . ." (335) suggests, as in the Towneley episodes, that Mary may wear a crown upon her head.

As in the plays of the other three cycles, in the Hegge episodes, Gabriel may have sung his "Hail Marys," music may have accompanied ascensions and descensions of angels, and, here, also, of the Trinity. Unlike the Chester, York, and Towneley dramatists' "Visit episodes," the Hegge playwright employs both Mary and Elizabeth to sing the magnificat and the gloria patri. Mary chants in Latin, and Elizabeth translates in English. Possibly, these actions and the conduct of the ritual of the magnificat may have been identical to the enactment in the church, because, in the liturgy, the magnificat was sung twice. Also, evidently a choir sings at the conclusion of Contemplacio's epilogue, because he remarks that "we" will sing Ave regina celorum to the Virgin. None of the other three dramatists mentions the Ave regina celorum.

Significant amplifications and deletions occur, however, not only in matters of staging, costuming, and music. The Hegge playwright includes at least ten other important amplifications, additions, and deletions. Perhaps, the most apparent amplification is the Hegge dramatist's emphasis upon unity of man and God, in terms of sexual intercourse, which may have eventually evolved into the familiar seventeenth-century poetic image of God's ravishment of man. The Holy Ghost volunteers to impregnate Mary, remarking, ". . . I love to 3our lover xal 3ow lede / pis is þe Assent of our

vnyte" (183-184). Evidently, the Holy Ghost will "lead" God to His "lover," man. The image, here, is sexual, just as it is later during the episode of the conception. The act of the conception is definitely sexual. The stage directions indicate a union between the Trinity and Mary. The beams, which are, of course, phallic symbols, "penetrate" or touch Mary's bosom. Her exclamations about experiencing pleasure in "flesh and bone" without pain suggest that her ecstasy is physical, which, in turn, implies orgasm. Indeed, the staging of the act of conception is symbolic of the sexual act. The Hegge dramatist is the only one of the four (or more) cycle playwrights who expresses the act of the Immaculate Conception in such a clearly humanistic image, thus stressing the dominant theme of Christ's humanity and the unity of man and God. The Hegge playwright also maintains the sexual image after the conception, with Gabriel's referring to Mary as God's "bowre," which, again, suggests a sexual relationship between God and Mary. Moreover, none of the other playwrights develops an intimate relationship between Mary and Gabriel. This dramatist emphasizes the "farewells" between the two, and Mary thanks Gabriel extensively for his visit to her, inviting him to return.

Another amplification which is typical of the Middle Ages is found in the reference to particulars. For example, *Contemplacio* notes that man has suffered 4,604 years in Hell.

Here, the precise reference may be taken as an example of the medieval insistence upon particulars, which numerous scholars cite. In the Towneley play, God claims that man has suffered 396 years longer, or 5,000 years. Hence, the number in the Hegge play is a much more precise statement than the Towneley designation. Perhaps, the reference to 4,604 years is, in a sense, intended to be humorous, because it is so extremely specific. In his Epilogue, *Contemplacio* mentions, also, the specific number of years, 10,800, that man is pardoned. As in the case of citing the number of years that man has suffered and is pardoned, the Hegge dramatist is extremely specific when he refers to the town, Montana, in which Elizabeth lives and the number of miles to it from Nazareth. The playwright's use of fifty-two, rather than fifty, may suggest, again, the medieval delight in particulars. Also, since the spectators knew the exact number of miles that Joseph and Mary had to travel, the demand upon the audience to supply verisimilitude for the journey was, perhaps, even greater than it was in the corresponding episodes in the other three cycles.

Unlike, the Chester, York, or Towneley dramatists, the Hegge playwright adds two characters, Joseph and Zacharias, to the Visit play. Joseph accompanies Mary on her journey to Elizabeth's home, and Zacharias is on stage, even though he does not and cannot speak. The dramatist includes, also an account of the circumstances surrounding Zacharias' plight,

which the Chester, York, and Towneley playwrights do not describe.

More, perhaps, than the other three dramatist, the Hegge playwright stresses the inversion from Old Testament to New Testament theology. For example, in The Parliament of Heaven, Misericordia, who is mercy, represents, of course, the New Testament concept of a God of love and mercy. Both Justicia and Veritas symbolize a faith in the God of wrath and justice of the Old Testament. Moreover, one notes that the debate among the four sisters, the complaints of the Archangels and Contemplacio, and man's cries from Hell build to a climax; therefore, the inversion from Old Testament to New Testament philosophy is eminent. In all four cycles, Joseph represents the Old Testament concept of the God-man relationship, since he cannot understand that man and God may ever be united. The Hegge dramatist emphasizes, however, Joseph's acceptance of the new theology. At first, Joseph's seeking punishment for Mary parallels the philosophies of justice uttered by Veritas and Justicia in The Parliament of Heaven, illustrating the Old Testament God of wrath and unmerciful justice, as opposed to the New Testament God of mercy. In his pleading to Mary for forgiveness, however, Joseph's repeated use of the word, mercy, denotes his change over to a New Testament philosophy.

Also, the Hegge dramatist provides the most specific reference in the four cycles to the Chain of Being. The

Virtutes comment that they are " . . . in þe fyrst ierarchie . . ." (38). The "hierarchy" reference reflects a medieval belief in the philosophy of the Chain of Being. Evidently, these Archangels are closer to God than is Contemplacio if they are in His first hierarchy. For that matter, the stage in the Middle Ages reflects this concept of the Chain of Being in its different levels for Hell, Limbo, Earth, Paradise, and Heaven.

In Contemplacio's Epilogue, this playwright adds an idea which the Chester, York, and Towneley dramatists do not mention. Contemplacio notes, " . . . thus þe chirch addyd Maria And Jhesus . . ." (156). Here, the Hegge playwright mentions the church and part of its history, unnamed in any episode in the other cycles. Thus, this reference to the church may support Craig's theory that the Hegge plays were presented by a religious, rather than by a trade guild. One recalls, also, that Joseph sermonizes to the audience and relates proverbs more frequently in these Hegge plays than he does in the Chester, York, or Towneley episodes. Actually, in this respect, the Hegge Joseph episode is more like the corresponding episode in the Chester cycle, than like the York or Towneley episodes. The Hegge Joseph play is like the same plays in the Chester and Towneley cycles, in that the angel who appears to Joseph is unnamed. The York playwright is the only one of the four who specifically states that the angel is Gabriel. In all four cycles, however, Gabriel

visits Mary.

In addition to the most obvious amplifications in the Hegge episodes, one notes, also, three significant deletions. The Hegge episodes contain less humor than either the York (especially the Joseph play) or the Towneley plays. The tone is more serious, like that of the Chester episodes. The humor which occurs in the plays seems unintentional. For example, the reference to specific numbers seems somewhat humorous, as do Joseph's questions to Zacharias. Joseph's asking Zacharias, who cannot speak why he is shaking and not talking is suggestive of a modern "sick humor." Furthermore, in the Joseph plays, the Hegge dramatist does not mention Mary and Joseph's betrothal. This omission in this episode is, however, the result of an expansion of the cycle, because the Hegge playwright has amplified the betrothal into a separate play, which precedes the Annunciation. Finally, the Hegge playwright hardly emphasizes Joseph's age. The other three cycle dramatists stress his age more than does the Hegge dramatist. In fact, the York and Towneley playwrights employ the fact of Joseph's old age and, perhaps, senility to develop a comic cuckold character, a character type that eventually becomes an archetypical figure in literature.

Again, the basic events of the Hegge plays are the same as those in the Chester, York, and Towneley episodes. As with the other cycle dramatists, the Hegge playwright achieves individuality for his episodes only through

amplification or the lack of it, deletion, rearrangement, and versification. After studying the stanzas of the Hegge episodes, one suggests that, in general, the schemes are confused because of revisions, and, possibly, because of the playwright's and revisors' lacks of abilities as poets. In general, the staging, costuming, and use of music may be quite similar to the other three cycles. The natures of the amplifications, additions, and deletions tend to enable the Hegge playwright to achieve an extremely reverent and didactic tone, similar, perhaps, to that of the Chester episodes.

CHAPTER VI

AMPLIFICATION, SOURCE, AND AUDIENCE

OF THE ANNUNCIATION EPISODES

It was not necessary to understand;
it was necessary to believe.

H. Craig, English Religious Drama
of the Middle Ages, p. 12

Although some scholars hold that simplicity is not necessarily an indication of an early cycle play, the textual study in the previous four chapters indicates that the three episodes in the later texts were amplified more than the corresponding episodes in the earlier ones. Perhaps, the most significant amplification lies in the later playwrights' and revisers' attempts to depict the Biblical characters as human beings who encountered situations similar to those experienced by medieval man. For example, the Hegge playwright emphasizes Christ's humanity and humanizes the Immaculate Conception, giving stage directions and employing images which imply the sexual act. One realizes also that the Hegge playwright's staging of the Immaculate Conception is amplified more than that of the Chester, York, or Towneley dramatists. In general, however, one assumes that the staging, costuming, music, and properties of these three episodes in the four cycles were quite similar. The basic plots, taken from the Scriptural accounts of the Immaculate Conception in Matthew and Luke are the same. The differences

in these episodes among the four cycles lie in the amplifications, additions, deletions, and versification. One discovers that the verse of the later episodes is more complex and involved than the verse of the earlier episodes. For example, the simple verse of the Chester episodes would seem earlier than the complex verse of the same episodes in the Towneley cycle; or the Hegge dramatist's verse that is often confused because of his attempt to incorporate numerous later poetic techniques into his verse; or even the York poet's alliterative verse. If Craig's datings are correct, lack of amplification and simple verse forms become signs of an early text.

One must remember that, in considering the three episodes of the four cycles, each episode should be studied in relation to the corresponding episode in each of the other cycles. In general, one concludes that the Chester is earlier than the York, the York earlier than the Towneley, and the Towneley earlier than the Hegge. Even though this chronology is, probably, correct, a study of the emendations in the individual plays does not always support the theory. A textual study suggests, as Craig does, that the York Joseph episode is a later revision than the Towneley Joseph episode, even though the Towneley cycle apparently was composed at a later date than the York plays. In fact, the revised York Joseph episode may be one of the latest Joseph episodes, if not the latest, of all four cycles. Since the textual study indicates that a concentration on the humanistic

and humorous elements is definitely one of the primary characteristics of expansions that were made in the later cycles, the York Joseph episode is a late revision. Obviously, the Chester character of Joseph is not highly developed. He asks once who the father of Mary's child is; he laments; then the subject is dismissed without any conversation with Mary. The Towneley character of Joseph is humorous and a more fully developed character than Joseph in the Chester play. The humanistic element is, indeed, present. Joseph is a loveable old man, and his belief that Mary's act was, simply, characteristic of a young woman is especially humanistic, as is his clumsy expression of tenderness to her. The episode is not, however, as detailed as the York episode. Also, the Hegge account is not as detailed as the York episode. Joseph is unnecessarily harsh. Actually, harshness is his main characteristic. He does not ponder aloud the involutions of the situation, as does the York Joseph. The York Joseph is the typical, jealous husband, who inquires nine times who the child's father is. He shows self-concern and considers every aspect of the situation, revealing his innermost emotions and attitudes. Also, unlike the other playwrights, the York dramatist does not commence with Joseph's initial discovery that his wife is pregnant. In a manner of speaking, the York playwright begins in medias res, a method that seems to be more difficult than that of adhering to the strict narrative chronology in the other

cycles. Joseph is bemoaning the fact that his wife is pregnant when the play commences. Throughout the play, he recalls and considers the history of his and Mary's relationship. Even though he is definitely a comic character, the audience may have become disgusted with his stubbornness and his incessant interrogations of Mary. The York dramatist's characterization of Joseph would be realistic in any age.

Expansion of an episode is also evident in the number of speeches and lines. In fact, the number of lines and speeches seems to coincide with the date of the episode and cycle. For example, the later plays contain more lines and speeches than the earlier ones. The following tables indicate the correlation between the number of speeches, lines, and characters, and the earliness or lateness of the cycles.

These tables indicate that the York Joseph episode is amplified more than any of the other Joseph episodes. Also, the Chester Visit episode may be later than the corresponding episode in York. One may safely suggest that the episodes with a greater number of lines and speeches were written or revised at a later date than the ones with fewer lines and speeches. With the exception of the Joseph episodes, one assumes that the Chester and York episodes were written at an early date, and, perhaps, about the same time. Obviously, again with the exception of the Joseph episodes, the Towneley episodes are more expanded, and therefore, later than the Chester or York. Indeed, the Joseph episode in Hegge is the

THE ANNUNCIATION

	Chester		York		Towneley		Hegge	
	Sp.	Ll.	Sp.	Ll.	Sp.	Ll.	Sp.	Ll.
Mary	3	14	3	20	4	24	5	50
Gabriel (Angelus in York)	3	34	4	32	4	53	6	75
Total	6	48	7	52	8	77	11	125

THE VISIT

	Chester		York		Towneley		Hegge	
	Sp.	Ll.	Sp.	Ll.	Sp.	Ll.	Sp.	Ll.
Mary	2	49	3	20	7	48	17	61
Elizabeth	2	23	2	24	7	43	16	72
Joseph							5	24
Contemplacio							2	56
Total	4	72	5	48	14	91	40	113

JOSEPH'S RETURN

	Chester		York		Towneley		Hegge	
	Sp.	Ll.	Sp.	Ll.	Sp.	Ll.	Sp.	Ll.
Joseph	2	46	22	209	8	194	14	147
Mary			14	32	7	13	9	48
Elizabeth	1	2						
Angelus	1	8	4	30	1	12	2	13
Two Handmaidens			5	35			2	6
Deus							1	6
Total	4	56	45	306	16	219	28	220
TOTAL for all three episodes	14	176	57	406	38	387	79	458

only one which is not, by far, the most highly amplified episode when one compares it with the corresponding episodes in the other cycles. The total number of speeches and lines is larger in the York episodes than in the Towneley episodes, because of the lengthy York Joseph episode. Nevertheless, the Towneley cycle is later, because the number of lines and speeches in the other two plays of the York and Towneley cycles support this fact. Obviously, none of these three Wakefield episodes is as early as the York Visit or Annunciation episodes.

Furthermore, the cycle building is important in considering which episodes are early and which are late. These three accounts in the Chester cycle are in one large play entitled The Nativity. The three episodes in the York cycle are in the same order as they appear in the Chester play, but the York accounts are divided into two separate episodes, The Annunciation, and visit of Elizabeth to Mary and Joseph's trouble about Mary. Also, the Towneley dramatist presents the material as two episodes, but the order is changed. The first episode, The Annunciation, contains, of course, the Annunciation, but, also, the Joseph account. The Salutation of Elizabeth is a separate episode. Also, the Hegge playwright places the Visit to Elizabeth after Joseph's Return, and the first episode is The Salutation and Conception. All three are separate episodes. The Chester accounts are, however, hardly long or episodic enough to be separate episodes.

The fact that the Chester playwright wrote The Nativity as a single episode may support the supposition that the source of these cycle plays is a no longer extant Christmas liturgical play, which would have been presented as one play. Liturgical drama, however, would not have contained the Joseph account, which is, obviously, not a part of the canonical offices, even though the seeds for the Joseph episode is, indeed, Biblical. In Matthew, Joseph is " . . . minded to put [Mary] away privily" (i:19). The source, then, of these three episodes may be a no longer extant Nativity play which was basically liturgical, but which, also, was comprised of some secular material. If such a play existed, it may well have been written by the church clergy, who hoped to educate the unlettered laity. The Joseph episode may have been added, logically, to enable the masses to realize that Biblical man and medieval man experienced similar emotions, problems, and reactions to situations. Also, Joseph would have symbolized, for the illiterate people, the first convert to Christianity. All of the cycle plays may have developed from such a common source. Since obvious similarities exist (other than those which are based upon the Christmas stories in Matthew and Luke) among all four cycles, the plays either had a common source play or extensive borrowing occurred among the cycles. Most scholars agree, however, that such borrowing among the cycles was the exception, rather than the rule. Such borrowing would not

have been, however, plagiarizing, because of the belief that knowledge was the common property of all men and because of the resulting anonymity of the playwrights. Certain of the similarities between York and Towneley may be explained, in part, through borrowing, but the similarities between and among these episodes in the four cycles may be more logically accounted for in the theory of a lost common source play.

For example, Mary's speeches before the conceptions in both Chester and York are quite similar. In Chester, she remarks:

Now sith that god will it so be,
 and such grace hath send to me
 blessed evermore be hee,
to please him I am paide.
Loe Gods chosen mekelie here!
 and lord god, prince of power,
 leeve that it fall in such manere
 this word that thou hast said.
 (41-48)

In York, she iterates:

Thou angell, blissid messenger,
 Of goddis will I holde me payde,
 I love my lorde with herte dere
 -De grace pat he has for me layde.
Goddis handmayden, lo! me here,
To his wille all redy grayd,
 Be done to me of all manere,
 Thurgh thy worde als pou hast saide.
 (185-192)

Obviously the similarities between the two passages are more than coincidence. Parallel ideas appear in some of the lines. Also, the same words are employed: Loe and lo, paide and payde, here and here, manere and manere, and thou hast said and pou hast said. In both episodes, paid and said are rhymed, as are here and manere. The lines in which the

rhymed words occur communicate the same ideas in the two speeches. Each stanza is eight lines long and the order in which the words are rhymed is even the same. Here, the playwrights were either borrowing, one from the other, which idea is unlikely, or they were using the same source. The passage is not Scriptural, it does not occur in The Annunciation feast drama of the liturgical office in the church, nor is it apocryphal. Precise similarities, such as use of the same words between and among the plays, are suggestive, then, of a common source, sometimes other than the Bible, the liturgy, and the apocrypha. Surely, a source play, a troped Scriptural line, or a hymn is involved, here, with the similar passages. Indeed, most of the major events common to all the plays are in the Scriptural accounts in Matthew i:18-25 and Luke i:5-57; therefore, one cannot claim substantially that the playwrights based the incidents on a lost play which they could have taken directly from the Bible. The Biblical accounts contain the seeds of every major event in the episodes, from Mary's question about being able to conceive, to Joseph's tribulation and the angel's appearance to him, to Elizabeth's blessing of Mary and the magnificat. The two Biblical accounts were combined and organized, however, at one time, into a sequence of logical events for a play. Perhaps, a lost liturgical play represents the original compilation of the two Biblical accounts of the Annunciation. The material which is

indicative of a common source play would not be, however, simply the Biblical events which all of these episodes have in common. Rather, one should look for inconsistencies, specifically expanded detail, additions, deletions, and use of words common to two or more texts.

On the other hand, the playwrights may have used more than one literary source and the traditional body of knowledge in society, but the theory which suggests a common source play is still not discounted. Joseph's old age, which is obvious in all of the cycles, but, perhaps, stressed least in Hegge, is not evident in the Biblical account; yet, all of the playwrights emphasize his age. Perhaps, some playwright was able to realize that the practical, mundane minds of medieval men would have thought that Joseph had a problem had he been at a virile age and Mary had remained a virgin. Joseph was depicted as an old man, thus giving the audience a biological reason for his inability to copulate. This idea of Joseph's old age must have been available to the four or more cycle dramatists, who, especially, in the York and Towneley plays, expanded the situation into humanistic and humorous episodes. In the humorous Joseph episodes of Towneley and York, Joseph is, perhaps, one of the first cuckolds or deceived husbands in English literature. Moreover, the situation in the Joseph episode is not unlike that in Chaucer's Miller's Tale. The fact of Joseph's physical defect, his inability to walk well, may also be a

forerunner of a typical comic type. Rossiter suggests that juxtaposing the religious with the farcical is similar in technique to the "comic relief," that Shakespeare employs.¹⁵³ Also, the character, Joseph, and his situation may echo the Greek legend in which Amphitryon, a king of Thebes, returns home to find his wife, Alceme, impregnated by Zeus, who seduced her by appearing in the likeness of Amphitryon; Hercules is the product of the conception.

A determination of the influences which the mystery plays had on future literature and the literature which affected the cycles is not as important, here, however, as the influence of these early dramas upon medieval man. Indeed, the purpose of the drama was religious, not dramatic, and to instruct, not to entertain. The instruction was, of course, managed completely through symbols. Time, distance, characters, costume, music, and properties were, perhaps, the most important symbols basic to medieval drama. Verisimilitude was supplied, of course, by the minds of the spectators. The credulity of the minds of medieval men is almost incomprehensible for men, today. The playwrights were able to communicate their moral messages and ecclesiastical history only because they had faith and their audience had faith. Indeed, the spectators did not try to understand; they merely

¹⁵³A. P. Rossiter, Angel with Horns and Other Shakespeare Lectures, pp. 282-286.

believed. They believed only because of faith and because their minds supplied verisimilitude for the various symbols. Even before medieval man journeyed to witness a cycle play in performance, he had already accepted, beyond question and through simple faith, the two most significant concepts of Christianity, the Immaculate Conception and the Resurrection. He did not, therefore, experience difficulty in believing the message of the cycle plays. Furthermore, since the playwrights generally maintained their original religious purpose, the spectators of the drama were able to accept, without doubt, the dramatists' messages. For example, never does the Virgin Mary become a dominating woman, and never, in any way, do the playwrights treat her role disrespectfully. She receives nothing but praise and respect in the drama, just as she does in the art, where she is the most honored and loved of all the saints. Certain of the cycle plays may have maintained, however, the original purpose better than others. Creizenach holds that the Chester plays preserve the initial purpose more completely than the other plays.¹⁵⁴ Indeed, the York and Towneley plays are somewhat humorous, and the humanistic element relates the play to medieval man, but the tone of the plays is not as deeply religious as in the Chester plays. Even though the Towneley plays may have been

¹⁵⁴W. Creizenach, "The Early Religious Drama," The Cambridge History of English Literature, V, 53-54.

the most "artistic" of the cycles, artistry was not the main point of the religious drama. Also, the York alliterative verse may have been the easiest verse for the spectators to listen to, which was, certainly, an important factor, but the achievement of a comfortable and enjoyable poetic line was not the purpose of the drama, either. The Hegge cycle contains a serious and religious tone; however, the playwright, who was, obviously, a well-educated individual, employs a high level of language, and becomes didactic, pedantic, and philosophic with his prophecies and sermonizing, and the illiterate audience may have had difficulty in comprehending his play, even though symbols were employed. On the other hand, one suggests that the Hegge dramatist was writing for a more sophisticated and educated audience than were the Chester, York, and Towneley playwrights. Certainly, the Chester cycle may have preserved the original instructive, religious purpose more precisely, simply because it is perhaps the earliest of the four extant cycles. No involutions or complications of plot or verse appear, but all necessary elements are present to have enabled medieval man to understand. For example, the Chester Joseph inquires only once about the father of Mary's child, and when the angel appears to reveal the truth to him, he accepts, without question, the angel's revelation. He does not question or doubt, as the York Joseph does. The Chester Joseph believes, exemplifying the type of faith which was also characteristic of that held by

the spectators. Certainly, one cannot speak of medieval drama without also considering the vital role played by the audience. Only in the credulous minds of the audience did the symbols become real, or did "transubstantiation" occur. Since the Middle Ages, however, the simple naturalness of literature seems to have been lost in the conscious struggle for sophistication, recognition, and fame, and in the probing, scientific, and "completely rational" mind of the masses. Indeed, a society will never experience, again, such an intimate relationship between a literary art and its audience, because the scientific mind will not make allowances for the total obedience, credulity, and faith that was characteristic of the medieval mind. The sole purpose of these medieval cycle plays was to instruct, not to entertain, and the spectators attended the performances in order to learn the history of man, not to criticize the abilities and techniques of the dramatists. The anonymous medieval playwrights who were not consciously writing drama achieved their simple naturalness only through their earnestness of purpose and theirs and the audience's faith and lack of literary sophistication.

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