

HEAVEN, HELL, AND MIDDLE EARTH:
PROBLEMS IN THE STAGING OF THE
CHESTER CYCLE PLAYS

515

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PREFACE

A textual investigation of the Chester cycle plays reveals certain problems in their staging. Yet, few scholars have analyzed the significant stage directions and dialogue which could establish more accurately the stage techniques utilized in the depiction of the three general locales of Heaven, Hell, and Middle Earth. Consequently, it was suggested to me by my graduate advisor, Dr. Charles E. Walton, of the Department of English, Kansas State Teachers College, that I undertake a textual study of the Chester plays in an attempt to disclose the minimal devices needed for the performance of the cycle. I examined the locales of each play so that I might identify the specific references which were instrumental in the representation of that locale. Furthermore, in formulating the appropriate stage techniques for the plays under consideration, I found it necessary to study the contemporary conditions which directly were related to these productions.

Certain works not cited specifically in the footnotes of this manuscript have, nevertheless, been invaluable in the shaping of this study. Therefore, I feel that the authors deserve recognition and that their works be included in the bibliography.

I wish to express my appreciation to Dr. Charles E. Walton for his considerate understanding and his faithful.

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C. L. T.

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CHAPTER I

A STUDY OF CHESTER AND THE SOURCE, DATE, AND TEXT OF THEIR CYCLIC PLAYS

Chester today remains as a city in possession of England's foremost examples of medieval architecture, a distinction which earlier characterized it, as well, making it unique in comparison with other English communities in the Middle Ages. For this reason, its cycle plays also are unique in the history of the drama of this period. The remains of the old city of Chester, therefore, contribute much to one's understanding of the method of producing the Chester cycle. Looking southwestward from a vantage point on the Chester walls, one observes an eighty-acre level meadow, called the Roodee, which, in the history of this city, has been used for various events, including contemporary cricket-matches and military formations.¹ This meadow is highly significant to the conditions surrounding the performance of the Chester cycle plays.

The city walls afford one an excellent opportunity to overlook the entire community below, as they must have been similarly advantageous to early topographers who sketched overlays of the dimensions of the city. From this location

¹"The Sketcher in North Wales," Leisure Hour, XII (1852), 519.

one sees that High Cross was and is yet the focal point of the city, the very center, in fact, of the area.² Of two churches, St. Peter's and the Abbey of St. Werburgh, the latter, located on Northgate Street, has, since the time of Henry VIII, been designated as Chester Cathedral.³ Here, the Abbey Gateway deserves one's attention, since it played an important part in the processional which became so prominent in the production of the cycle plays.

There is a distinct variety and individuality in Chester's buildings. Apparently, the independence and personal satisfaction of the non-conforming medieval mind prodded Chester townspeople to build their houses and shops in front of, behind, and occasionally on the city street lines. If the street were a broad one, perhaps such irregularity in the building placements does not preclude the use of a walk way in front of them. However, in many cases, when the streets narrowed, those buildings constructed beyond street lines have utilized the normal sidewalk space. Therefore, the " . . . first story of the buildings was replaced by an arcade, called a 'Row,' which shelters the

²Francis R. G. Duckworth, Chester, p. 26.

³Lady Blanche Murphy, "Chester and the Dee," Lippincott's Magazine of Popular Literature and Science, XX (November, 1877), 523.

walk."⁴ The Rows certainly are a "microcosm in themselves," since in each, one recognizes various trades and conditions of commercial life; for instance, the butchers shops in Butcher's Row, the cloth tradesmen in Mercer's Row. Also, one may recognize vestiges of domestic life, for the medieval shopkeeper generally made the second story of the building into living quarters, relegating the first and lower levels to his business.⁵ The terms, "first" and "lower" levels, should not be considered in the modern sense of "first" and "basement" levels. The streets of Chester were sunken, somewhat resembling "artificial ravines;" thus, carriages actually passed in front of the lower levels.⁶ Nevertheless, Chester's sunken streets and raised Rows provided an architectural situation, because the Rows acted as a kind of gallery or a raised spectator area from which townspeople might clearly observe the pageants and shows that passed through in medieval times.⁷

Generally speaking, the development of medieval drama took place in the Church. This liturgical drama was the result of an attempt to give a deeper, personal, and more

⁴Duane Lyman, "The Architecture of Medieval Chester," Architectural Record, XL (September, 1916), 285.

⁵"The Sketcher in North Wales," op. cit., p. 520.

⁶Murphy, op. cit., p. 525.

⁷Duckworth, op. cit., p. 5.

life-like meaning to the religious ceremonies. The Church altar usually represented the sepulchre or the manger, while altar boys represented angels and Magi. Undoubtedly, the settings and pictorial devices were limited, thus, leaving much to the imagination.⁸ However, after presenting somewhat sketchy, yet popular representations of the Bible, monks and priests in the Church eventually became more concerned about the inadequate expressiveness of thought and actions. Therefore, the Scriptures were dramatized until an entire cycle from the Creation to the Last Judgment had been formulated around a central narrative--i.e., the Resurrection. The plays, thus, became too popular for the chancel to accommodate and were moved into the churchyard where more scenery could be used and more people could view. Finally, all of the townspeople were given an opportunity to see the Bible as live situations as the plays journeyed through the city streets.⁹ Chester street pageants developed from a similar manner of impersonation and communal inspiration.¹⁰ For example, the Prophetæ was a liturgical procession of priests impersonating the Prophets who

⁸Donald Clive Stuart, Stage Decoration in France in the Middle Ages, p. 224.

⁹Duckworth, op. cit., p. 131.

¹⁰J. L. Styan, "Drama as Ritual," Modern Language Quarterly, XXVII (September, 1966), 326.

foretold the Messiah's coming and who represented an Advent prelude to the Christmas sequence. Also, in the Prophetæ, the greatest prominence was given to Balaam rather than to the other Prophets. Similarly, in the Chester cycle, the Balaam and Balak episode was possibly a Prophet play in which Balaam and Balak crowded out the other major figures.¹¹ Thus, the play represents a survival of the dramatic tradition of the Laon, Rouen, and Benedictbeuern plays of the Prophetæ.¹² Evidence of the liturgical origin of the Chester cycle is apparent in such Latin stage directions as "Tunc cantabit angelus" in the Ascensio and in the frequent use of the Expositor, perhaps delivering a priest's explanatory comment.¹³ Thus, the Chester plays, like the majority of English and French mystery plays, were once acted within the Church walls by members of ecclesiastics.

In studying about medieval England, it is difficult to establish with accuracy the point at which the personification of the passons ceased in liturgical drama and a more

¹¹M. D. Anderson, Drama and Imagery in English Medieval Churches, p. 23.

¹²Mary Hatch Marshall, "The Dramatic Tradition Established by the Liturgical Plays," PMLA, LVI (December, 1941), 964.

¹³Sir A. W. Ward and A. R. Waller, The Cambridge History of English Literature, V, 12.

independent drama developed.¹⁴ It is, then, difficult to identify authorship of such drama since the town governors would often request that the Church compose plays in English metre. Within the Church a priest, or, in larger abbeys such as St. Werburgh's, a brother from the monastery may have composed the plays. In such cases, it is obvious that the liturgical drama with which he had been associated would undoubtedly influence his writing, and, perhaps, unbeknown to him, such liturgical drama had been taken from earlier works.¹⁵ There are three general theories regarding the authorship of the Chester plays: (1) translation from earlier French or Latin plays; (2) translation and/or composition by Randle Higden; and (3) composition by Sir Henry Francis. It is not improbable that by "borrowing" or, in modern terminology, "plagiarizing," the medieval drama made use of previously recognized works. Thus, one's task of identifying the author of the Chester plays is rather complex. Had these plays been translated, they were most probably taken from French originals. The manuscript most generally associated with such a theory is Le Misteré du Viel Testament, in which one discovers numerous parallels to certain

¹⁴"Dramatis Personae," MacMillan's Magazine, LXXI (February, 1895), 263.

¹⁵Sir E. K. Chambers, English Literature at the Close of the Middle Ages, p. 20.

Chester plays.¹⁶ Some claim, therefore, that such parallels indicate that all mysteries were literally translated from the French drama; however, these scholars fail to recognize the importance of the dating of the Le Misteré in relation to the development of Chester drama. Since the Le Misteré was not put into print until 1500, its original form, that which would have been used at the end of the first quarter of the fourteenth century and, thus, translated later into English, undoubtedly had undergone significant alteration.¹⁷ Certainly, one should not deny that a French influence did manifest in stage decorations and presentations; however, this should not be confused with a translation per se. A convincing explanation, then, of the parallels between these two forms is offered by Craig and again by Anderson. For example, Craig concludes:

Both plays go back at least in part to a somewhat extensively combined Latin plays, such as is represented by the corrupt and imperfect Benediktbeuern Christmas play, which is of the same original composition as the Chester cycle and the French Old Testament plays.¹⁸

Anderson agrees that:

Certain parallels between the Chester Plays and the Mystere du Viel Testament may indicate that both drew on a common original, but neither in this case nor any

¹⁶Hardin Craig, English Religious Drama of the Middle Ages, p. 171.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 172.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 139.

other is there proof that the English vernacular plays were even literal translations of foreign texts.¹⁹

If one rejects this theory of translation, he must re-examine the long-accepted tradition that holds that the plays were translated into English or possibly composed by Don Randle (Randulph) Heggenet (Hidgen), a monk of Chester Abbey and the Chester Chronicler. Too often, critics have been led astray by the following line appearing in the Late Banns, 1600: "The devise of one done Rondall, moonke of Chester abbey" (7). Thus, a common assumption, such as "In the programe or proclamation we are told that 'Don Rondal, moonke of Chester Abbey' was the author," is the result of the Banns.²⁰ Similarly, the following note attached to one of the Chester manuscripts (H.MS. 2124) has given critics reason to accredit Heggenet with the authorship of these plays:

Whitsun playes first made by one, Don Randle Heggenet, a Monke of Chester Abbey, who was thrise at Rome, before he could obtain leaue of the Pope to have them in the English tongue²¹

However, the third theory which belongs to Salter, acknowledging Sir Henry Francis as the author of the Chester plays,

¹⁹Anderson, op. cit., p. 41.

²⁰"The Drama in the Middle Ages," The National Magazine, II (March, 1853), 221.

²¹R. L. Mangan, S. J. "The Nativity in Early Pageants," Catholic World, C (December, 1909), 294.

is the most plausible. Here, it is necessary for one to examine the first document, written in 1532, concerned with the origin of the plays, *i.e.*, William Newhall's Proclamation included in a Book Containing Fragments of Assembly Orders preserved in the Chester Town Hall. In this Proclamation, one finds the statement: "[the plays were] devised and made by Sir Henry Francis."²² The 1532 records also show that Sir Henry Francis had, by this time, been forgotten; thus, if he were not the actual author, one thinks that Newhall would have gained nothing by proclaiming him such. However, in 1539 or 1540, Newhall had omitted Sir Francis's name from his Proclamation. Following the Disestablishment of the Church of Rome, the city officials wanted to remove from the plays all prior associations with Catholicism; therefore, Randle Hidgen (Don Rondall Heggenet), Chester's foremost man of letters and author of Polychronicon, was, in Newhall's opinion, accorded the honor. Thus, Newhall apparently attempted to give more recognition to the plays, but his cause did not end with issuance of his Proclamation. Other contemporaries felt it necessary to corroborate the Hidgen authorship; hence, the statements occurring in the Late Banns of 1600 and in the Harley MS. 2124 (1628) are, by no means, accurate accounts,

²²Frederick M. Salter, Medieval Drama in Chester, p. 33.

but rather, merely attempts to " . . . reconcile the irreconcilables brought into the story by William Newhall."²³ If one accepts this theory, his problem in the dating of the Chester plays becomes more clear, since records show that Sir Francis was senior monk at Chester Abbey in 1377 and 1382, and was made Papal Chaplain in 1389.²⁴ These dates indicate that he flourished during the time associated with the other cycles. Thus, in 1377 (the date for the Beverley plays), one finds a first reference to craft-plays in England; then, for York and London in 1378, and, finally, for Coventry in 1392.²⁵ Salter suggests that one date the Chester plays as 1375, thus preceding those at Beverley by two years, retaining its priority initiated by many inaccurate claims of authorship.²⁶ Certainly, if, indeed, one accepts Sir Francis as the author of the Chester cycle, he discovers that the statement, "the Chester plays were 'divided and made by one Sir Henry Francis' between 1268 and 1276,"²⁷ is incongruent, since Sir Francis was honored as

²³Ibid., pp. 34-41.

²⁴Glynne Wickham, Early English Stages: 1300 to 1660, I, 137.

²⁵Salter, op. cit., p. 42.

²⁶Loc. cit.

²⁷C. M. Gayley, "The Miracle Plays," The International Quarterly, X (October, 1904--January, 1905), 117.

late as 1389, and one thinks it doubtful that he enjoyed a life span of approximately 120 years! Chambers is unable, as well, to offer a plausible answer to the dating question. He suggests a 1327-29 date; however, he admits that ". . . if the plays were actually established in 1327-29, the first hundred years of their history is a blank. The earliest notice in any record is in 1462"28 Thus, no exact date has been determined, although Salter's explanation is probably the most accurate and, therefore, acceptable, to date.

In the complete Chester cycle, there are twenty-four plays. These include plays concerned with pre-Christian history, the Nativity group, Christ's missions, and the Pentecost represented as follows:

- I. Fall of Lucifer (The fallinge of Lucifer)
- II. The Creation (The creation of ye worlde)
- III. The Deluge (Noah & his shipp)
- IV. The Sacrifice of Isaac (Abraham & Isacke)
- V. Balaam and Balak (Kinge Balack & Balaam with Moyses)
- VI. The Nativity (Natiuytie of our Lord)
- VII. Adoration of the Shepherds (The shepperdes offeringe)
- VIII. Adoration of the Magi (Kinge Harrald & ye mounthe victoriall)
- IX. The Magi's Oblation (Ye 3 Kinges of Collen)
- X. Slaying of the Innocents (The destroyeinge of the Children by Herod)
- XI. Purification, lines 1-208,²⁹ (Purification of our Ladye)

²⁸Sir E. K. Chambers, The Medieval Stage, II, 352.

²⁹Robert H. Wilson, "The Stanzaic Life of Christ and the Chester Plays," Studies in Philology, XXVIII (July, 1931), 420.

- XII. The Temptation, lines 1-208,³⁰ (The pinackle, with ye woman of Canan)
- XIII. Christ, The Adulteress, Chelidonius (The risinge of Lazarus from death to liffe)
- XIV. Christ's Visit to Simon the Leper (The cominge of Christe to Ierusalem)
- XV. Christ's Betrayal (Christ's maundy with his desiples)
- XVI. Christ's Passion (The scourginge of Christe and The Crusifieng of Christ)
- XVII. Christ's Descent into Hell (The harrowinge of hell)
- XVIII. Christ's Resurrection (The resurrection)
- XIX. Christ Appears to Two Disciples (The Castle of Emaus & the Apostles)
- XX. Christ's Ascension (The Ascention of Christe)
- XXI. The Sending of the Holy Ghost (Whitsonday ye makeinge of the Creede)
- XXII. The Prophets and Antichrist (Prophetes before ye day of Dome)
- XXIII. The Coming of Antichrist (Antecriste)
- XXIV. The Last Judgment (Domes Daye)

The metre used in these plays is that type known as rime couée, or tail-rhyme, generally written in eight-lines stanzas " . . . in which two pedes of three four-stressed lines rhyming together are each followed by a three-stressed cauda."³¹ The caudae rhyme within each, while the pedes, although they may have a common rhyme, generally do not rhyme. Normally, the metre is iambic with an aaa₁b₃ccc₁b₃ or aaa₁b₃aaa₁b₃ technical metre formula.³²

³⁰Ibid., p. 419.

³¹Chambers, English Literature at the Close of the Middle Ages, p. 24.

³²Loc. cit.

One notes a certain "nobleness of tone" in the Chester plays which often distinguishes them from the " . . . coarseness of the York and Townley, and the decorous dullness of the Coventry cycle."³³ For example, in the Chester Passion play, the dramatist achieves a business-like tone for the events of the conspiracy.³⁴ Also, in the Passion play, one recognizes more of an attempt at characterization than in the earlier liturgical drama. However, the medieval mind was " . . . never able to escape a sense of the absurdity of sin."³⁵ Thus, a typical description of evil or the Devil is evident in The Temptation and the Banns to the play:

And next to this, you bowchers of this Citie,
the storie of Sathan that christe woulde needes tempte,
set out as Accostomablie vsed haue yee,
the devill in his fethers, all ragger and rente.
(H/2124: 119-122)

In general, however, these plays are consciously developed with an inherent understanding of the characters, and, therefore, they are united by a schematic comprehensiveness, from The Creation to The Last Judgment.

³³Duckworth, op. cit., pp. 137-138.

³⁴Waldo F. McNeir, "The Corpus Christi Passion Plays as Dramatic Art," Studies in Philology, XLVIII (July, 1951), 604.

³⁵David Coit, "The Poetic Element in the Medieval Drama," Atlantic Monthly, LVI (September, 1885), 412.

Salter suggests that, perhaps, the Chester cycle was originally a single long play and that, later, it became a processional. Although a date has not yet been determined for the presentation of these plays as processional drama, Salter, however, finds evidence of the first production of these plays by individual guilds as early as 1422.³⁶ His evidence is taken from the court proceedings concerned with two guilds that had disputed the right of assistance by other guilds. Salter finds the next record of the plays' probable existence as processional drama in the City Treasurer's accounts for 1429-30. This document reveals that ". . . he received from the Fishmongers a rental of 4^d for a piece of ground on which to store their pageant wagon" ³⁷ Chambers, however, takes issue with Salter's date, stating that ". . . the earliest notice in any record is in 1462" Similarly, he argues that ". . . there is no actual record of plays at Chester itself until 1462." ³⁸ His proposals, however, are questionable, since the record cited by Salter ". . . shows that the Mercers had a play in 1437-8, the Shearmen (Cissorum) in 1439-40" ³⁹

³⁶Salter, op. cit., p. 45.

³⁷Ibid., p. 46.

³⁸Chambers, The Medieval Stage, I, 109, 352.

³⁹Salter, op. cit., pp. 45-46.

The individual guilds, later involved in the production of the entire cycle, were composed of laborers--stonemasons, carpenters, painters, glaziers, metal workers, tanners--who united originally for the purpose of producing a work of art. It is not unusual, then, to think that such men would accept the opportunity to present religious art in the form of plays.⁴⁰ Naturally, these guilds, as well as the more commercial ones, would realize an opportunity to advertise their crafts and to obtain the city's recognition. However, although the guilds did have a full control over the production of these plays, their performances were regulated by the civic authorities who decided each year whether or not the plays were to be presented, or were to be omitted because of war or pestilence.⁴¹

A study of the Chester play manuscripts and the accompanying Banns allows one a more comprehensive understanding of these guilds' functions, as well as additional information regarding historical aspects of these plays. Five complete MSS. from the period, 1591-1607, have been preserved;⁴² however, fragments are also available. These

⁴⁰Duckworth, op. cit., p. 70.

⁴¹Chambers, English Literature at the Close of the Middle Ages, p. 18.

⁴²Ward and Waller, op. cit., p. 47.

manuscripts and fragments include:⁴³

1. H. 1475-1500 Hengwrt MS. 229, in the library of Mr. Wynne of Peniarth, containing Play XXIV (Antichrist) only. Probably a prompter's copy, as some one has 'doubled it up and carried it about in his pocket, used it with hot hands, and faded its ink.
2. D. 1591. Devonshire MS., in the library of the Duke of Devonshire, written by 'Edward Gregorie, a scholar of Bunbury.'
3. W. 1592. Brit. Mus. Addl. MS. 10,305. Signed at the end of each play 'George Bellin.'
4. h. 1600. Brit. Mus. Harl. MS. 2013, also signed after some of the plays by 'George Bellin' or 'Billinges.' Averse proclamation or 'banes' is prefixed, and on a separate leaf a copy of the prose proclamation made by the clerk of the pentice in 1544 with a note, in another hand.
5. B. 1604. Bodl. MS. 175, written by 'Gulielmus Bedord,' with an incomplete copy of the 'banes.'
6. H. 1607. Brit. Mus. Harl. MS. 2124, in two hands, the second being that of 'Jacobus Miller.' An historical note, dated 1628, is on the cover.
7. M MS. in Manchester Free Library, containing fragments of Play XIX (Resurrection) only.

Another Harlian manuscript (Harley MS. 1944), called a "Breviary or some few Collections of the City of Chester," was possibly written in 1609.⁴⁴ It has been often cited since it describes the Chester plays and pageant wagons; however, its validity has not been established, since it is questionable whether Archdeacon Robert Rogers' son David was ever an eye-witness to such proceedings.⁴⁵ Although it has been suggested that perhaps the Archdeacon himself had

⁴³Chambers, The Medieval Stage, I, 407.

⁴⁴Craig, op. cit., p. 182.

⁴⁵Salter, op. cit., p. 54.

collected the items and his son had then compiled them, it is doubtful. For, the record has an account of the St. George's Day Race on the Roodee, beginning "In anno Dom. 1609, Mr. William Lester, etc." and ending. "This was the first beginnige of St. George's race, etc." Thus, certainly the entire manuscript could not have been collected by the elder Rogers, who died in 1595, or earlier.⁴⁶ It becomes difficult, then, to determine how much of the MS. was an eye-witness report and to what extent was hearsay evidence.

The Banns were the methods of public announcement of forthcoming plays and the subjects involved. According to Salter, ". . . every company sent out its representatives for the occasion in the costumes in which they played . . ." ⁴⁷ To the contrary, Craig states that ". . . there are two sets of banns, or public announcements, recited on St. George's day by the town crier, who on his rounds, was accompanied by the stewards of each craft or trading company." ⁴⁸ However, Salter points out that such an assumption was perhaps the result of the insertion made by Randle Holme in the accounts of the Smiths (Harley MS.

⁴⁶Loc. cit.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 57.

⁴⁸Craig, op. cit., p. 167.

2054) which states " . . . for ridinge the banes xiiij^d the citty Crier ridd." Yet, this report is questionable, because if the town crier received 13^d from each gild "for ridinge the banes," " . . . that gentleman," as Salter states, "must have had one of the best grafts in history."⁴⁹ The Chester Late Banns are contained in four manuscripts: A/Harley 1944 (1609), B/Bodley 175 (1604), D/Devonshire HM2 (1591), and R (h)/Harley 2,013 (1600). The Early or Pre-Reformation Banns appear only in H/Harley MS 2,124 (1607).⁵⁰ From these records one learns of the associations of guilds and plays. The following catalogue is a list of the guilds and the corresponding scenes that they produced as found in the Banns of the Harley, 2124 MS.:

- I. The "Tanners" - "the fall of Lucifer" (64-70)
- II. The "Drapers" - "the Creation of the worlde" (71-74)
- III. The "water-leaders and drawers of deey" - Noah and the Ark (75-78)
- IV. The "barbers and waxe-Chaundlers" - The Sacrifice of Isaac (79-85)
- V. The "Coppers and lynnyn drapers" - "Balaam and his Asse" (86-89)
- VI. The "wrightes and sklaters" - "the beirth of Christe" (90-96)
- VII. The "painters and glasiors" - The Adoration of the Shepherds (97-103)
- VIII. The "marchantes, vintners" - The Adoration of the Magi (104-107)
- IX. The Mercers - The Magi's Oblation (108-111)

⁴⁹Salter, op. cit., p. 54.

⁵⁰Frederick M. Salter, "The Banns of the Chester Plays," RES, XV (October, 1939), 432.

- X. The "gouldsmythese and Masons" - The Slaying of the Innocents (112-114)
- XI. The "Symthes" - The Purification (115-118)
- XII. The "bowchers" - The Temptation of Christ (119-122)
- XIII. The Glovers - Christ, The Adultress, Chelidonus (123-126)
- XIV. The Corvisors - Christ's Visit to Simon the Leper (127-130)
- XV. The Bakers - Christ's Betrayal (131-137)
- XVI. The "ffletchers, bowyers, Cowpers, stringers and Iremongers" - Christ's Passion (138-144)
- XVII. The Cooks - Christ's Descent into Hell (145-151)
- XVIII. The "Skynners" - The Resurrection (152-155)
- XIX. The "saddlers and ffusterers" - "Appearances of Christe" - (156-159)
- XX. The "Telers" - The Ascension (160-163)
- XXI. The "ffishmongers" - The "holy ghoste" (164-167)
- XXII. The "shermen" - The Prophets and the Antichrist (168-170)
- XXIII. The "diers and hewsters" - The Coming of Antichrist (171-177)
- XXIV. The Weavers - The Domesday (178-184)

In the other Banns, one learns that there was an additional play, Our Lady's Assumption, produced by ". . . the wurshipful wyffys of this town." However, this play was not a crucial one, and, thus, could have been combined with another scene, or omitted if necessary, without seriously affecting the drama. Therefore, it should be evident that, generally, each gild would produce the most appropriate play.

One must also familiarize himself with the types of stages utilized during performances. It is generally agreed that the liturgical drama was performed in the church or on its surrounding grounds. However, when considering

processional drama, it becomes necessary that one carefully examine the pageant wagon and its relationship to the plays. The name, pageant or pagand, was derived from the Greek, pegma, and the Latin, pagina.⁵¹ Pageants were originally the "boards," either fixed or wheeled scaffolds, whereon the plays were enacted.⁵² Numerous scholars have used Rogers' account as authoritative evidence regarding the Chester pageant wagons:

. . . these pagiantes or cariage was a highe place made like ahowse with ij rowmes beinge open on the tope the lower rowme they apparrelled & dressed them selues, and in the higher rowme they played, and they stooode vpon 6 wheelles⁵³

Jusserand refers to Rogers' account in the statement,

" . . . the wagons were built high like a house of two stories, in the lower one the actors lived, in the upper one they played."⁵⁴ Similarly, Jackson states that

" . . . the Miracle Plays went wheeling along from street to street, played on double scaffolded carts; the players attiring themselves on the lower scaffold, while the play

⁵¹Mangan, op. cit., p. 295.

⁵²"The Pageants of the Middle Ages," The Spectator, CII (June 5, 1909), 888.

⁵³Salter, Medieval Drama in Chester, p. 56.

⁵⁴J. J. Jusserand, "The Drama of the Middle Ages," The Chautauquan, XIX (April, 1894), 67.

was progressing on the upper!"⁵⁵ Despite the fact that Rogers' account of these pageant wagons may not be an eye-witness record, these particular lines have been questioned from another standpoint. For example, Wickham suggests that, if the structures were as cumbersome as two story houses and approximately 15 to 20 feet high, it certainly would have been difficult to wheel them through the narrow medieval streets.⁵⁶ Thus, the pageant wagons described by Rogers do not provide a workable stage nor does the reference to a lower dressing room correspond with medieval staging procedures. Perhaps, as Craig suggests, Rogers was misled by the seventeenth-century theatres' ". . . tiring houses or tiring rooms in which actors made changes in costume" ⁵⁷ Or, possibly, Wickham's interpretation that the "ij rowmes" may not have been placed vertically, but that, rather, the "higher" room would actually be "beyond" the "lower" or "front" room clarifies Rogers' account. Wickham illustrates his theory in conjectural reconstructions based on those wagons of the "Carriage House" which was owned by the Chester Tailor's company:⁵⁸

⁵⁵H. H. Jackson, "Chester Streets," Atlantic Monthly, LIII (January, 1884), 16.

⁵⁶Wickham, op. cit., p. 150.

⁵⁷Craig, op. cit., p. 124.

⁵⁸Wickham, op. cit., p. 58.

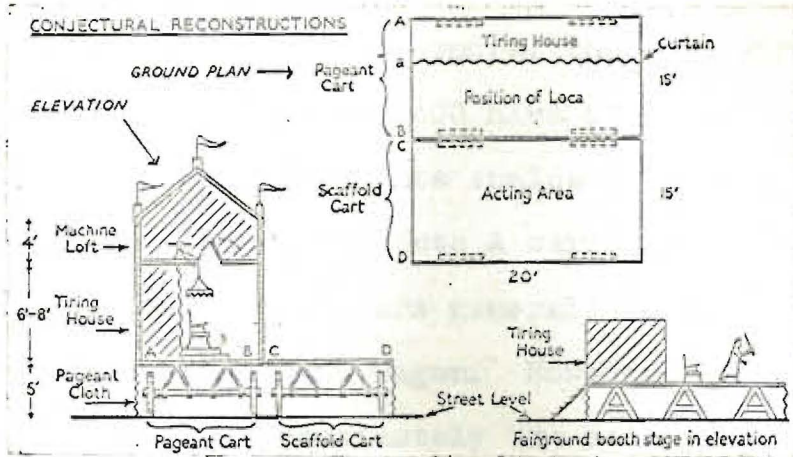


FIGURE 1

GROUND PLANS AND ELEVATION OF PAGEANT WAGONS

It is doubtful that Rogers intended such an interpretation; however, Wickham's use of two wagons may have merit when one considers the actual staging of these plays. In all probability, every wagon was not constructed in the same manner. It is only logical to assume that precious space on a pageant wagon would not be utilized if there were to be no need for a particular scene. For example, if there were no references to Hell, in terms of staging, it may not have been necessary to equip a wagon with identifying properties. Similarly, if there were a need for mountains or temples on Earth, such representations would be included on the particular wagon. Thus, Rogers' account undoubtedly is a generalization, not an exact description of each wagon. Another discrepancy in Rogers' account refers to the individual companies' wagons: ". . . every Company brought forth the their pageinte which was the cariage or place which they

played in"59 Furthermore, the following lines contained in the Banns of 1600 have often been misinterpreted: " . . . these pagente shulde be played after breeffe rehearsal, for everye pagenete A carriage to be provyded withall"60 Scholars generally agree that each gild performed upon a pageant wagon. However, since more than one gild required approximately the same properties and stage constructions, it would not be necessary that every gild possess its own wagon. Gilds could have shared these vehicles, thus suggesting fewer wagons than plays or gilds. Anderson supports this theory using the Painters, Coopers and Skinners gilds as an example. These particular gilds could have shared a wagon having a raised structure " . . . which served as a hilltop pasture, the Mount of Calvary, the Sepulchre, and a building convertible from the Stable to Pilate's Palace."61 Salter, furthermore, agrees with this suggestion, citing an incident in which the Vintners may have used a wagon in Play VIII which was performed at the close of the first day, the Goldsmiths, Play X, the first performance of the second day and the Dyers, Play XXIII, performed toward the end of the final day; in

⁵⁹Salter, Medieval Drama in Chester, p. 55.

⁶⁰Wickham, op. cit., p. 120.

⁶¹Anderson, op. cit., p. 120.

which cases, one pageant wagon would have served all of their needs.⁶²

The Chester plays were generally acted on three successive days in a week--nine on Monday, nine on Tuesday, and seven on Wednesday. However, in reconstructing the processional route of these plays, one finds the authorities again in disagreement. The accompanying plan of the city of Chester enables one more clearly to visualize the proposed routes. Salter and Craig suggest that the plays began at the St. Werburgh Abbey gates, continued to the High Cross, then to the Castle, and finally to the Roodee, an extensive open space by the river.⁶³ If a particular wagon were to be used by another gild, Craig suggests that the vehicle to be used for the next day's performance " . . . could be brought up at night over a relatively short distance to the Abbey Gates for a new start."⁶⁴ However, since seven men, usually, were needed to draw such a vehicle, it would seem unlikely that they would arrange a route which necessitated their pulling the wagon from the Abbey to the Roodee and back again. Other authorities identify the route as one beginning at the Abbey Gateway and continuing to Watergate

⁶²Salter, Medieval Drama in Chester, p. 59.

⁶³Ibid., p. 12.

⁶⁴Craig, op. cit., p. 167.

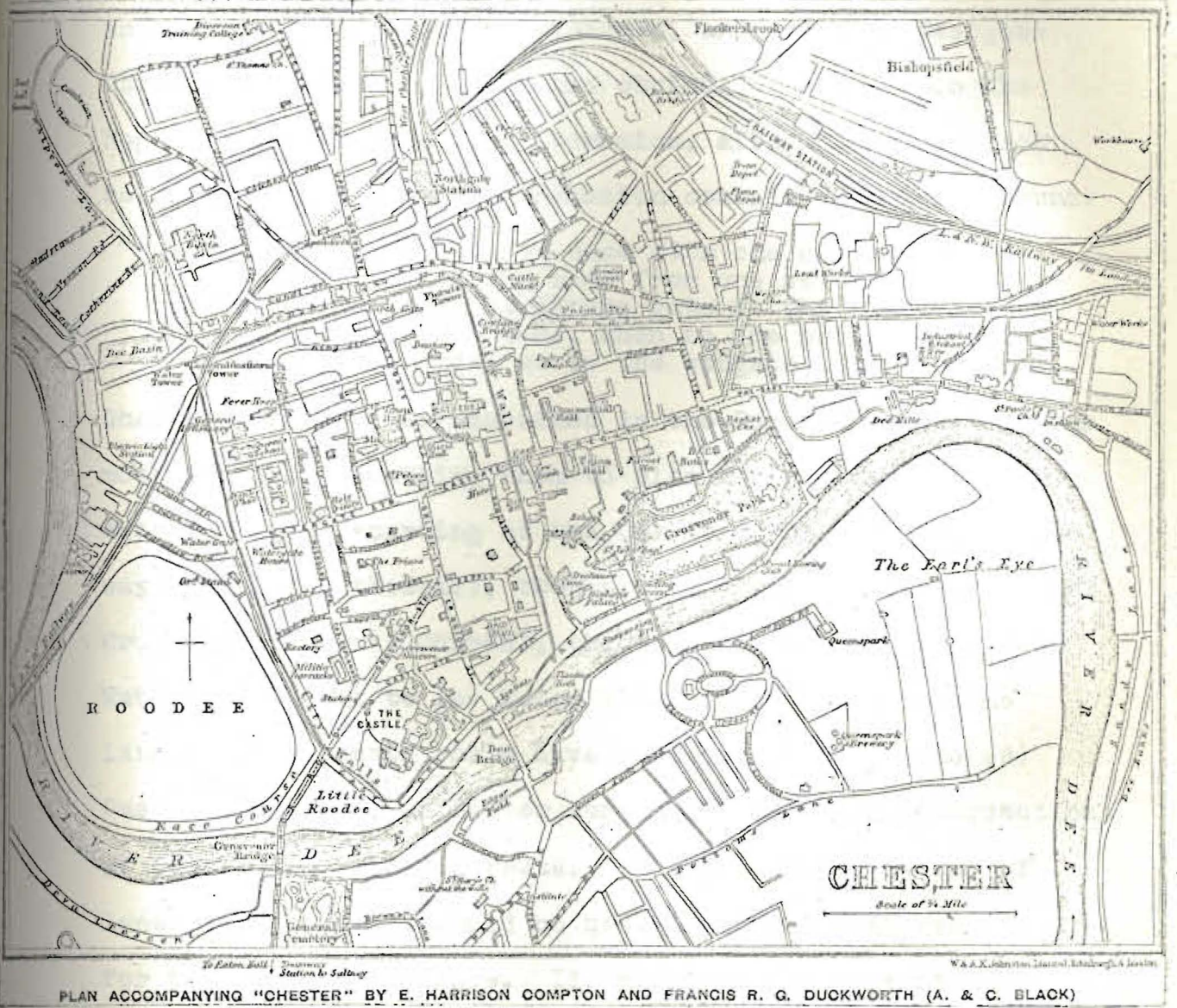


FIGURE 2
A PLAN OF CHESTER

and Bridge Streets.⁶⁵ Chambers, also, claims that
 " . . . the first station was at the Abbey gates, the next
 by the pentice at the high cross before the Mayor, others
 in Watergate Street, Bridge Street, and so on to Eastgate
 Street.⁶⁶ Chambers, here, has obviously relied upon the
 Rogers' account for his information, although he does not
 refer to the following information contained in the account:

. . . And when they had done with one cariage in one
 place they wheeled the same from one streete to an
 other. first from the Abbaye gate to the pentise then
 to the watergate streets, then to the bridge streete
 throughe the lanes & so to the estgate streete.⁶⁷

Chambers' theory, as contained in the Rogers' account, seems
 most feasible, enabling them to plan a circular route. For
 example, after starting at the (a) St. Werburgh Abbey Gate-
 way (Chester Cathedral), then to the (b) Pentice at the High
 Cross (St. Peter's Church), the pageant could proceed down
 Watergate Street to (c) Water Gate. Then by way of the
 lanes, the pageants could have been presented in the (d)
 Castle courtyard, as Salter suggests, or at the intersection
 of Castle and Bridge Streets. Finally, again, by way of
 lanes, the pageants could be brought to (e) Eastgate Street
 for the last performance. If, however, the pageant wagon,

⁶⁵Duckworth, op. cit., p. 137.

⁶⁶Chambers, The Medieval Stage, I, 354.

⁶⁷Salter, Medieval Drama in Chester, pp. 55-56.

then, were needed by another gild, it could easily have been pulled through St. Werburgh Street to a position at the starting point, thus avoiding an approximate three-quarter-mile pull from the Roodee to the Abbey.

The termination of the Chester plays is uncertain. Since these plays were so popular among the villagers, they did not readily cease the productions. In 1571 one Chester mayor, John Hankey, forbid that the plays be presented; however, despite his order, the performances continued until 1575.⁶⁸ During Sir John Savage's mayoralty, apparently the opposition of the authorities became so great that a suppression of the plays could be no longer delayed. After suppression, citizens tried to amuse themselves by wholeheartedly celebrating the Midsummer's Show, founded in 1498, which had previously been produced only during the years when the cycles were not presented.⁶⁹

Tracing the historical development of the Chester plays is a complex task; yet, it is necessary and enlightening if one is to consider the staging of these mysteries, enabling one to realize some of the conditions under which these dramas were enacted and to identify the materials with which the early producers worked. It is, therefore,

⁶⁸Craig, *op. cit.*, p. 356.

⁶⁹Chambers, *The Medieval Stage*, I, 356.

necessary to consider the staging techniques used in the three scenic levels--Heaven, Hell, and Middle Earth--with specific references to appropriate individual plays. However, one should not assume that all of these levels were always represented in a single play. Usually, if there were more than two levels represented, one was of primary importance while the others were secondary. Thus, within each of the three specified levels, the plays under investigation will be considered for the following information: (1) the dramatis personae, indicative of the number of characters needed; (2) internal evidence in the dialogue; (3) stage directions including properties and stage mechanisms; and (4) costuming, including make-up.

CHAPTER II

STAGING TECHNIQUES IN THE DEPICTION OF HEAVEN

Heaven to the medievalists was interpreted in terms of the known world of Earth. In medieval French dramatic staging, Heaven obviously was placed above the stage proper. Furthermore, lines from the French drama such as "en une chappelle/La dessoulez," and "Descendez a terre," suggest that there existed two levels.⁷⁰ Thus, if Heaven were elevated, it must also have been surrounded by stars, clouds, or simply a blue superstructure with the signs of the Zodiac upon it.⁷¹ The clouds especially may have had a special purpose in the mechanical ascent and descent of characters. However, a description of the elevated throne and scaffolding is necessary before other staging techniques may be considered. The single scaffold was a simply made structure constructed of four posts, a floor half-way up, a roof, sides and back which were probably made of curtains.⁷²

⁷⁰Stuart, op. cit., pp. 65-66.

⁷¹Wickham, op. cit., p. 93.

⁷²Richard Southern, The Medieval Theatre in the Round, pp. 114-116.

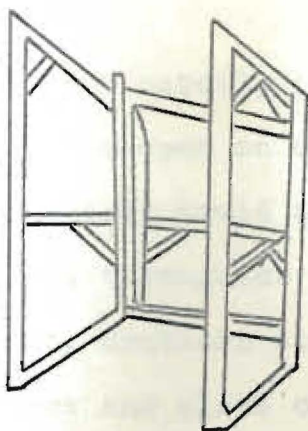


FIGURE 3

A RECONSTRUCTION OF A SINGLE SCAFFOLD

Perhaps The Miniature of the Martydom of St. Apollonia, by Jean Fouquet, about 1455, is a key to the use of scaffolds and elevated levels. When a single section of the picture is viewed in detail, one recognizes God and His angels about Him on the scaffold with the way of access to the raised place being a long incline with slats across it to prevent one's feet from slipping. Such a structure is identical to the modern use of a plank. Southern acknowledges that such a device could also allow for some kind of processional passage along it, whereas a ladder could be used by only one at a time. If a slated plank were used, then a succession of figures could have ascended.⁷³ In the scaffold of the miniature, one observes that God is seated on a throne surrounded by small child-like angels. A curtain is evident on both sides, forming side walls; however, in this miniature a draw curtain across the front is not present.

⁷³Ibid., pp. 99-100.

Southern, however, does not totally reject the idea of a draw curtain which would be open on occasions when God spoke to man, for he states that it would be too tiring for God to sit relatively motionless throughout the course of the play. However, in his argument, Southern stresses a time element of three-and-a-half hours and plays of 3,000 lines.⁷⁴ Yet, since the Chester plays generally are such comparatively short plays, Southern's argument does not seem especially pertinent.

With regard to the number of characters utilized in the scene, as in most medieval cycles, the Chester plays generally open and close with theological instruction given by "Deus" in Heaven. For example, in Play I, The Fall of Lucifer, it is obvious that the initial scenes are located in Heaven, and later, in Hell. The dramatis personae of Heaven in this play includes twelve speaking roles: Deus, Lucifer, Angeli, Archangeli, Lightborne, Virtutes, Cherubyn, Dominations, Principatus, Ceraphine, Thrones and Potes-tates.⁷⁵ However, a great many non-speaking characters also occupied the staging locale of Heaven. It was common that God had small child-like angels, who assisted in the production of music, about Him. Undoubtedly, the stage for Heaven

⁷⁴Ibid., pp. 112-113.

⁷⁵Hermann Deimling (ed.), The Chester Plays, I, 9-20.

in this play must have been constructed in such a way as to allow sufficient space for so much traffic. The Fall of Lucifer contains an example of a use of chairs as properties and for scenery. In this episode, God explains to Lucifer in the presence of Angels, ". . . I sett you next my Chayre" (67). Later, Lucifer declares "Here will I sit now in this stid [reference to God's gilded throne]" (165). Similarly, Dominations orders Lucifer and Lightborne, "Goe to your Seates and wende hence!" (185). From these lines, it is evident that a scaffolding for Heaven must have been present providing for a rather elaborate throne for God and smaller chairs on each side for His Angels. When God exits in l. 104, he may have gone behind His throne or the back curtains at the rear of the scaffolds, thus allowing for a continued action about His "chair." Principatus' warning Lucifer of a "wicked fall" (130) further demonstrates that action, here, occurred on an elevated platform; otherwise, if Heaven were represented on the main level of the stage on the pageant wagon there would have been no means of seeing the participants after the "fall." In addition, this play enables one to observe the use of music in these dramas. Internal textual evidence as well as the descriptions contained in stage directions testify to the fact that vocal music remained in cycle dramas long after other liturgical elements

faded.⁷⁶ For example, Archangeli exclaims, "A song now let us singe in feare" (64), and the stage direction, here, reads: "Tunc cantabunt." It has been suggested that actor Angels were often trained musicians who sang sacred chorals to the accompaniment of unseen instruments.⁷⁷ Collins stresses the quantity of singing which occurs in these cycle dramas, especially in the Chester cycle, noting that Tunc cantant is a most common musical stage direction. For this reason, he thinks these directions were an indication of the song in performance. If he is correct, one notes that, in the Chester cycle, there are twenty-three songs in fourteen plays; or, more than one-half of the plays in the cycle which call for singing. However, as Collins points out, this many songs would not have been unusual, since Chester had always been a musical center, boasting the earliest minstrel organization in England.⁷⁸

The final consideration is the manner of costuming those in Heaven. In The Fall of Lucifer, God has the most obvious costume in His white leather coat,⁷⁹ probably most

⁷⁶Fletcher Collins, Jr. "Music in the Craft Cycles," PMLA, XLVII (September, 1932), 613.

⁷⁷Lucy H. Hooper, "Mysteries and Miracle Plays," Appleton's Journal, XXV (April, 1881), 302.

⁷⁸Collins, op. cit., pp. 616-617.

⁷⁹Mangan, op. cit., p. 296.

costly. In other plays in the Chester cycle, His coat was often painted or gilded producing an illuminated effect.⁸⁰ In the Rogers' account, there is a reference also to the custom of gilding the face of whoever played God, and to request that, since the gilding "disfigured the man," perhaps, in the future, the character could appear in "a cloudy covering," rather than in "shape or person."⁸¹ Thus, God could have been dressed in shapeless, flowing garments representing a spiritual sensation rather than in elaborate, detailed costuming. In the Coventry records, there is traditional costuming noted for the role of God, as follows:

- 1451.--It' payed for vj skynnys of whitleder
to godds garment xviiiij
It' payed for makyng of the same
garment xd
- 1498.--It' payd for mendyng a cheverel for
god and for sowyng of gods kote of
leddur and for makyng of the hands
to the same kote xiiij^d
- 1565.--pd for payntyng & gyldyng (inter
alia) gods cote. pd for a gyrdyll
for god iiij^d
- 1501.--It' pd ffor a newe sudere for god . vij^d
- 1560.--Item for a selldall for god xiij^d⁸²

⁸⁰Duckworth, *op. cit.*, p. 134.

⁸¹Edward Clodd, "Mysteries and Moralities," *Knowledge*, VII (Friday, July 31, 1885), 84.

⁸²"Sharpe's Dissertation on the Pageants or Dramatic Mysteries," *Retrospective Review*, XIII (1826), 311.

The remaining divine supernumeraries probably wore ecclesiastical vestments, embroidered with gold thread, furnished by the Church.⁸³ According to Southern in his examination of The Miniature of the Martydom of St. Apollonia, the smaller angels around God (probably children) were costumed in belted robes, cowlnecks, and wings.⁸⁴ Since such costuming techniques will vary little in the Heaven sequences, they will not be given any further consideration in this study.

The next play and its staging to be considered is The Creation, Play II. Since the actual creation of the Earth and sky by God in the performance is an appealing section, no additional characters are necessary other than His angels. As God opens the play, He remarks that "the earth is voyde onely I see,/therefore light, for more lee," (6-7); thus, with their imaginative minds the audience could observe, from the beginning, how God commanded that the waters, seeds, herbs, fish, fowl, and the numerous other representations of Earth were to be produced. In the "Cain and Abel" scene, an interesting stage direction appears: "Then a flame of fier shall Descende vpon the sacrifice of abell" (560). Thus, one assumes that a flame must have been

⁸³Hooper, op. cit., p. 302.

⁸⁴Southern, op. cit., pp. 99-100.

produced and directed toward Earth. How this flame was managed on the stage is difficult to imagine; however, Salter suggests that since, during the reign of Alexander the Great, "Kratisthenes could make fire burn spontaneously," the stagecraft was accomplished by the mime, juggler, or magician who flourished during the Dark and Middle Ages.⁸⁵

In The Deluge, God is the only character with a speaking part in Heaven; and, as in the preceding plays, the scene opens with God's words of instruction, in this case, to Noah. The first stage direction occurs before God opens the play:

The thirde pagent of Noyes flood and first in some heigh place or in the cloudes, yf it may be, God speaketh ynto Noe standing with-out the Arke with all his familye.⁸⁶

This direction locates God in His elevated position and introduces the use of clouds as mechanisms. The clouds are obvious in depicting God on high; however, clouds could have been used in God's descent for the purpose of instructing Man and, then, for his ascension into Heaven. Such clouds could also have concealed mechanisms operated from the loft of the pageant wagon. Certainly, the audience would have

⁸⁵Salter, Medieval Drama in Chester, pp. 71-72.

⁸⁶Et primo in aliquo supremo loco sive in nubibus, si fieri poterit, loquatur Deus ad Noe extra Arham existentem cum tota familia sua.

been delighted with the mystical appearances and disappearances of God. The "cloud" evidently opened as the person or object descended to Earth. It has been recorded that, at least by 1399, if not earlier, such cloud mechanisms had been used.⁸⁷ By the middle of the sixteenth-century, the spectacle of moving clouds was not an uncommon one.

Records of this period show that:

To John Rossee for . . . Long boordes for the stere of a clowde; vis. Pulleyes for the Clowds and curteynes; iij^s . . . Dubble gyrts to hange the soon in the Clowde; xij^d.

The mention of pulleys suggests their function in the movement of these stage clouds. One also recognizes that the clouds could have been moved horizontally along a wooden "steering-way" or rail, and that a sun, too, could have been hung among the clouds.⁸⁸ With such firmly constructed moveable mechanisms, it was possible to have released men from them; and, perhaps, objects, representing the various acts of weather, may have been released. For instance, records show that hailstones and snow released from clouds were often sweets and biscuits; similarly, rain was also counterfeited to present a realistic performance of the

⁸⁷Wickham, op. cit., pp. 93-96.

⁸⁸Richard Southern, Changeable Scenery, pp. 29-30. "Clouds in Captivity," CCCXVII (April 21, 1923), 181. Even as late as 1923, stage technicians were using the same general method of moveable clouds constructed with white gauze cloth and drawn along a rail by electric rather than man power.

coming floods.⁸⁹ Storm sounds could be produced in a variety of ways. For example, large wooden troughs, about ten feet long, two feet wide with zigzag slats on the bottom, and various sizes of round stones or cannon balls bouncing as they are rolled back and forth are the only properties necessary to produce the rumbling effect of thunder.⁹⁰ The sound of clashing thunder was often produced by shaking a suspended sheet of metal, such as copper. Cylinders, loosely filled with seed and small pebbles, lifted at one end and then the other, allowing the contents to fall in a pattering stream, thus, produced the sound of hail and rain. A rushing sound of water could have been " . . . simulated by turning round and round an octagonal pasteboard box, fitted with shelves, and containing small shells, peas, and shot." Finally, if two discs were covered with a very fine, tightly-strained material, such as silk, and suddenly pressed together, a hallow, whistling sound of loud and fitful gusts of wind could be achieved.⁹¹

The dramatis personae of The Nativity, Play VI, is limited and contains only two speaking roles. The play is

⁸⁹Wickham, op. cit., pp. 93-96.

⁹⁰"Stage Deluge," The Literary Digest, LVI (March 2, 1918), 25.

⁹¹"Stage Storms," All the Year Round, XXVIII (August 10, 1872), 307.

unique in that God does not speak; the opening speech is delivered by Gabriell, who is later joined by Angelus. However, dialogue is not always evidence of the presence of a character; and, in this case, God is obviously present on His throne in Heaven, since Gabriell states, ". . . god is with thee," (2). Similarly, Mary recognizes God ". . . that sitts on heighe in see," (5). The remaining action is focused on Earth; therefore, the locale of Heaven becomes of secondary importance.

In the Adoration of the Shepherds, VII, one again is aware of the absence of dialogue for God whose messages are carried by His Angel. Therefore, although God is visible, the only speaking role is that of the Angel. However, there is much emphasis placed upon the light which appears unto the shepherds:

Primus Pastor:

what is all this light here
that shynes so bright here
on my blacke bearde?
for to see this sight here
a man may be afright here,
for I am aferde. (311-316)

Tertius Pastor:

Such a sight seming,
and a light gleming
letts me for to looke.
all, to my deming,
from a starre streming
it to me stroke. (323-328)

Undoubtedly, the light came from the star which slowly moved

toward Bethlehem and the stable. The movement of the star from west to east could easily have been produced by suspending a star from an invisible wire attached to traverse rods across the top of the stage and operated from the machine loft. However, the star's blinding light which is alluded to must have been accomplished by means of paint, since fire could not have achieved such an effect. The use of music is also evident in this play, as a stage direction at l. 368 reveals: "Then the Angel will sing 'Gloria in excelsis.'"⁹² Indeed, an emphasis upon singing continues throughout this play. The characters of Earth were supplemented in their singing by members from the local choirs, often specified in the records as boys or clarkys.⁹³ Collins describes the members of this group as those who ". . . merely sat in the Heaven and sang like little angels and cherubim."⁹⁴

Although Play XX, Christ's Ascension, presents only Jesus and four Angels as divine figures, a major problem in staging occurs during their actual ascent into stage Heaven. Obviously, Jesus and the Angels were hoisted up slowly; however, in this case, Salter suggests that the

⁹²Tunc cantabit Angelus 'gloria in excelsis Deo et in terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis.'

⁹³Collins, op. cit., p. 619.

⁹⁴Loc. cit.

necessary supports were fitted onto "Jesus," because the dialogue indicates that He is speaking and then is lifted through the clouds while suspended from a wire. He is also directed to sing during His ascension; and the same direction adds, "Having finished the song, Jesus will stand in the midst as if above the clouds."⁹⁵ If the actor portraying Jesus were dangling from a wire as stagehands manually hoisted him, one thinks it would have been rather difficult for him to sing, or to prevent himself from swaying while he was supposed to "stand in the midst." However, if a small step were attached to the cloud device, it could be moved gradually into place during Jesus' speech, and he could then merely have stepped backward onto the step while the cloud gently ascended toward Heaven. Important also in achieving the stage effect of misty clouds and hazy outlines are the garments worn by the actors. If Jesus and the Angels were dressed in long, flowing white robes which would cover the small platform on which they stood and which would gently sway about them as they ascended through the gauze covered clouds and background properties, a truly impressive atmosphere could have been produced. However, it is doubtful that the Heaven stage level was ever seen in the performance of this play. For, with the amount of ascending

⁹⁵Salter, Medieval Drama in Chester, pp. 68, 70.

required, the scaffolding would have had to be as high as the machine loft, thus necessitating that the loft advance beyond this level. One thinks that such a structure would have been exceedingly top heavy for the relatively narrow frame. Perhaps, as Jesus and the Angels were lifted into the clouds, the structures toward the top of the pageant wagon were placed downstage enabling the actors to pass behind them at the conclusion of the ascension episode.

Finally, The Last Judgment, Play XXIV, begins with the traditional approach--didactic instruction; however, in this case, the dramatis personae does not include God as the majestic figure, but rather, He is replaced with a bleeding Christ surrounded by Angels holding the Instruments of the Passion.⁹⁶ Thus, in this final episode, although "Deus" is indicated, Christ is the speaker. The Last Judgment does not suggest the use of any special scaffolding for its Heaven. A stage direction at l. 356 signifies that Christ was to appear, on a cloud:

With the rhythmical Lamentations of the dead, Jesus will descend as if on a cloud, if it will be possible; because according to the opinions of the teachers, the son of God will judge in the sky near the Earth. The Angels will stand with the cross, with the crown of

⁹⁶J. W. Robinson, "The Late Medieval Cult of Jesus and the Mystery Plays," PMLA, LXXX (December, 1965), 510.

thorns, with the spear, and with the other Instruments, demonstrating all these things.⁹⁷

This cloud could have been supported by the basic stage scaffolding of Heaven, thereby also providing standing accommodations for Angels. The costume of Christ in this sequence is not particularly different from God's; however, since numerous references in this play allude to the blood that Christ sheds, the ". . . mantle must be draped so that the wound in His side may be plainly visible."⁹⁸

Deus:

Therefore, my Angells, fayre and bright,
 looke that you wake eche wordly wight,
 that I may see all in my sight,
 that I Blood for can bleed. (13-16)

Ihesus:

After dyed on the rood tree,
 and my blood Shedd, as thou may se,
 to prive the Devyll of his posty,
 and winne that was away.
 The which Blood, behoulds ye,
 fresh houlden till now I would should be,
 for certayne poyntes that lyked me,
 of which I will now say.

One cause was this certaynly,
 that to my father Almighty
 at my Ascention offer might I
 this Blood, praying a Boone: (381-392)

⁹⁷G. W. Matthew (ed.), The Chester Plays, II, 440.
Finitis Lamentationibus mortuorum, descendet Iesus quasi in
nube, si fieri poterit; Quia secundum Doctorum Opiniones in
Aere prope terram iudicabit filius Dei. Stabunt Angeli cum
Cruce, Corona Spinea, lancea, aliisque Instrumentis, omnia
demonstrantes.

⁹⁸Robinson, op. cit., pp. 510-511.

Also I would, without [en]were,
this Blood should now be shewed here,
that the Iews dyd in this manere, (397-399)

Also my blood now shewed is,
that good therby may haue blisse, (405-406)

Now that you shall apertly se,
fresh Blood bleed, man, for thee, (421-422)

Behould now all men on me,
and se my Blood fresh out flee,
that I bledd on rode tree
for your Saluation. (425-428)

Certainly a substance, perhaps in a container concealed in His robes, may have been released to flow from His body. If a substance with the consistency and appearance of human blood could not have been produced, it would be probable to assume that a newly slaughtered animal's blood was collected and used, thereby achieving an impact on the already impressed audience.

Thus, a study of the staging techniques used in the depiction of Heaven reveals the following conditions. First, generally, the dramatis personae of Heaven is limited to God and His Angels. Often the Angels become God-like and deliver messages to Man. However, even in these cases, textual evidence supports the fact that usually God remained visible to the audience during the performance, unless, of course, He left His throne, as in The Fall of Lucifer, or, as in Christ's Ascension in which the locale of Heaven was not depicted. Secondly, the basic scaffolding for Heaven was apparently constructed in the same manner. Undoubtedly,

however, its dimensions were altered at times to accommodate the varying numbers of characters. For example, it is obvious that more space was needed for the staging of Heaven in The Fall of Lucifer (in which at least twelve characters were present) than in The Deluge (in which only one is required). Finally, costuming was restricted to those garments associated with the Church or the spiritual and supernatural. Thus, shapeless garments, displaying little color other than gilding were generally in use throughout these plays.

CHAPTER III

STAGE TECHNIQUES IN THE DEPICTION OF HELL

The staging of the locale of Hell, like Heaven, was interpreted in terms of the known elements of Earth. Obviously, just as Heaven emphasized purity and beauty, Hell depicted the evil and ugliness of the soul to the exclusion of all else. Consequently, Heaven and Hell are the flanking devices of Earth, whether on the sides or above and below, in their respective levels.⁹⁹ However, Hell was not considered merely in terms of opposites. Rather, ". . . the lower world was the part of every play best furnished with the machinery necessary to display it."¹⁰⁰ Thus, there are several interpretations for the staging of this locale, particularly its means of entrance. The following three theories regarding Man's entrance into Hell have been supported: (1) he entered through Hell's gates, (2) through Hell's trap-doors, or (3) through Hell's mouth or the dragon's head. Each of these will be investigated with respect to the internal evidence and the stage directions presented in the plays under consideration. Often the interior of Hell was visible; however, the fact that

⁹⁹Wickham, op. cit., p. 89.

¹⁰⁰Jusserand, op. cit., p. 67.

groaning cries were heard from the lower depths of Hell suggests that Hell was composed of levels. Therefore, since not all levels were necessary for visible actions, the deepest portion of Hell could have been under the pageant wagon while Limbo could have been represented immediately behind the "gates" or "mouth."

In The Fall of Lucifer, the dramatis personae of Hell is quite limited and includes only speaking roles for the two fallen Angels, Lucifer and Lighborne. Thus, after their fall they become personages of Hell and are identified as "Primus Demon" and "Secundus Demon." The most distinct staging in this play occurs during the Angels' fall into Hell. As a result, in this play, God's speech (203-209), "I charge yow fall tyll I byd: 'Noe!'/to the pit of Hell, evermore to be!" and the stage direction, "Then Lucifer and Lighborne must fall,"¹⁰¹ signify that the Angels actually must have fallen into Hell. It would be impressive to the modernist if Heaven were stationed on the main level and the Angels fell through a trap-door into "the pitt;" however, this arrangement is not feasible, since Lucifer and Lighborne would be under the pageant wagon. Consequently, the audience would have no opportunity to see the demons who appear in the last sequence of the play unless they bent

¹⁰¹Tunc cadent Lucifer et Lighborne.

down and looked under. If this were the case, the Mayor on the Pentice at the High Cross and many wealthy merchants sitting in their second story rooms and standing on the Rows of Chester would have been prevented from hearing or seeing this episode. However, if Heaven were stationed on the scaffolds with Hell on the main level, the Angels could fall from Heaven into Hell, but still remain insight. Also, by the chronology of events in the plays, the Earth had not even been created. Moreover, one could have used his imagination and easily could have visualized the seemingly vast distance between Heaven and Hell. Since the "fall" is highly significant, even to the other plays, it would have been more impressive if Lucifer and Lighborne fell right outside the grotesque dragon's head, or Hell's mouth, thus allowing the demons to drag the damned through it into Hell.¹⁰² These demons were usually portrayed by the most popular buffoons and jesters who could display the barbaric and crude actions of the devils.¹⁰³ The device representing the entrance into Hell was usually elaborately constructed and ornamented. It was to be contrived with pasteboard and lathe,¹⁰⁴ and was apparently continually maintained, for a record shows that 21^d.8 was paid for the ". . . makynge of

¹⁰²Hooper, op. cit., p. 302.

¹⁰³Craig, op. cit., p. 126.

¹⁰⁴Duckworth, op. cit., p. 134.

hellmouth new."¹⁰⁵ Great expense must have gone into the construction of the device. The jaws of the head were made to open and close,¹⁰⁶ while flames were ejected and smoke escaped from its opening. The allusion of fire could have been produced by lighted torches or by the mystifying methods before mentioned. However, the smoke easily could have been produced by suddenly pouring hot water on a shovelful of quicklime or coals.¹⁰⁷ It is evident that the costuming of the personae in Hell was as terrifying as it could be; therefore, masks, as well as claw-gloves, were utilized by actors.¹⁰⁹ Also, their bodies were clad in the skins of beasts and made to look as grotesque,¹¹⁰ and as completely opposite from the costumes of Heaven, as possible.

Although in The Creation only one character, the Demon, is presented, he also appears in the disguise of a serpent before Eve in the Garden of Eden. The stage direction at l. 160 states that: ". . . then the serpent shall come up out of a hole and the devil walking shall

¹⁰⁵Mangan, op. cit., p. 296.

¹⁰⁶Gauss, op. cit., p. 419.

¹⁰⁷"Some Realistic Stage Effects," Chamber's Journal, LXXIII (December 5, 1896), 778.

¹⁰⁸Jusserand, op. cit., p. 67.

¹⁰⁹Anderson, op. cit., p. 170.

¹¹⁰Hooper, op. cit., p. 302.

say."¹¹¹ This direction states implicitly that the Demon's entrance be through a hole in the "Earth;" therefore, in this play, the interior of Hell was not visible, but rather was below the wagon. Thus, the Demon could have appeared on Earth by using a trap-door.¹¹² Although the stage direction states "serpent," the Demon obviously came through the trap-door in his customary garb. After his appearance on Earth, he then suggests to the audience that he will use the serpent's disguise:

Disguise me I will anon tyte
and profer her of that ilke fruit:
so shall they both for ther delight
be banished from the blisse.

A manner of an Adder is in this place,
that wynges like a byrd she hase,
feete as an Adder, a maydens face;
her kinde I will take. (189-196)

Therefore, as brocke I my pane,
my adders coate I will put on,
and into paradise will I gone,
as fast as ever I may. (205-208)

These lines indicate that a transformation occurred instantaneously on the stage since the Demon as "Serpens" immediately resumes his dialogue. Therefore, the costume of the

¹¹¹. . . et veniet serpens ad paradisum positum in specie Demonis et ambulando dicat.

¹¹²Eric Rede Buckley, "The Staging of Plays 300 Years Ago," The Gentleman's Magazine, LXVIII (September, 1901), 295. Trap-doors were not unknown during this period; they were also used as graves in which burial scenes could be enacted on the stage. The Coming of the Antichrist is such an example in which the body is laid under earth and gravel and then is still capable of rising.

serpent must have been made simply in order for him to dress himself on the stage. The main portion of the disguise is acknowledged by the Demon himself as being an "adders coat;" thus, since he could not change clothes completely in the time allowed, a coverall representing a lizard-like body could have been used. Also, although it is not so stated in the text, a change of his original mask for a more snake-like one easily could have occurred.

In The Slaying of the Innocents, Play X, Hell and its personae are not as crucial to the scenes as they are in other plays. However, in the last sequence, the Demon does appear briefly at the time of Herod's death scene:

Herod:

I haue done so much woe,
And never good sith I might goe,
Therfor I see now cominge my foe,
to fetch me to hell.

I bequeath heare in this place
my soule to be with Sathanas.
I dye, I dye, alas! alas!
I may no longer dwell! (425-432)

Thus, a trap-door situated in Herod's palace could have been used effectively. As Herod expresses that he sees Satan coming for him, the Demon could slowly rise from the "depths of Hell." Hell's mouth or Hell's Gates could not be used as effectively in this scene, as in other plays, since the stage was already utilized to its capacity in the other Earth locales. Similarly, examining the internal evidence of the

play, one does not recognize the same tone--the violence, noise, and bodily actions--as usually is associated with the other methods of entering and leaving Hell. On the contrary, the true overt personality of the jester or buffoon playing the Demon is apparent as he begins his descent and states:

I will bringe this into woe,
and come agayne and fetch moe,
as fast as ever I may goe.
farewell and haue good day! (453-456)

It was previously acknowledged that God generally opened and ended the mystery plays. In some cases, however, it was recognized that angelic figures assumed God's duties while He sat on high. Likewise, mortal men have been designated to introduce the sequence. However, The Temptation scene certainly is unique, for "Sathanas," the only character from the locale of Hell, opens the play and stresses his sovereignty in his speech much like God in His opening dialogue in The Creation:

Sathanas:

Now by my soverayntie I sweare
and principalitie that I beare,
In hell payne when I am there
a gammon I will assay (1-4)

Deus:

I God, most in maiestye,
in whom beginning none may be,
endles alsoe, most of postye,
I am and haue bene ever. (1-4)

Yet, Satan in this play is not within Hell, even as the

scene opens, but rather is on Earth. Thus, in his last speech, he signifies that he must descend into Hell:

Alas! for shame! I am shent;
with helhoundes when I am hent,
I must be ragged and all to rent,
and dryuen all to dyrt.

Therefore is nowe myne intent,
or I goe, to make my testament:
to all that in this place be lent,
I bequeath the shitte. (153-160)

If the play remained open until he made his descent and was no longer visible, the trap-door device again could have been used. Also, in this last piece of dialogue, Satan reveals that his costume is "ragged and all to rent." In the Banns of 1600, there is also a reference to the appearance of the Devil in this scene:

And next to this, you bowchers of this Citie,
the storie of Sathan that christe woulde needes tempte,
set out as Accostomable vsed haue yee,
the devill in his fethers, all ragger and rente.
(119-122)

Thus, in this play Satan's costume varies from other depictions of him. Anderson suggests that he had feathered tights and wings and triple talons on hands and feet.¹¹³ According to Anderson, this depiction was not that of the ". . . usual hideous fiend;" however, although the Devil's actions were less terrifying and his language was subdued, his giant bird-like appearance still reflected the horror of the "pit" to the audience.

¹¹³Anderson, op. cit., p. 169.

Christ's Descent into Hell is the most obvious treatment of Hell, its interior and its characters. The dramatis personae of Hell in this play includes fourteen speaking roles: Adam, Esay, Simeon, John the Baptist, Seth, David, Satan, two Demons, Jesus, Michael, Enoch, Helias, and Latro. Since this play's locale is Hell, obviously it could not be staged in the lower most position of the wagon, but rather, on the main level, usually designated as Earth, where all could see. As Adam opens the play, one becomes aware that he is situated in Hell, as are numerous other fallen souls who long for Christ's recognition. God apparently is stationed in Heaven, for those in Hell beg that they be saved:

David:

A! high god and king of blisse,
 worshiped by thy name, iwis!
 I hope that tyme now come [h]is
 to deliuer vs of danger.

Come, lord! come to Hell anone,
 and take out thy folk, everychon,
 for those years are fully gone
 sith mankynd first came heare. (81-88)

At l. 145 Jesus demands that the gates of Hell be opened, and continues to use the phrase until He is allowed to enter:

Open hell Gates anone!
 you princes of payne, everychon!
 That Gods sonne may in gone,
 And the kinge of Blisse! (145-148)

Open vp hell gates, yet I say,
 you Princes of pine that be present!
 and lett the kinge of bliss this way,
 that he may fulfill his intent! (177-180)

Obviously, the internal evidence of this play stresses that the gates were used as the entrance into Hell rather than the frequently used Hell's mouth or dragon's head. Certainly, the trap-door was of no use in staging this sequence, since it would necessitate that all of the action occurring within the interior of Hell be under the stage. Therefore, the use of the gates was a convenient method of staging the play; however, it was not necessarily an unusual method. In France, during this period there is evidence that gates were used for the setting of Hell in the Provençal Resurrection. Similarly, when Christ is about to enter Hell, the stage direction reads: Aras Sant Miquel he Gabriel s'en ano an Jhesus dava[n]to los enfernís; and Lucifer, from within, then speaks. Furthermore, the line, "Ubretz vos, portas infernals," describes the entrance.¹¹⁴ From such an entrance, smoke could escape in much the same manner as that in Hell's mouth. It cannot be questioned that Hell's mouth was a most popular device for the representation of Hell's entrance. However, just as there is a miniature in a French manuscript which represents some devils advancing from the mouth, so too, is there another miniature which shows the use of stone gates as Hell's entrance. According to the French, as Jesus advanced through the gates, he entered

¹¹⁴Stuart, op. cit., p. 153.

Limbo and saved Adam and the prophets, but left Lucifer to remain chained in the flames of Hell proper.¹¹⁵ Certainly, one cannot use these French accounts as conclusive evidence for staging the Chester representations; however, since the internal evidence of the English plays corresponds to the staging techniques feasible to the French stages during the Middle Ages, it should be considered a highly probable technique in staging the "Harrowing of Hell" sequence. The play then ends with singing as the saved ascend toward God. However, in four MSS. the play continues in the form of a contemporary warning to those living in sin. Naturally, all were not saved from the burning fires of Hell; thus, a plea to those listening was issued by a woman being eternally punished for her sins on Earth:

sometyme I was a tavernere,
 a gentill gossipe and a tapstere,
 of wyne and ale a trustie brewer,
 which wo hath me wroghte.

of cannes I kepte no trewe mesuer,
 my cuppes I souldde at my pleasuer,
 deceavinge manye a creature,
 tho my ale were naughte.

and when I was a brewer longe,
 with hoopes I made my ale stronge,
 ashes and Erbes I blende amonge,
 and marred so good mavlte. (269-280)

Taverners, tapsters of this cittie
 shalbe promoted heare by me
 for breakinge statutes of this cuntrey,
 hurtinge the common welth; (285-288)

¹¹⁵Ibid., pp. 95, 111.

Therefore, as a result of her evil, Satan warmly welcomes her while taverners in the audience probably received an obvious public criticism of their unlawful practices¹¹⁶ and came to a realization of their own doom if they did not alter their way of life:

welckome, deare darlinge, to vs, all three;
 though Iesus be gone with our meanye,
 yet shall thou abyde heare still with me,
 in paine with oute Ende. (309-312)

This investigation of the staging of Hell reveals that the dramatis personae in this locale is usually extremely limited, generally including only the Devil, who, depending on the play in which he appears, may be referred to as Sathanas, Sathan, the Serpent, and the Primus Demon. Occasionally, other demons appear, but they are referred to only in numerical terms. Also, the interior of Hell proper was seldom visible; however, entrances to this locale were carefully constructed so that no further depiction of the area was necessary. Yet, again, in each of the plays making use of this locale, one notes a distinct individuality in the representations of these mechanical entrance devices. Consequently, if one examines the internal evidence and the stage directions presented in the texts, he discovers that from three separate devices--Hell's gates, Hell's trap-door,

¹¹⁶Lady F. P. Verney, "Mysteries, Moralities, and the Drama," Contemporary Review, XXV (March, 1875), 600.

and Hell's mouth--each gild utilized that specific device which was most adequate for its own needs.

CHAPTER IV

STAGING TECHNIQUES IN THE DEPICTION OF MIDDLE EARTH

After examining the staging techniques used in the development of the Heaven and Hell sequences in the Chester plays, it is now necessary to study the middle area between these two stations. Undoubtedly, Middle Earth is accorded the most dialogue, the largest dramatis personae, and the most scenic devices. The Middle Earth level has been developed to such a degree because of the dramatist's concern for the present as he traced Man's journey from Heaven through Earth and finally to Damnation or Salvation.¹¹⁷ The Chester players naturally were delighted with an opportunity to present the Biblical stories to their fellow townspeople, for their own pleasures, and for public recognition. However, the author or authors of these plays had another objective, namely, to see that these dramas were understood and enjoyed. Moreover, most probably the use of typical attitudes in atypical circumstances confronted by those on Earth helped these plays to be understood more easily and, subsequently, enabled them to retain their popularity.

The Creation is the first play in which the level of Earth occurs and in which the personage of Man is introduced.

¹¹⁷Wickham, op. cit., p. 89.

Herein, the dramatis personae is relatively limited when compared to other handlings of Earth episodes, but it does include the customary Adam and Eve sequence. However, although one has considered God and the Devil-Serpent in the foregoing chapters, he has done so only in relationship to their respective levels of Heaven and Hell, and their entrances and exits from these stations. Yet, it is necessary that they directly be related to Earth and Man. For example, at l. 80 the stage direction states:

Then God goinge from the place wher he was, Comethe to the place wher he Createth adam.¹¹⁸

However, one should not understand this direction as a reference to Paradise. Rather, it is clear that God created Adam outside of the Garden of Eden and,

Then the Creator bringeth adam in to paradise before the tree of knowledge, and saith . . .¹¹⁹

Therefore, two locales must be established--Earth proper, where Adam was created, and the Garden, where God journeys with Adam. The problem of staging the creation of Adam and Eve is not necessarily pronounced if one considers that medievalists had vivid imaginations and that a modern step-by-step scientific development was unnecessary. Possibly, Adam was merely lying among stage bushes where God seemed

¹¹⁸Tunc recedet de illo loco ad locum, vbi creavit Adamum et faciet signum, quasi faceret ipsum.

¹¹⁹Tunc Creator adducet eum in Paradisum ante lignum.
(116)

generally to work in the play. Thus, when God commands, " . . . ryse vp, Adame, rise vp rade,/a man full of soule and life!" (107-108), the actor stood up. Similarly, in l. 128, Adam is directed " . . . to lie down" while God " . . . takes a Rib out of his side"120 Obviously, an animal's bone had been placed in the pre-arranged spot before the beginning of the play. During the performance Adam could have lain down beside the bone and God could then appear to "take it from his side." No doubt, Eve's formation was enacted in the same manner. The appearance of Demons through a trap-door in Earth has already been discussed; however, after this Demon dresses himself in serpent's costume, it is necessary that he be able to see into the Garden of Eden and recognize the Tree of Knowledge. The internal evidence stresses that a tree and an apple are necessary:

Serpens:

Take of his fruite and assaie:
It is good meate, I dare laye,
and, but thou fynde yt to thy paye,
say that I am false.

Eate thou on apple and no moe,
and yow shall knew both wayle and woe,
and be lyke to Goddes, both twoo,
thou and thy housband also. (233-240)

¹²⁰Tunc Creator capiens manum Adami et faciet ipsum
Iacere et capiet costam.

Eva:

An apple of it I will eate,
to assaye which is the meate;
and my housband I will get
one morsell for to take. (245-248)

Then adam shall take the frute and Eate their of, and
in weeping manner shall saye¹²¹

Therefore, from a painted or paper-mâché tree an actual apple was procured, which, also, must have been pre-arranged. At l. 384, there is evidence of the use of music, for God drives Adam and Eve out of Paradise as Angels appear and minstrels play. The means of costuming Adam and Eve have been suggested in two theories; i.e., Adam and Eve either were clothed, or naked. Salter, discussing the appropriateness of the gilds to their plays, explains that " . . . the Tanners, who could provide the skin-tight, white-leather costumes necessary, originally produced the play of Adam and Eve."¹²² However, textual evidence seems to indicate that the actors, here, were without clothing. At l. 160, the stage direction reads: "Then Adam and Eve shall stande nakede and shall not be ashamed"¹²³ Similarly, after eating the apple, Adam and Eve recognize their nakedness and cry:

¹²¹Tunc Adam comedit, et statim nudi sunt, et lamentando dicat. (252)

¹²²Salter, Medieval Drama in Chester, p. 32.

¹²³Tunc Adam et Eva stabunt nudi et non verecundabunt.

Adam:

Out! alas! what eales me?
I am naked, well I see;
woman, cursed must thou be,
for bothe now we be shente. (257-260)

Eve:

Alas! this Adder hath done me nye.
alas! her red why did I?
naked we bene bothe for thye,
and of our shape ashamed. (265-268)

Adam, husband, I red we take
thes figg-leaves for shame sake,
and to our members a hillinge make
of them for thee and me. (273-276)

Furthermore, the stage direction at l. 280, "Then Adam and Eve shall Cover ther members with leeves,"¹²⁴ would have had little significance were the actors already covered. The suggestion that their garments were made of tight leather would still make this line relatively unimportant. As is cited by the author of "Mystery or Passion Plays," "Mr. Holliwell, in his notes to this play, speaks of Dr. Marriott's theory that Adam and Eve were completely nude, " . . . the play would be quite unintelligible on any other supposition."¹²⁵

One of the most familiar plays, yet, one which offers numerous staging problems is The Deluge. Although the play

¹²⁴Tunc Adam et Eva cooperiant genitalia sua cum foliis, et stabunt sub arbore, et venit deus clamans cum alta voce.

¹²⁵"Mystery or Passion Plays," Blackwood's Magazine, CVI (December, 1869), 685.

contains only 372 lines and few stage directions, the cast of characters of *Earth* is a relatively large one. It includes Noah, who instructs his family to start building the Ark; Sem, Ham, and Japhet, who offer their assistance; as do Mrs. Noah, Mrs. Sem, Mrs. Ham, and Mrs. Japhet. The débat between Noah and his wife, then, follows, along with the presentation of the Gossips or Mrs. Noah's friends with whom she tries to stay.¹²⁶ There is no evidence cited regarding the number of Gossips; however, it seems feasible to think that there were three. There were approximately nine or ten stagehands, also, who had no speaking parts, but who assisted in the loading of "animals" into the Ark. Therefore, the cast would have included approximately twenty actors. After God instructs Noah to build the Ark, the next indication of action is contained in the dialogue. For example, gestures certainly must have been made by Sem when he states, ". . . anne axe I haue, by my crowne," (52); by Ham, "I haue a hatchet wonder-kene," (57); by Japhet, "And I can well make a pyn,/and with this hammer knock yt in," (61-62); and by Vxor Sem, "Here is a good hackstock." (69) Also, in this same exchange of dialogue, Mrs Noah remarks,

And we shall bring tymber to,
for wee mon nothing els doe;
women be weake to vnderfoe
any great travayle. (65-68)

¹²⁶Anna Jean Mill, "Noah's Wife Again," *PMLA*, LVI (September, 1941), 613.

According to Salter, Mrs. Noah must enter, therefore, laden with building materials and staggering under the load.¹²⁷

The next stage direction at l. 80 implies that the actors must now begin to pantomime the construction of the Ark:

"They made signs as if they were laboring with divers instruments."¹²⁸ As Noah tells the audience how he is constructing the Ark, he indicates in his dialogue what properties were necessary:

These bordes I ioyne here together,
to kepe vs safe from the wedder,
that we may row both hither and thider,
and safe be from this floode.

of this tree will I make the mast
tyde with gables that will last,
with a sayle-yarde for each blast,
and each thinge in ther kinde. (85-92)

Following this dialogue, the whole family appears to be at work. The staging of Noah's Ark has not been adequately explained in past records. There is controversy regarding the use of a real Ark, apparently the size of an entire pageant wagon; however, theories about the staging of the play around the Ark have not extended beyond a concept of the Ark's being pulled through the streets in a processional. Yet, if such a structure were used, the lengthy dialogue regarding its actual construction would be

¹²⁷Salter, Medieval Drama in Chester, p. 30.

¹²⁸Tunc faciunt signa, quasi laborarent cum diversis Instrumentis.

meaningless. It has also been suggested that two wagons were used as pre-constructed sections of the approximate size of a wagon were fitted into place during the dialogue. The actors then could use a second flat-bed type of wagon placed in front of the Ark for the acting area. However, this proposal is not especially feasible, either, since in it there are no allowances for Heaven's scaffolds and, thus, for God Himself. The most plausible theory concerned with this staging problem suggests the use of pre-constructed panels as mentioned above, but in extremely reduced sizes. Therefore, a simulated Ark may have been constructed in front of the audience while Noah in his dialogue appropriately describes the process. Since there is no evidence of the use of closing and opening of curtains to denote the passage of time, Noah makes his audience aware of time, stating: "A 100 wynters and 20/this shipp making taried haue I" (149-150) As Noah tries to persuade his wife to enter the Ark, he momentarily gives up his arguments and speaks to the audience in a traditional aside:

Lord, that women be crabbed eye,
and never are meke, that dare I saye.
this is well sene by me to daye,
In witnes of yow each one. (105-109)

He, then, returns to his wife and again tries to reason with her; however, he still speaks to the audience and suggests that, because of her unfeminine attitudes, she, rather than he himself, may be thought as head of his household:

Good wife, let be all this beere
 that thou makes in this place here;
 for all they wene thou art master,
 and so thou are by St. John. (109-112)

Mrs. Noah's sons reveal that if they cannot verbally persuade her to enter the Ark, they will physically overcome her:

Sem:

In feith, mother, yet you shall,
 whether you will or not. (239-240)

The most lengthy stage direction contains specific details regarding the boarding of the animals into the ship:

Then Noah will enter the Ark and his family will pass to him all animals depicted on cards and recite their names; and after speaking his part every one of them, except Noah's wife will enter the Ark and the animals designated must agree with the words spoken and thus the first son will begin:¹²⁹

However, despite these directions, this sequence presents a staging problem. It has been suggested that the animals could have been depicted by one of the following methods: (1) by pictures of animals painted on cards, (2) by real animals, (3) by children disguised as animals,¹³⁰ or (4) by artificially constructed animals. If one analyzes the stage direction, "animals depicted on cards," he should have

¹²⁹Tunc Noe introibit archam, et familia sua dabit et recitabit omnia animalia depicta in cartis et, postquam vnusquisque suam locutus est partem, ibit in archam, vxore Noe excepta, et animalia depicta cum verbis concordare debent, et sic incipiet primus filius. (160)

¹³⁰Janet Leeper, "Noye's Fludde at Aldeburgh," Drama, L (Fall, 1958), 34.

little doubt that cards were made of a somewhat heavy and durable material such as cardboard and were brought in by the stagehands or extras, taken up a slightly raised gangway, and set up against the back boards of the Ark. Similarly, extras could show the appropriate card and set each one in the Ark as Sem begins:

Sir, here are lyons, libardes in,
horses, mares, oxen, and swyne,
geates, calves, sheep and kine
here sitten thou may see. (161-164)

By this means, one explains Sem's concluding line as a direct reference to the audience. In addition, Salter states that in one of the MSS., the direction is given to set the paintings around the "boards" of the Ark.¹³¹ Therefore, after each extra had placed his picture in the Ark, he would, then, exit to the rear, obtain his next card, and enter again as before, while the speaker identifies the animals. However, mere picture representations would have added relatively nothing to the effect of the play. Therefore, perhaps real animals were used, although this practice would seem to be doubtful since animals larger than donkeys could not have been accommodated on the wagon. The suggestion that children wearing animal masks depicted the animals is more acceptable; however, if realistic animals could have been made, it would have been useless to have employed actors.

¹³¹Salter, Medieval Drama in Chester, p. 31.

Finally, the use of artificially constructed animals is credible and, in part, actually relates to the stage direction. Perhaps the names, rather than the pictures of animals were written on cards with artificial three-dimensional animals used. For example, an early record shows that Bishop Hall compared his congregation to such animals, stating:

I fear that some of you are like the Pageants of your great solemnities wherein there is the show of a solid, whether of a Lion, or Elephant, or Unicorne, but if they be looked into, there is nothing but cloth and sticks and wyre.¹³²

However, the probable use of real animals should not be disregarded entirely. For instance, one imagines the amusing, as well as interesting, qualities the play would have if actors were to struggle with bleating sheep, cantankerous billy goats, and leaping rabbits, in an attempt to get them aboard the Ark!¹³³ With all the animals inside the Ark, Noah, then, peers out of an opening as the rain continues. Then, the scene ends when he disappears from view. The direction immediately following describes the foregoing action and introduces that of the succeeding scene:

Then Noah shall shut the window of the ark and for a little space underneath the roof, he will sing the song "Save me o God"¹³⁴

¹³²Wickham, op. cit., p. 99.

¹³³Anderson, op. cit., pp. 139-140.

¹³⁴Tunc Noe claudet fenestram Archae et per modicum spatium infra tectum cantent psalmum 'Save mee o God' et aperiens fenestram et respiciens. (256)

As the Ark "heaves" in the waves, the passengers sing the psalm (King James Version. Psalms: 69): "Save me, O God, for the waters are come in unto my soul!"¹³⁵ The Ark could have been made to seem as if it were being rolled and tossed about in the turbulent waters by means of pasteboard waves attached to wires leading to the loft along the downstage side. These waves could then be moved while the passengers aboard the Ark swayed.¹³⁶ Thus, when Noah reappears and states, "Now 40 dayes are fullie gone," the audience is aware of the passage of time; and in modern terms, one would recognize the opening of a new scene. Noah, tells this audience that he will "send a raven;" however, the stage direction follows this remark stating:

Then he will send a raven and taking the dove in his hand he will say:¹³⁷

The next direction, again, is explicit in expressing Noah's handling of the bird:

Then he will send out the dove and there will be on the ship bearing an olive branch in his mouth which Noah will let go from the mast through a rope in his hand and afterwards Noah will say.¹³⁸

¹³⁵Collins, op. cit., p. 619.

¹³⁶Duckworth, op. cit., p. 148.

¹³⁷Tunc dimittet corvum et capiens columbam in manibus dicat. (264)

¹³⁸Tunc emittet columbam et erit in nave alia columba ferens olivam in ore, quam dimittet ex malo per funem in manus Noe, et postea dicat Noe. (272)

Salter refers to this line and states that, when the dove returns bearing a spray of olive, it is by a sleight and "is passed to him from inside, but he seems to pick it out of the air."¹³⁹ However, one should not overlook the possibility of the presence of trained birds, for, jugglers frequently had trained animals, and " . . . sometimes the practice of jugglery was combined with that of minstrelsy and animal training."¹⁴⁰ Thus, a bird actually could have been trained to fly to the back of the wagon, receive the branch, and return again to Noah. The costuming of those persons representing Earthly Man generally was no different from contemporary dress.

The Sacrifice of Isaac includes a most interesting episode; however, the actual story of the sacrifice of Isaac was not expected to be as popular as it later became. Although the play includes dialogues by Nuntius, Abraham, Lothe, Armiger, Melchisedeh, the Expositor and Deus, the Abraham/Isaac sequence offers the most interesting developments in staging. At l. 245 in MS. W, one recognizes an obvious reference to the sacrifice locale: "Here they go both together to the place to do the sacrifice." Internal

¹³⁹Salter, op. cit., p. 32.

¹⁴⁰Louis B. Wright, "Animal Actors on the English Stage before 1642," PMLA, XLII (September, 1927), 656.

evidence supports the theory that this locale was an elevated level:

Abraham:

Now Isaake, sonne, goe we our waye
to yonder mountayne, if that we maye. (249-250)

As was previously noted, gilds shared their wagons with one another if approximately the same scenery was required. Therefore, in this episode, the mountain that Abraham identifies could be later converted to the shepherds' mountain or Mount Calvary. After reaching this locale, Isaac makes three requests:

Father, if you be to me kinde,
about my heade a kercher bynde, (385-386)

I praye you, father, turne downe my face
a lyttle whyle, whyle you have space,
for I am full sore adred. (390-392)

My deare father, I you praye,
let me take my clothes away,
for sheeding blood on them to daye
at my last endinge. (401-404)

Evidently Abraham tied a kerchief about his son's head, for three of the Chester MSS. allude to such action at l. 388:

Here Abraham kisseth him and bindeth a karchaff about his head, and lettes him kneele and speaketh.

Also, according to this direction, Abraham kisses Isaac.

Although no references to this gesture are made in the dialogue, it is expressly mentioned in the stage directions of

nearly all of the MSS. of the Chester cycle.¹⁴¹ However, there is no textual evidence to show that Isaac removed his clothes for the sacrifice. Finally, as previously studied, animals frequently are referred to in these plays; therefore, if possible, real animals were used for variety and interest. Rather than to sacrifice Isaac, a tied lamb was offered in his place. Therefore, if a real lamb were used, it must have been slaughtered on the stage, since Abraham's lines and the subsequent stage direction otherwise could not be justified:

a horned wedder here I se,
among the breeres tyed is he,
to the offred it shall be
anone right in this place. (141-144)

Then lett Abraham take the lambe and kill him and lett
god say¹⁴²

Also, if the lamb were not killed as directed, there would have been much distraction on the stage during God's final speech.

Undoubtedly, the major episode of The Nativity play is the stable scene; however, two other locales and, thus, their personae, must be established. First, is the Emperor Octavian's palace, in which the Emperor confers with the two Senators and Sibble, the sage; and, then sends his messenger,

¹⁴¹Margaret Dancy Fort, "The Metres of the Brome and Chester Abraham and Isaac Plays," PMLA, XLI (December, 1926), 834.

¹⁴²Tunc Abraham mactabit Arietem. (144)

Preco, to carry the order of taxation into Nazareth. Next, Joseph's house must be designated; and, finally, on the eastern side of the wagon, the stable at Bethlehem must be represented in which two midwives witness Christ's birth. However, it should not be assumed that each of these locales was depicted by any realistic scenery. Chairs were quite common in such plays and could represent a room, house, town, or country.¹⁴³ Therefore, it would not be unrealistic, in the medieval sense, to use a chair for Joseph's house or the Emperor's station. Joseph and Mary's journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem included an ox and an ass, on which Mary sat:

Joseph:

now sith yt may none other be,
 Mary, sister, now hye wee!
 an oxe I will take with me,
 that there shall be sould. (433-436)

Maria:

helpe me downe, then, my life fere!
 for I hope my tyme is neere;
 christ in this stable that is here,
 I hope, borne will be. (473-476)

In this case, it is not likely that both animals were real. Yet, possibly an ass could have been used on the stage. However, mechanical animals, if constructed strongly, with movable parts, also could have surmounted the staging

¹⁴³Stuart, op. cit., p. 15.

problem.¹⁴⁴ Thus, Mary actually would have ridden on a hobby-horse instead of an ass.¹⁴⁵ The stable was constructed in more greater detail than the other locales of this play. It apparently had a thatched roof so that, when the Magi and Shepherds came, a portion of this roof could have been pulled away, enabling the light from the Star to shine on the Saviour's head. Also, its back and, most probably, its sides were draped with curtains. In fact, the Painter's accounts for 1561 have a payment of 3^d recorded "for 3 Curten cowerds."¹⁴⁶ Although there is no evidence of dialogue during the painless birth of Christ,¹⁴⁷ it can be assumed that it was in those speeches which precede and follow the logical time:

Joseph:

Loe! mary! hart! I haue brought here
II mydwifes for the manere
to be with thee, my dearling deare,
tyll that it be daye. (505-508)

Maria:

A! Ioseph, tydinges aright:
I haue a sonne, a sweet wight.
lord, thanked be thou, much of mighte,
for preeved is they postye! (513-516)

¹⁴⁴Hooper, op. cit., p. 302.

¹⁴⁵Geoffrey Dearmer, "Miracle Plays," Saturday Review, CXXXVII (January 5, 1924), 8-9.

¹⁴⁶Salter, Medieval Drama in Chester, p. 65.

¹⁴⁷Craig, op. cit., p. 187.

The dramatis personae of the Adoration of the Shepherds obviously includes the Shepherds, or Pastors, among them being a clownish shepherd named Gartius, and Trowl, a shepherd boy, and the characters from the stable episode. The stage setting must have included two locales: (1) a mound, representing the pasture land of the Shepherds, on the western side of the wagon, and (2) the stable at Bethlehem on the eastern side. It is necessary that the Shepherds' locale be somewhat elevated since the Third Shepherd asks for help in getting up:

Hankin, hold up thy hand and haue me,
that I were on height ther by thee.

Primus Pastor:

Gladly, sir, and thou wold be by me;
for loth me is to deny thee. (93-96)

After the appearance of the Angel, l. 368, the Shepherds hear singing; and, there is a continued emphasis on song:¹⁴⁸

Primus Pastor:

Nowe pray we to hym with good intent,
and sing I will, and me unbrace,
that he will let us to be kent,
and send us of his grace. (447-450)

Secundus Pastor:

sing we now, I red us, shrill
a mery song us to solace.

¹⁴⁸Collins, op. cit., p. 619.

Gartius:

Nowe sing on! let us see!
 some songe I will assaie,
 All men singes after me,
 for musique of me learne you may. (453-458)

During their journey to Bethlehem, they again pursue their singing:

Gartius:

Now wend we forth to Bethlem,
 that is best our song to be,
 for to se the starre gleame,
 the frute also of that mayden free. (459-462)

Gartius:

and sing we all, I redd,
 some myrth to his maiesty,
 for certayne now see we it in deed:
 the kinges sonne of heaven is he. (487-490)

After arriving at the stable, the Shepherds obviously have in their possession certain properties. Although Salter discusses the use of boy apprentices in the offering sequence, the text under present investigation does not include such a scene. The only offerings that are made in this version of the play are those of the Shepherds themselves:

Primus Pastor:

Loe! I bring thee a bell;
 I praie thee, save me from hell,
 so that I may with thee dwell
 and fare well for aye. (571-574)

Secundus Pastor:

Haile the, maker of the star,
 that stood us beforne!
 haile the, blessedfull barne!
 I bring the a flackett!

and therat hanges a spone
 to Eate thy potage withall, at none,
 as I my selfe full oft hath done.
 with hart I pray the : take it. (579-586)

Tertius Pastor:

hayle, graunter of happe!
 in earth now thou dwelles.
 loe, sonne, I bring the a Capp,
 for I haue nothing els. (591-594)

Gartius:

My deare, with Drury vnto thee I me dresse,
 my flote on fellowship that I do not lose,
 and to saue me from all ill sicknes,
 I offer to thee a paire of my wyues olde hose;
 (599-602)

It is obvious that a bell, flackett, spoon, cap, and hose were meant to be seen by the audience. Thus, again singing, the Shepherds begin their journey homeward.

Although the Adoration of the Magi involves three Kings, it also includes a Doctor and an Expositor and introduces another extremely prominent figure, King Herod, surrounded by his council and servants. As the scene opens, the Magi are apparently situated on a mound, or perhaps on improvised chairs, as they endeavor to see the prophetic Star:

Primus Rex:

For well I wot, forsooth, I wiss,
 that his prophesie sooth is.
 A star shold rise, betokening blisse,
 when Gods sonne is borne.

Therefore these Lordes and I in feare
 in this mount make our prayer
 devoutly once in the yeare,
 for therto we bene sworne; (9-16)

It also is evident in the stage direction at l. 112 that before they can begin their journey to Bethlehem, they must descend from an elevated position:

Then the kinges goe downe to the beastes and ryde
about.¹⁴⁹

The reference to riding implies the use, perhaps, of mechanical, hobby-horse types of animals. Apparently the three Kings begin their journey from the far side of the stage, with the guiding Star hanging at the opposite side. Consequently, in the middle was Herod. As the Kings travelled toward the East, they entered Herod's palace. Because the guilds often shared pageant wagons, Herod's throne might have been constructed for the use of the Vintners in their play, and, then, later was used by the Goldsmiths and Masons in the staging of the Slaying of the Innocents. An elevated throne was necessary, possibly with a crown suspended above it, for this device could have been hung from the machine loft, with a curtain or drapery encircling the throne. Although one cannot determine to what extent actors with non-speaking roles were used, it is possible to consider that Herod had numerous servants and advisers around him.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹Descendunt et circumambulant bis et tunc ad Equos.

¹⁵⁰Wickham, op. cit., p. 154.



FIGURE 4.

A STAGE PLAN FOR THE ADORATION OF THE MAGI

The Magi's Oblation is a direct continuation of the preceding play. Here, the Kings begin once more at the far side of the wagon and travel toward the Star over Bethlehem. Thus, for instance, if two pageant wagons were placed, one in front of the other, the two stages would form one long, continuous horizontal acting area. Thus, in this play, the stable and those associated with this locale were probably represented on the far side. Undoubtedly, since The Magi's Oblation was performed by the Mercers, it is natural that their costumes were most elaborately and richly made.

The Slaying of the Innocents contains numerous speaking roles, including Herod, two soldiers, Preco, Joseph and Mary, and two parents whose children are slain. However, the play calls for many other actors and actresses necessary to represent soldiers and townspeople. Herod opens the play with his proclamation that all newborn male children must be killed and, thereafter, sends his soldiers into the lands of Judea and Galilee. An Angel next appears to Joseph advising him to flee into the land of Egypt. In his illustration of

these locales, Wickham places Herod's throne in the middle of the area representing Bethlehem and Egypt.¹⁵¹ Consequently, Joseph would be fleeing from no one, but rather would be journeying toward Herod's throne! Since Herod was stationed in Jerusalem, which is north of Bethlehem, it would seem feasible that Galilee would have been on one side of him with Bethlehem on the opposite. Thus, if the troops went into Galilee and Judea (the locales on either side), then the Doctor's following statement is clarified:

Commaund your knightes anone in hye
to goe to the land of Galeleye
and into the land of Iudy,
to slay all that they may finde. (129-133)

Similarly, it is not necessary that Egypt be designated as a major locale, for Joseph and his family need only to hover in the far corner of the wagon to suggest that they have left Bethlehem (Judea) and are now in Egypt. Thus, when the angel appears to them and directs them to re-enter Judea, they can do so without crossing through Herod's palace which area would logically be that of Jerusalem. The staging of the slaughter, however, did not pose major problems for, undoubtedly, stuffed dummies were used. Therefore, the soldiers' downward sword strokes could have produced the necessary effects.¹⁵² Also, the soldiers refer to the

¹⁵¹Loc. cit.

¹⁵²Anderson, op. cit., p. 136.

bodies of children on the points of their spears:

Secundus Miles:

Dame, thy sonne, in good fay,
 he must of me learne a play:
 he must hop, or I goe away,
 upon my speare ende. (321-324)

Blood-stained dolls may have been crucial to the staging of this episode. For example, the Chester plays include a scene not evident in the other mystery cycles. In order fully to punish Herod, this scene explains that Herod's son, also, shall be among the slain. As a result, Herod more readily and intensely recognizes his sin. The costuming for those other than Herod was generally of contemporary design. However, Herod's role was a popular one because of the nature of his dialogue and the appearance of his wardrobe. Using the Coventry cycle as an example, one notes that Herod required a crest (helmet) of iron and a gilted falchion,¹⁵³ and that a poleaxe was necessary for one of his sons.¹⁵⁴

The dramatis personae of Christ, The Adulteress, and Chelidonium includes twenty-one characters with speaking roles: Jesus, "Puer Ducens Cacum," Chelidonium, Peter, John, "Primus and Secundus Proximus," two Pharisee, "Primus and Secundus Vicinus," Nutius, Mother, Father, Caecus, two Jews, Mary, Martha, Thomas, and Lazarus. However, the most

¹⁵³"Sharpe's Dissertation," cited in Contemporary Review, op. cit., p. 303.

¹⁵⁴Mangan, op. cit., p. 296.

significant episode of the play occurs in the later sections. Jesus, in Galilee, is summoned by Mary and Martha to Bethany where their brother, Lazarus, was buried. Thus, Jesus and His disciples journey to the land of Judea. Therefore, Galilee just be represented, although no stage pieces were necessary. Bethany, too, requires few scenic devices; however, the raising of Lazarus introduces an opportunity for the use of stage machanisms. Lazarus literally is raised, or pulled, from the grave. Moreover, the use of a trap-door device would justify Mary's statement that for four days he had lain in the clay, denoting that which would be below the visible surface. When Jesus announced, "Lazar, come forth! I bydd thee," Lazarus was pulled from the opening, lying on a platform. Consequently, Lazarus' exclamation pertaining to the fact that he was raised is a literal one:

A! lord, blessed most thou be!
 from death to lyfe hast raysed me
 through thy mickle might. (455-457)

There is an obvious costuming allusion at l. 462: "Loose, him now, and let him goe!" If Lazarus was wrapped in his graveclothes, his hands and feet most probably were tied. The play ends as Jesus makes His way toward Jerusalem.

Jesus and His disciples, Peter, Phillip, Simon, and Judas, again enter Bethany, home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, in Christ's Visit to Simon the Leper in order to

make preparations for Christ's entry into the Holy City of Jerusalem. However, although these characters are the primary ones in this sequence, Cayphas, Annas, and two Pharisee are also designated speaking roles. Christ's Visit to Simon the Leper, like The Slaying of the Innocents, includes numerous personae which are necessary to the action but have limited or no dialogue. For example, a janitor, six "cives," and two "mercators" who receive Jesus and His followers in Jerusalem are required. Although Jesus speaks of a castle where Peter and Phillip may get an ass and her fole, it may have been represented with only pillars thereby denoting a city:

Peter and Phillip, my Brethren free,
before you a Castell you may see;
goe you thither, and fetch anone to me
an asse and her fole also.

Loose them, bring them hither anon!
if any man gritch you as you gone,
and you say that I will ryde theron,
soone will the let them goe. (137-144)

These animals were most likely real ones, since Jesus states that he will ride on one.

Christ's Betrayal, Play XV, again includes Jesus and His followers, Peter, John, Jacob, Andrew, Judas, Thomas, and Phillip, as well as the minor roles of the servant, "pater familias," Malchus, and a Jew. This play, containing the Last Supper sequence, is one of the few Chester plays which require an interior scene other than that of a palace.

The interior of Simon's house is the primary locale in which the Last Supper occurs. It is necessary that a set table be provided for Jesus and His disciples because Jesus instructs them to

. . . goe to your seat;
 this pascall lambe now let us eate,
 then shall we of other things intreat,
 that be of great effect. (65-68)

Although a real table could have been set for this occasion, it is also possible that a pasteboard two dimensional drawing was used.¹⁵⁵ Therefore, it would be unnecessary to use as many individual properties. However, during the sequence, the characters undoubtedly ate the bread and drank the wine; otherwise, there would be no genuine meaning to the lines:

this breade I geue here my blessinge,
 take, eates, brethren, at my biddinge,
 for leeuve you well, without leasinge,
 this is my body, . . . (89-92)

ffather of heauen, I thanke thee
 for all that euer thou doest to me!
 brethren, takes this with hart free,
 that is my blood, (97-100)

After the supper, the washing of the feet poses no staging problems. The costumes were simply made, although some of the longer robes were ecclesiastical garments borrowed from the Church.

¹⁵⁵J. C. Trewin, "Look at the Clock," Illustrated London News, CCIXX (July 7, 1951), 26.

Play XVI, Christ's Passion, immediately follows the Betrayal. The dramatis personae of this play is quite large and poses a problem if one considers the amount of acting space available. For instance, if individual thrones were to be built for Annas, Cayphas, Pilate, and Herod, and if a mount and sepulchre were required, there would be little, if any, room for the six Jews who persecute Christ, and the twelve persons who pity him, including "Primus and Secundus Mulier;" Mary, mother of Jesus; Mary Magdalene; Mary Jacob; Mary Salome; John, Evangelista; Centurio, Longeus, Joseph the Arimathaeon, Joseph and Nichodemus. However, chairs easily could have been used in the cases of Annas and Cayphas, and a small throne for Pilate. The church could have been designated if only one stained glass plate¹⁵⁶ were suspended from the loft with perhaps a column alongside it. The theory that stained glass was used in this episode cannot be fully substantiated; however, since records show that Richard Doby was paid 2^d by the Coopers, and since Richard Doby was a glazier, one might assume that he had at one time performed such a service for the gild.¹⁵⁷ The locale of Mount Calvary next could have been depicted as a series of raised platforms, much like wide stair steps. Before Christ

¹⁵⁶E. Martin Browne, "The English Mystery Plays," Drama, XLIII (Winter, 1956), 36.

¹⁵⁷Salter, Medieval Drama in Chester, p. 66.

was "nailed" to the cross, it was necessary that the audience see the throwing of dice for His robe. Thus, this action could have occurred on the lowest step, or at the base of the mount. One property crucial to the development of the scene was the cross. It would not have been necessary to use heavy, strong wood, for, certainly, one constructed to support a man's weight would have been difficult to handle on the stage. According to the dialogue, ropes also are needed in order to pull the cross up in a vertical position. The actual "nailing" of Jesus to the cross could have been represented if the actor were placed on the top side of the cross and his hands tied to its points. The acts of hammering nails through his palms would, of course, be simulated; however, drops of blood placed in these spots would be meaningful to the audience. When this deed was accomplished, the crucifiers would pull the cross up by the ropes. If the actor maintained a rigid back, and kept his feet close together, the desired effect could have been achieved. Although, in reality, the actor would merely be standing extremely erect with the structure tied to him. The play ends as Nicodemus steps to the front of the stage with Joseph and relates to him and the audience the frightening acts of nature which occur during this period:

ffor the sonne lost his light,
Earthquake made men afright,
the Roch that never had cleft
did cleev then, as men might know.

Sepulchrs opened in mens sight,
 dead men rysen ther by night;
 I may say he is god Almighty,
 such Signes that can show. (877-885)

Certainly rumbling noises must have been produced from beneath the wagon, and bodies could have been raised from their graves about Mount Calvary.

Christ's Resurrection, Play XVIII, includes approximately the same primary characters as Play XVI; however, it presents an interesting staging problem. It is necessary that Pilate still retain his throne at one corner of the wagon while Mount Calvary and the Sepulchre are located on the opposite side. However, it is necessary that the Mount be elevated, since at the base sit Pilate's three guards attending the body of Christ within the Sepulchre. If one considers Mount Calvary as a series of wide steps, then it could be transformed into a sepulchre by affixing to it a domed shaped piece of pasteboard. A hole large enough for a man to enter could have been cut into the structure, with a simulated stone placed in front of it. When Christ rises from the dead, he then could appear to emerge from the Sepulchre and advance down one or two steps to the base level. As a result, the guard's following explanation to Pilate would be entirely feasible:

He sett his foote vpon my Backe,
 that every lith began to cracke;
 I would not byde such another Shacke
 for all Ierusalem. (274-277)

He obviously used the guard's back for his final step. There is evidence in the stage direction at l. 153 that angelic singing occurred. Therefore, after His speech it would be effective if the singing were heard again and He would take a position at the base of God's scaffold.

One may conclude that the depiction of Earth in the Chester plays involves a primary consideration of acting space. The dramatis personae of Earth naturally includes numerous speaking and non-speaking roles; therefore, only in extremely significant episodes, may elaborate and cumbersome stage settings be used. It is necessary that first consideration be given to the characters and their dialogue, rather than to the representations of scenic locales. For example, in Christ's Passion, one finds it unnecessary to construct expensive and space-consuming thrones for Annas, Cayphas, and Pilate when Herod's throne represents the general appearance of such settings. Similarly, little attention may be given to costuming unless the character himself or the textual evidence necessitates it. Otherwise, simply made contemporary dress, which more effectively identified the characters with the audience, was adequate for the actors in the Earth locale.

CHAPTER V

BASIC CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE STAGING OF THE CHESTER PLAYS

Certain basic concepts have been recognized as the result of this study. First, in order to achieve some accuracy in regarding individual staging techniques, one must realize that pageant wagons could vary distinctly one from another, depending on the purpose. Thus, a certain set of permanent scenic devices on one wagon were not required on another. It is apparent, then, that each play should be treated separately with respect to the individual gild's purposes; yet, each play should also be considered with respect to the thematic unity of the plays themselves.

Next, one cannot examine the Chester plays with any modern concepts of realism. Certainly a realistic sequence to the medievalist would not necessarily be real to the modernist. Thus, in staging the Chester plays, the question of whether or not the scene was realistic in a modern sense was not considered. If a scene expressed to its audience what the dramatist had intended; and, if in return the audience recognized the message and understood it, then, the performance presented a real meaning to its audience.

This understanding of realism, then, compels one to examine properties and scenic devices, not in terms of realism, but rather as George Kernodle states, as "principal

emblematic devices."¹⁵⁸ For example, the mound could be a shepherd's pasture, a crucifixion locale, or a holy sepulchre; the chair, a throne, an elevated device, or a house. However, it should not be assumed that only the emblematic and artificial were utilized. Rather, if the actual property could be used feasibly, then it was, not for realism, but for convenience and its appropriateness. Therefore, if animals could be handled effectively on the stage, the real, rather than representations, was used.

The medievalist's use of mechanical devices, unfortunately, has often been underestimated or completely rejected. The machine loft was a vital and constantly active place. A textual study of the Chester plays presents substantial evidence to show that numerous stage movements originated from this area. Without such mechanical apparatus, the Latin words, ascendet and descendent, would be unimportant. Similarly, if one relied only upon the directions given, without the use of a loft, the staging of the raising of Lazarus would be extremely difficult, if at all possible.

The characters apparent in the Chester plays are the result of a genuine desire to make the plays enjoyable as well as instructive. The stubbornness of Mrs. Noah, the sweetness of Isaac, the cruelty of Herod, the kindness of

¹⁵⁸George Kernodle, From Art to Theatre, p. 15.

Jesus, the deceitfulness of Judas are traits which the townspeople recognized; thus, the dialogue of such roles was emphasized.

In considering the dramatis personae in these plays, one should not overlook the importance of the angelic figures assigned to each of the three levels. In some cases, angels order man to deliver God's messages; in another, they accompany man to be certain that he does not go astray; and in others, they are singers. Since the Chester cycle contains frequent stage directions concerned with singing, the angels, therefore, have prominent roles in the action.

Finally, regarding the problems of costuming, the Chester plays demonstrate unusually interesting stage use of garments. For example, God in a white leather coat, Herod with his iron helmet, the Devil decked out in his feathers are costumed so as to reflect each of these characters' traits. To a spectator in the Middle Ages, these costumes would have depicted an innocent person, on the one hand, and a strong, conquering individual on the other.

Too little credit has been given to a medievalist's ingenuity, and too much emphasis has been placed on his "naïveté" and "simplemindedness." Consequently, this study of the Chester cycle plays verifies the fact that the medievalists' techniques were unique and their mechanisms technologically more advanced than what generally is recognized.

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