

Medieval English Drama – Miscellaneous

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1 The York Plays

	<i>crafts</i>	<i>pageants</i>	
1	Barkers	Fall of the Angels	
2	Plasterers	Creation	
3	Cardmakers	Creation of Adam and Eve	
4	Fullers	Adam and Eve in Eden	
5	Coopers	Fall of Man	
6	Armourers	Expulsion	
7	Glovers	Cain and Abel	
8	Shipwrights	Building of the Ark	
9	Fishers and Mariners	Flood	
10	Parchmentmakers and Bookbinders	Abraham and Isaac	
11	Hosiers	Moses and Pharaoh	
12	Spicers	Annunciation and Visitation	
13	Pewterers and Founders	Joseph's Trouble about Mary	
14	Tilehatchers	Nativity	
15	Chandlers	Shepherds	
16	Masons / Goldsmiths	Herod; Magi	
17	Hatmakers, Masons and Labourers	Purification	
18	Marshals	Flight into Egypt	
19	Girdlers and Nailers	Slaughter of the Innocents	
20	Spurriers and Lorimers	Christ and the Doctors	
21	Barbers	Baptism	
22	Smiths	Temptation	
22a	Vintners	Marriage of Cana	not extant
23	Curriers	Transfiguration	
23a	Ironmongers	Jesus in the House of Simon the Leper	not extant
24	Cappers	Woman taken in Adultery / Lazarus	
25	Skinners	Entry into Jerusalem	
26	Cutlers	Conspiracy	
27	Bakers	Last Supper	
28	Cordwainers	Agony in the Garden and Betrayal	
29	Bowers and Fletchers	Christ before Annas and Caiphas	
30	Tapiters and Couchers	Christ before Pilate 1; Dream of Pilate's Wife	
31	Litsters	Christ before Herod	
32	Cooks and Waterleaders	Remorse of Judas	
33	Tilemakers	Christ before Pilate 2; Judgement	
34	Shearmen	Road to Calvary	
35	Pinners	Crucifixion	
36	Butchers	Death of Christ	
37	Saddlers	Harrowing of Hell	
38	Carpenters	Resurrection	
39	Winedrawers	Christ's Appearance to Mary Magdalene	
40	Woolpackers and Woolbrokers	Supper at Emmaus	
41	Scriveners	Incredulity of Thomas	
42	Tailors	Ascension	
43	Potters	Pentecost	
44	Drapers	Death of the Virgin	
44a	Linenweavers	Funeral of the Virgin	not extant
45	Woollenweavers	Assumption of the Virgin	
46	Hostelers	Coronation of the Virgin	
47	Mercers	Last Judgement	

2 The Towneley Plays

	<i>pageants</i>	<i>losses</i>	<i>out of place</i>	<i>crafts</i>	<i>derived from</i>	<i>author</i>
1	Creation	lacks 'Fall'		Barker		
	<i>gap</i>					
2	Killing of Abel			Glovers		
3	Noah					Master
4	Abraham	lacks end				
	<i>gap</i>					
5	Isaac	lacks beginning				
6	Jacob					
7	Prophets		*			
8	Pharaoh		*	Litsters	York	
9	Caesar Augustus					
10	Annunciation					
11	Salutation					
12	First Shepherds					Master
13	Second Shepherds					Master
14	Magi					
15	Flight into Egypt					
16	Herod					Master
17	Purification of Mary	half missing				
	<i>gap</i>					
18	Christ and the Doctors	lacks beginning			York	
19	John the Baptist					
20	Conspiracy					
21	Buffeting					Master
22	Scourging					
23	Crucifixion					
24	Play of the Dice					
25	Harrowing of Hell				York	
26	Resurrection				York	
27	Pilgrims			Fyshers		
28	Thomas of India					
29	Ascension	lacks end				
	<i>gap of 12 leaves</i>	2 or 3 plays lost				
30	Judgment	lacks beginning			York	
31	Lazarus		*			
32	Hanging of Judas		*	Lysters		

So called from the name of its seventeenth-century owner, the Towneley manuscript was copied *circa* 1500 or 1550; its provenance is unknown, but the pageants make several references to Wakefield (place names recur in *Killing of Abel* 369 and *Second Shepherds* 581, 657). Unlike the York manuscript, it is not a 'register' (that is, an official copy of what was actually staged), but looks like a compilation.

Four pageants are out of place, and there are four gaps, one of 12 leaves with perhaps two or three plays lost (on Mary?). It lacks pageants on *The Nativity*, *The Temptation of Christ*, *The Trial before Herod*. The episode of the Last Supper, which is in the *Conspiracy* pageant, lacks the institution of the Eucharist.

Five plays are derived from York, with adaptations, and five more are by a single, anonymous author, the so-called Wakefield Master. Craft names were added to five pageants in the 16th century. The 32 pageants have the appearance of a processional cycle, like York's; it was probably developed in the second half of the 15th century, when the town of Wakefield was sufficiently prosperous to afford it.

Wakefield was a small town in Yorkshire, the centre of a large manor and under the control of a lord. It did not enjoy the autonomy of York, a town under the full administration of the craft guilds (whose mentality transpires in plays like *The Building of the Ark* and *The Crucifixion*). Wakefield's intimate knowledge of the countryside is revealed in plays like *The Killing of Abel* and *The Shepherds*.

Its staging was probably suppressed in 1576.

3 The N-Town Plays

	<i>pageants</i>
	Proclamation
1	Creation of Heaven; Fall of Lucifer
2	Creation of the World; Fall of Man
3	Cain and Abel
4	Noah
5	Abraham and Isaac
6	Moses
7	Jesse Root
8	Joachim and Anna
9	Presentation of Mary in the Temple
10	Marriage of Mary and Joseph
11	Parliament of Heaven; Salutation and Conception
12	Joseph's Doubt
13	Visit to Elizabeth
14	Trial of Mary and Joseph
15	Nativity
16	Shepherds
	<i>There is no play 17</i>
18	Magi
19	Purification
20	Slaughter of the Innocents; Death of Herod
21	Christ and the Doctors
22	Baptism
23	Parliament of Hell; Temptation
24	Woman Taken in Adultery
25	Rising of Lazarus
26	Prologue of Satan and John the Baptist; Conspiracy; Entry into Jerusalem
27	Last Supper; Conspiracy with Judas
28	Betrayal
	Procession of the Saints
29	Herod; Trial before Annas and Caiphas
30	Death of Judas; Trials before Pilate and Herod
31	Satan and Pilate's Wife; Second Trial before Pilate
32	Procession to Calvary; Crucifixion
33	Harrowing of Hell (I)
34	Burial; Guarding of the Sepulchre
35	Harrowing of Hell (II); Christ's Appearance to Mary; Pilate and the Soldiers
36	Announcement to the Three Marys; Peter and John at the Sepulchre
37	Appearance to Mary Magdalene
38	Cleophas and Luke; Appearance to Thomas
39	Ascension; Selection of Matthias
40	Pentecost
41	Assumption of Mary
42	Judgement Day

Copied between 1468 and *circa* 1500, the manuscript numbers the plays from 1 to 42, but with a jump from 16 to 18. The *Proclamation* is the banns advertised by three Vexillatores, or 'banner-bearers', who take turns in summarizing the pageants one by one,

SECUNDUS VEXILLATOR

In the fyrst pagent we thenke to play
 15 How God dede make thurowe his owyn myth did through might
 Hevyn so clere upon the fyrst day, heaven
 And therin he sett angell ful bryth. bright
 [...]

and at the end announce the performance for ‘next Sunday at six o’clock in N-town’:

TERCIUS VEXILLATOR

[...]
 525 A Sunday next, yf that we may, on
 At vj of the belle we gynne oure play six o’clock begin
 In N-town; wherfore we pray
 That God now be yowre spede. prosperity
 Amen.

The plays were probably intended for touring in East Anglia and the name of the town supplied on each occasion in place of N (=nomen).

The banner-bearers summarize 40 plays, or pageants, and this is not the only discrepancy between *Proclamation* and plays:

TERCIUS VEXILLATOR

230 In the xvij pagent the knyghtys bedene 17th knights indeed
 Shull brynge dede childeryn befor the kyng. shall dead children
 Whan Kyng Herownde that syth hath sene, sight seen
 Ful glad he is of here kylling. very glad their
 [...]

The Herod play is numbered 20 in the manuscript (19 corrected). Moreover the *Purification* is not mentioned in the *Proclamation*. The discrepancies are to be explained as the result of a work of compilation by which the scribe assembled independent plays drawn from all over East Anglia: a cycle corresponding to the *Proclamation* (hence Proclamation Play), two sequences of plays (one on Mary and one on the Passion in two parts), single plays. He did cut and paste, and here is the final montage:

	<i>pageants</i>										
Proclamation Play	1-7		12		14-16, 18		20-25		34-40		42
Mary Play		8-11		13							
Passion Play								26-33 *			
others						19				41	

* Two episodes from Proclamation Play are interpolated in pageants 26 (the fetching of the ass) and 27 (Mary Magdalene).

The scribe-compiler evidently aimed to include everything he knew on the subject and build a repertoire for the free, selective use of the region.

It was not a civic cycle and its staging was not processional: the detailed stage directions of the Passion Play envisage a fixed staging, with a number of scaffolds delimiting a space used by both actors and spectators. This ambient scenic space is called *place* (in English) or *platea* (in Latin), and provides continuity and simultaneity of action. The ‘pageants’ numbered in the manuscript are not discrete plays but scenes in what is appropriately called “the plaie called Corpus Christi”.

4 The Chester Plays

	<i>crafts</i>	<i>pageants</i>
1	Tanners	Fall of Lucifer
2	Drapers	Adam and Eve; Cain and Abel
3	Waterleaders	Noah's Flood
4	Barbers	Abraham, Lot and Mechysedeck; Abraham and Isaac
5	Cappers	Moses and the Law; Balaack and Balaam
6	Wrights	Annunciation and Nativity
7	Painters	Shepherds
8	Vintners	Three Kings
9	Mercers	Offerings of the Three Kings
10	Goldsmiths	Slaughter of the Innocents
11	Blacksmiths	Purification; Christ and the Doctors
12	Butchers	Temptation; Woman taken in Adultery
13	Glovers	Blind Chelidonian; Raising of Lazarus
14	Corvisors	Christ at the House of Simon the Leper; C. and the Money-Lenders; Judas's Plot
15	Bakers	Last Supper; Betrayal
16	Fletchers <i>etc.</i>	Trial and Flagellation
16a	Ironmongers	Passion
17	Cooks	Harrowing of Hell
18	Skinners	Resurrection
19	Saddlers	Christ on the Road to Emmaus; Doubting Thomas
20	Tailors	Ascension
21	Fishmongers	Pentecost
22	Clothworkers	Prophets of Antichrist
23	Dyers	Antichrist
24	Websters	Last Judgement

There are eight manuscripts extant, all post-1575. The cycle was developed in the 1520s, and its last recorded performance was in 1575. Like York's, it was a civic cycle with processional staging, with only four stations. It was performed during three days in Whitsun Week

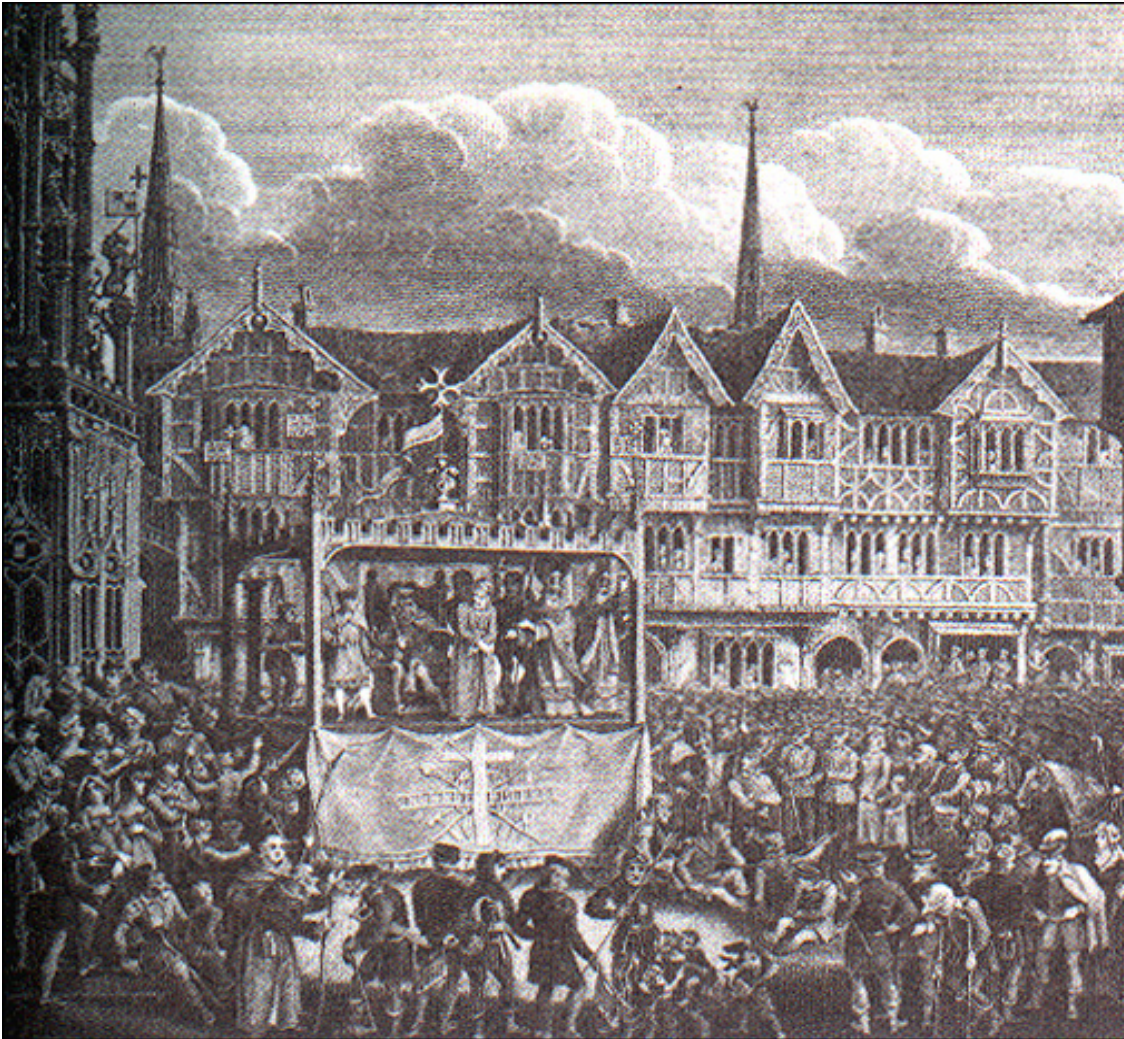
5 The Coventry Plays

	<i>crafts</i>	<i>pageants</i>
1	Shearmen and Tailors	<i>from Annunciation to Slaughter of the Innocents</i>
2	Weavers	Purification; Christ with the Doctors
...		

Only two pageants are extant from a (perhaps) 10-play cycle which included only episodes from the New Testament. It was a civic cycle staged processionally in 3 or 4 stations, and performed on Corpus Christi day. The last recorded performance was in 1579.

The Shearmen and Tailors' Pageant stages a continuous sequence of episodes which are split up in five to eight separate plays in the other cycles. And it probably used more than one pageant wagon (perhaps 3) for the several locations.

Here is a Coventry pageant wagon as reconstructed by the 19th-century antiquarian Thomas Sharp in *A Dissertation on the Pageants or Dramatic Mysteries Anciently Performed at Coventry* (1825):



6 Noah and his Wife in York and Chester

6.1 York

In York there are two distinct plays, *The Building of the Ark* (staged by the Shipwrights), and *The Flood* (staged by the Fishers and Mariners) – and they will need two different Arks for contemporary staging in two different stations.

The Ark of *The Building of the Ark* is probably on stage in prefabricated parts (a clinker-built ship), and Noah, after receiving instructions from God, proceeds with the typical professional demeanour of the York cycle (like the four *miles* of *The Crucifixion*). The feebleness of his old age disappears and he sets briskly to work describing the technical details like a true master shipwright:

GOD

Luk nowe that thou wirke nocht wrang
Thus wittely sen I the wyshe.

look work not wrong
surely since thee show

NOAH

89: A, blistfull lord, that al may beylde,
I thanke the hartely both euer and ay;
Fyfe hundreth wyntres I am of elde –
Methynk ther yoeris as yestirday.
Ful wayke I was and all vnwelde,
My werynes is wente away,
To wyrk this werke here in this feylde
Al be myselfe I will assaye.

blessed protect
heartily
age
years
weak feeble
weariness gone
work field
endeavour

To hewe this burde I wyll begynne,
But firste I wille lygge on my lyne;
Now bud it be alle inlike thynne,
So that it nowthyr twynne nor twyne.
Thus sall I june it with a gynne
And sadly sett it with symonde fyne:
Thus schall I wyrke it both more and mynne
Thurgh techyng of God, maistir myne.

board
lay measuring line
must equally thin
neither twine warp
shall join tool
carefully secure cement
work in every respect
master

104: [... ...]

More suttelly kan no man sewe;
It sall be cleyngked euerilka dele
With nayles that are both noble and newe,
Thus sall I feste it fast to feele.
Take here a revette, and there a rewe,
With ther the bowe nowe wyrke I wele;
This werke I warand both gud and trewe.

skillfully join
clenched in every part
nails
fasten tightly cover (the hull)
put rivet rove

In *The Flood* Noah sends one of his sons to call his wife, who comes but refuses to go on board the Ark accusing her husband of madness. Noah orders his sons to keep her there forcibly. She complains of not knowing her husband's plans, and he apologizes and says it is God's will; but this does not satisfy her and she gives him a slap, to which he does not respond. He gives further explanations, and she seems to begin to be convinced, but insists that she wants her gossips and relatives to come with her. Her daughters-in-law try to pacify her.

FILIUS 1

47: Fader we are all redy heere,
Youre biddyng baynly to fulfillle.

ready
readily

NOAH

49: Goos calle youre modir, and comes nere, And spede vs faste that we nouyot spille. FILIUS 1	go come hurry not die
51: Fadir, we shal nouyot fyne To youre biddng be done. NOAH	not pause until
53: Alle that leues vndir lyne Sall, sone, soner passe to pyne. FILIUS 1	all that lives shall torment
55: Where are ye, modir myne? Come to my fadir sone. UXOR	
57: What sais thou sone? FILIUS 1	sayest
57: Moder, certeyne My fadir thynkis to flitte full ferre. He biddis you haste with al youre mayne Vnto hym, that no thyng you marre. UXOR	remove very far strength so that nothing harms you / you do not spoil anything
61: Yoa, goode sone, hy the faste agayne And telle hym I wol come no narre. FILIUS 1	hurry thyself nearer
63: Dame, I wolde do youre biddng fayne, But yow bus wende, els bese it warre. UXOR	gladly must go it will be worse
65: Werre? That wolde I witte. We bowrde al wrange, I wene. FILIUS 1	worse know chatter wrong think
67: Modir, I saie you yitte, My fadir is bowne to flitte. UXOR	yet bound to move
69: Now certis, I sall nouyot sitte Or I se what he mene.	certainly shall not rest before means
 FILIUS 1	
71: Fadir, I haue done nowe as ye comaunde, My modir comes to you this daye. NOAH	
73: Scho is welcome, I wele warrande; This worlde sall sone be waste awaye. UXOR	she wasted
75: Wher arte thou Noye? NOAH	
75: Loo, here at hande, Come hedir faste dame, I the praye. UXOR	
77: Trowes thou that I wol leue the harde lande And tourne vp here on toure deraye? Nay Noye, I am nouyot bowne To fonde nowe ouer there fellis. Doo barnes, goo we and trusse to towne. NOAH	thinkest leave complete confusion prepared set out hills come on children depart
82: Nay, certis, sothly than mon ye drowne. UXOR	then must
83: In faythe thou were als goode come downe	might as well

And go do somewhat ellis.

else

NOAH

85: Dame, fowrty dayes are nerhand past
And gone sen it began to rayne,
On lyffe sall no man lenger laste
Bot we allane, is nought to layne.

forty nearly
since
shall longer
alone not to be concealed

UXOR

89: Now Noye, in faythe the fonnes full faste,
This fare wille I no lenger frayne;
Thou arte nere woode, I am agaste,
Farewele, I wille go home agayne.

you are acting extremely foolishly
matter enquire into
nealy mad I fear

NOAH

93: O woman, arte thou woode?
Of my werkis thou not wotte;
All that has ban or bloode
Sall be ouere flowed with the floode.

mad
understand
bone
shall

UXOR

97: In faithe, the were als goode
To late me go my gatte.

you may as well
way

We! Owte! Herrowe!

NOAH

99: What now, what cheere?

what's the matter

UXOR

100: I will no nare for no-kynnes nede.

nearer on any account

NOAH

101: Helpe, my sonnes, to holde her here,
For tille hir harmes she takes no heede.

to heed

FILIUS 2

103: Beis mery modir, and mende youre chere;
This worlde beis drowned, withouten drede.

be cheer up
undoubtedly

UXOR

105: Allas, that I this lare shuld lere.

information learn

NOAH

106: Thou spilles vs alle, ill myght thou speede.

destroyest

FILIUS 3

107: Dere modir, wonne with vs,
Ther shal no thyng you greve.

stay
grieve

UXOR

109: Nay, nedlyngis home me bus,
For I haue tolis to trusse.

I must go home
utensils gather together

NOAH

111: Woman, why dois thou thus?
To make vs more myscheue?

doest
harm

UXOR

113: Noye, thou myght haue leteyn me wete;
Erly and late thou wente theroutte,
And ay at home thou lete me sytte
To loke that nowhere were wele aboutte.

let me know
thereout

(=wasting time)

NOAH

117: Dame, thou holde me excused of itt,
It was Goddis wille withowten doutte.

UXOR

119: What, wenys thou so for to go qwitte?

thinkest get away with that

Nay, be my trouthe, thou getis a clowte. NOAH	gettest blow
121: I pray the dame, be stille. Thus God wolde haue it wrought. UXOR	
123: Thow shulde haue witte my wille, Yf I wolde sente thertille, And Noye, for that same skylle,	found out assent to it cause
This bargan sall be bought. Nowe at firste I fynde and feele Wher thou hast to the forest soght, Thou shuld haue tolde me for oure seele Whan we were to slyke bargane broght. NOAH	(=you will pay the penalty for this) resorted Such undertaking
131: Nowe dame, the thar noyot drede a dele, For till accounte it cost the noght. A hundereth wyntyre, I watte wele, Is wente sen I this werke had wrought. And when I made endyng, God gaffe me mesore fayre Of euery ilke a thyng; He bad that I shuld bryng Of beestis and foules yoyng, Of ilke a kynde a peyre.	need not thee nothing know well gone since measure (=indication) such fowls each pair
UXOR	
141: Nowe certis, and we shulde skape fro skathe And so be saffyd as ye saye here, My commodrys and my cosynes bathe, Tham wolde I wente with vs in feere. NOAH	escape harm save say gossips relatives both company
145: To wende in the watir it were wathe, Loke in and loke withouten were. UXOR	go dangerous come in without more ado
147: Allas, my lyffe me is full lath, I lyffe ouere-lange this lare to lere. FILIA 1	loath news learn
149: Dere modir, mende youre moode, For we sall wende you with. UXOR	shall go
151: My frendis that I fra yoode Are ouere flowen with floode. FILIA 2	from went
153: Nowe thanke we God al goode That vs has grauntid grith.	granted protection
FILIA 3	
155: Modir, of this werke nowe wolde ye noyot wene, That alle shuld worthe to watres wan.	not believe be covered in dark waters

6.2 Chester

The Chester plays have come down to us in eight manuscripts, and those of the Noah pageant have stage directions in English or Latin suggesting alternative stagings. The opening stage direction introduces God above and Noah and his family outside the Ark:

And firste in some high place – or in the clowdes, if it may bee – God speaketh unto Noe standinge without the arke with all his familye

After God's instructions they mime the building of the Ark-ship:

Then Noe with all his familye shall make a signe as though they wrought upon the shippe with divers instruments

Sons and daughters-in-law and wife all help; but when Noah invites his wife to step in, she unexpectedly refuses: she wants nothing to do with his whims! In audience address he laments women's bad-temper and invites her wife to desist, otherwise the audience may think she is the boss (and she is!):

097	Wife, in this vessell wee shalbe kepte;	
098	my children and thou, I would in yee lepte.	leapt
099	NOES WIFE. In fayth, Noe, I had as leeve thou slepte.	I would be equally willing that
100	For all thy Frenyshe fare,	French (=whims)
101	I will not doe after thy reade.	advice
102	NOE. Good wiffe, do nowe as I thee bydd.	
103	NOES WIFFE. By Christe, not or I see more neede,	before
104	though thou stand all daye and stare.	
105	NOE. Lord, that weomen bine crabbed aye,	bad-tempered
106	and non are meeke, I dare well saye.	none
107	That is well seene by mee todaye	
108	in witnessse of you eychone.	each one
109	Good wiffe, lett be all this beare	fuss
110	that thou makest in this place here,	
111	for all the weene that thou arte mastere –	they think
112	and soe thou arte, by sayncte John.	

She remains outside when the others go into the Ark. The stage direction also explains how the animals 'enter' the ark: they are painted on its boards and are listed by the characters in turn (the wife included):

Then Noe shall goe into the arke with all his familye, his wyffe excepte, and the arke muste bee borded rownde aboute. And on the bordes all the beastes and fowles hereafter rehearsed muste bee paynted, that ther wordes may agree with the pictures

161	SEM. Syr, here are lions, leopardes in;	
162	horses, mares, oxen, and swynne,	
163	geates, calves, sheepe, and kyne [...]	goats cows

About 50 species are named. The wife again refuses Noah's invitation to come on board: she does not want to part from her gossips – who appear on stage to sing a drinking song! Noah sends his sons to fetch her, and they force her to go. And when on board she slaps her husband for his trouble; but he keeps quiet.

193	NOE. Wyffe, come in. Why standes thou there?	standest
194	Thou arte ever frowarde; that dare I sweare.	stubborn
195	Come, in Godes name; halfe tyme yt weare,	it's almost time
196	for feare lest that wee drowne.	fear that

197 NOES WYFFE. Yea, syr, sett up your seale	sail
198 and rowe forthe with evell hayle;	evil health
199 for withowten any fayle	
200 I will not owt of this towne.	
201 But I have my gossips everyechone,	unless everyone
202 one foote further I will not gone.	go
203 They shall not drowne, by sayncte John,	
204 and I may save there life.	if their
205 The loved me full well, by Christe.	they very well
206 But thou wilte lett them into thy chiste,	unless ark
207 elles rowe forthe, Noe, when thy liste	you like
208 and gett thee a newe wyfe.	
209 NOE. Sem, sonne, loe thy mother is wrawe;	angry
210 by God, such another I doe not knowe.	
211 SEM. Father, I shall fetch her in, I trowe,	believe
212 withowten any fayle.	
213 Mother, my father after thee sende	
214 and byddes thee into yonder wende.	
215 Looke up and see the wynde,	
216 for wee benne readye to sayle.	be
217 NOES WYFFE. Sonne, goe agayne to him and saye	
218 I will not come therin todaye.	
219 NOE. Come in, wife, in twentye devylles waye,	
220 or ells stand there withowte.	
221 CAM. Shall we all fetch hir in?	
222 NOE. Yea, sonne, in Chrystes blessinge and myne,	
223 I would yee hyed you betyme	hurried in good time
224 for of this fludd I stande in doubtte.	flood fear
225 THE GOOD GOSSIPS. The fludd comes fleetinge in full faste,	
226 one everye syde that spredeth full farre.	
227 For fere of drowninge I am agaste;	
228 good gossippe, lett us drawe nere.	
229 And lett us drinke or wee departe,	before
230 for oftetyes wee have done soe.	
231 For at one draught thou drinke a quarte,	
232 and soe will I doe or I goe.	
233 Here is a pottell full of malnesaye good and stronge;	Malmsey wine
234 yt will rejoyse both harte and tonge.	
235 Though Noe thinke us never soe longe,	
236 yett wee wyll drinke atyte.	at once
237 JAPHETT. Mother, wee praye you all together –	
238 for we are here, your owne childer –	children
239 come into the shippe for feare of the wedder,	
240 for his love that [you] bought.	redeemed
241 NOES WYFFE. That will I not for all your call	
242 but I have my gosseppes all.	
243 SEM. In fayth, mother, yett thow shall,	
244 whether thou will or nought.	
[<i>Tunc ibit</i>]	she will go

245 NOE. Welcome, wyffe, into this boote.	boat
246 NOES WYFFE. Have thou that for thy note! [<i>Et dat alapam</i>]	trouble gives slap
247 NOE. Aha, marye, this ys hotte;	
248 yt is good for to be still.	
249 Ah, chyldren, meethinke my boote remeeves.	moves
250 Our tarryinge here mee highly greeves.	grieves
251 Over the lande the water spreades;	
252 God doe as hee will.	

After all the characters disappear from view within the Ark, the stage directions suggest two different stagings: either silence or song as the sound track of the Flood.

Then shall Noe shutt the windowe of the arke, and for a little space within the bordes hee shalbe scylent; and afterwarde openinge the windowe and lookinge rownde about sayinge

Tunc Noe claudet fenestram Arcae et per modicum spatium infra tectum cantent psalmum "Save mee, O God" et aperiens fenestram et respiciens

The Flood is all in that 'little space' of silence or song, because when Noah opens the window it is already over. It is left to the imagination of the audience, and either solution can be effective in its suspense. Psalm 69 is appropriate: "Save me, O God; for the waters are come in unto my soul". Here is a version current in the 16th century:

Save me O God, and that with speede, the wa- ters
flow full fast: So nye my soule do they pro-ceede, that I am sore a-gast.
2. I stick full deepe in filth and clay, where-as I feele no ground:
I fall in- to such floudes I say that I am lyke be drownd.

In his operatic rendering of the Chester play, *Noye's Fludde* (1957), Benjamin Britten will develop a full musical score for the Flood.

A stage direction takes care of the returning dove: "another dove with an olive branch in its mouth will be in the ship", and somebody will make it descend into Noah's hands from the mast with a rope:

Tunc emittet columbam et erit in nave alia columba ferens olivam in ore, quam dimittet aliquis ex malo per funem in manus Noe

In his closing speech God mentions the rainbow as a token of his covenant with man: there is no stage direction, but it could have been easily portrayed with a large fan:

357 DEUS. My Bowe between you and me	rainbow
358 In the firmament shall bee,	
359 By verey token that you may see	true
360 That such vengeance shall cease [...]	

7 The Shepherds' Songs in York, Coventry and Wakefield

Music – instrumental and above all vocal – is important in medieval drama, and in *The Shepherds' Play* singing is essential: there is the *Gloria* of the angel (or angels) and the three shepherds' songs (either their own or the *Gloria*, or even both).

7.1 York

In the York cycle the three shepherds are discussing the prophecies about the birth of a child in Bethlehem when a light dazzles them and an angel sings. The first shepherd says he will imitate the angel and invites the others to join in:

PASTOR 1

60 I can synge itt alls wele as hee,	as well as he
And on asaie itt sall be sone	trial
Proued or we passe.	before
Yf ye will helpe, late see, halde on,	
For thus it was:	

Et tunc cantant

The stage direction (“And then they sing”) may imply that they sing in unison or that they turn the monophonic *Gloria* into a three-part song. They sing again as they go to worship Jesus:

PASTOR 2

82 [...] Go we forthy	therefore
Him to honnour,	
And make mirthe and melody	
With sange to seke oure Saviour	

Et tunc cantant

And after the visit they leave singing:

PASTOR 3

130 And go we hame againe	home
And make mirthe as we gange.	go

The pageant ends on the echo of their song.

7.2 Coventry

In the Coventry cycle the episode of the shepherds is in the *The Shearmen and Tailors' Play*, one of the two plays extant, which stages events from the Annunciation to the Slaughter of the Innocents as a continuous sequence, probably using more than one pageant wagon for the several locations. Here the three shepherds meet and begin to eat and drink. When they see the star, it reminds them of the prophecies; then the angels sing:

There the angelys syng 'Glorea in exselsis Deo'

The shepherds listen in rapture, then as they go to worship the child they sing their own song:

There the scheppardis syngis 'Ase I Owt Rodde'

The *Gloria* is sung again by the angels; and after their visit the shepherds go away singing another stanza of their song (while the action continues with the introduction of two prophets):

There the scheppardis syngith ageyne and goth forthe of the place

The 'place' is probably the area delimited by the pageant wagons required for the sequence.

We know words and music of the shepherds' song:

As I out rode this enderes night,	last
Of thre ioli sheppardes I saw a sight,	jolly
And all abowte there fold a star shone bright;	their
They sange "terli terlow";	
So mereli the sheppardes ther pipes can blow.	merrily their

Doune from heaven, from heaven so hie,	
Of angeles ther came a great commpanie	
With mirthe and ioy and great solemnyte;	
The sange "terly terlow";	they
So mereli the sheppardes ther pipes can blow.	

The sequence has also another notable song, known as the *Coventry Carol*: it is the lullaby sung by three women at the beginning of the Slaughter, while Mary and Joseph flee to Egypt:

Here the wemen cum in wythe there chyldur syngyng them, and Mare and Josoff goth away cleyne

Of this, too, we have, words and music:

Lully, lulla, thow little tine child,	thou tiny
By by, lully lullay, thow little tyne child,	
By by, lully lullay!	

O sisters too, how may we do	two
For to preserve this day –	
This pore yongling for whom we do singe,	
By by, lully lullay?	

Herod, the king, in his raging,
Chargid he hath this day
His men of might in his owne sight
All yonge children to slay.

That wo is me, pore child, for thee,	
And ever morne and say	
For thi parting nether say nor singe	neither
By by, lully lullay.	

7.3 Wakefield

In Wakefield the three shepherds meet on the moor after delivering each his own lament on the hardships of their lives; then they seek consolation in a three-part song:

I PASTOR	
270 Lett me syng the tenory.	tenor
II PASTOR	
271 And I the tryble so hye.	treble high

III PASTOR

272 Then the meyne fallys to me.

middle part

It must be a secular song probably in the style of English discant, with the tenor as the lowest voice, and syllabic (one syllable = one note).

When later they hear the angel's solo singing of the *Gloria*, they are amazed by the virtuosity of its very short notes, or melismatic style (one syllable = several notes), and discuss it like connoisseurs. The first shepherd declares he can imitate it, and in spite of the scepticism of the second shepherd he starts singing and the others either listen or join in three-part singing. There is no stage direction, and it is possible that the first shepherd desists, but the third shepherd says

III PASTOR

963 Be mery and not sad –

964 Of myrth is oure sang!

After their worship of the child they go away singing:

III PASTOR

1087 To syng ar we bun –

1088 Let take on loft!

bound

begin loudly

And as in York the pageant ends on the echo of their vanishing song. Is it a three-part *Gloria* and do they sing it in syllabic or melismatic style? If the latter (and the actors are capable of it), their new style would imply an elevation of their nature.

For a survey see JoAnna Dutka, *Music in the English Mystery Plays*, Kalamazoo, Michigan, Western Michigan University, Medieval Institute Publications 1980.

8 Dramaturgy

8.1 Scaffolds and Acting Area

The cycles used a number of scaffolds (or pageants), either fixed (N-Town) or mounted on wagons for processional staging (York, Wakefield, Coventry, Chester). The scaffold may have a higher storey for God and the angels, as in the Chester Noah play:

And firste in some high place – or in the clowdes, if it may bee – God speaketh unto Noe

In N-Town the scaffolds have curtains:

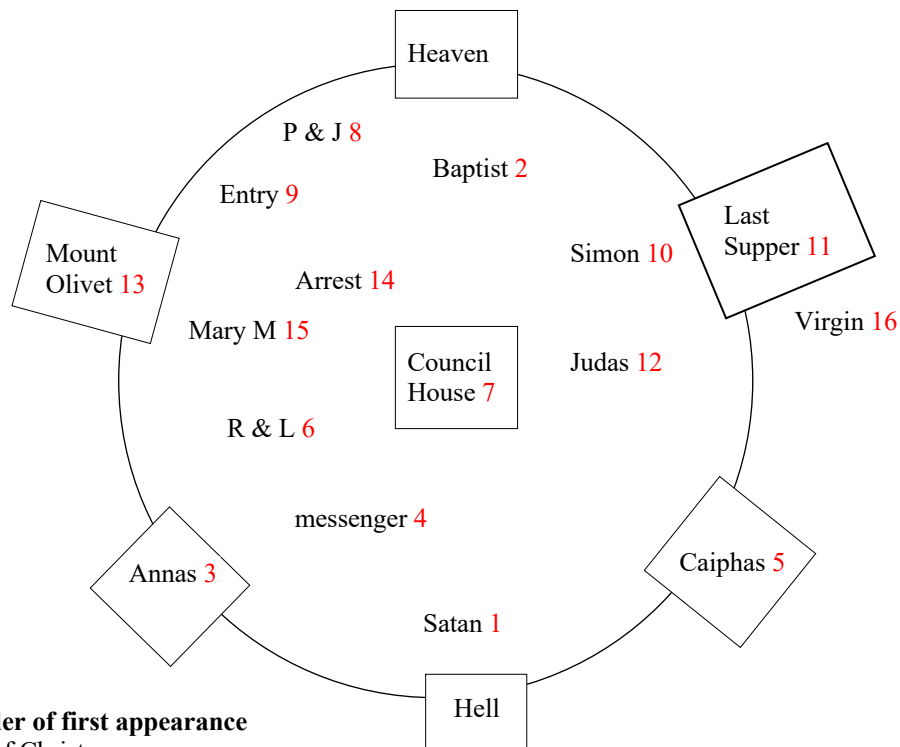
the cownsel hous beforneyd xal sodeynly onclose before said shall unclose

The acting area includes the space in front of the scaffold or pageant, as this stage direction from Coventry specifies,

Here Erode ragis in the pagond and in the strete also rages pageant street

The N-Town Passion Play envisages a multi-locational set that includes the whole circular area delimited by the scaffolds: this is called *place* or *platea* in the stage directions, and there the characters act in the midst of the audience – or the audience is in the midst of the action, as in a scale model of Jerusalem. Here is a possible plan for the staging of Passion Play I:

N-Town Passion Play I



numbers show order of first appearance

Arrest = the arrest of Christ

Baptist = John the Baptist

Entry = Christ's entry into Jerusalem

Mary M = Mary Magdalene

messenger sent by Annas to Caiphas and Rewfyn and Lyon

P & J = Peter and John the Evangelist

R & L = Rewfyn and Lyon

Simon = Simon the Leper

Virgin and final tableau may use scaffold of Last Supper

Audience address is used above all to involve the spectators. At the beginning of the Wakefield Killing of Abel the servant introduces his master Cain as one the spectators know well: the Cain that is among us, or in us – an imputation of Cain-ness. In the Wakefield Noah, during their marital squabbles, wife and husband appeal to the women and men in the audience to ask for solidarity or give instructions.

Extensive use of audience address is made at the beginning of the N-Town Passion,

I am youre lord, Lucifer, that out of helle cam

with Lucifer-Satan revealing his conspiracy to the spectators and exhorting them to the capital sins, and John the Baptist prophesying the coming of Christ and calling the spectators to repentance; later on Peter and John the Evangelist will announce Christ's arrival in Jerusalem. The spectators thus become the extras of the representation, and at the same time the stake of the struggle between Satan and Christ.

Spoken action is to say what is being acted. The building of the Ark is described step by step in Wakefield,

391 The top and the sayll	top (=platform at the head of the mast)
392 Both will I make,	
393 The helme and the castell	
394 Also will I take	

as are the postures of the builder,

366 My bonys will I bend [...]	bones
378 Now my gowne will I cast,	put off
379 And wyrk in my cote	coat

Spoken action is used to great effect in the York Crucifixion, where the stretching and nailing of Christ's limbs is described in close-up and slow motion,

Yis, here is a stubbe will stiffely stande,	yes nail stoutly
Thurgh bones and senous it schall be soght –	through sinews applied

to make the spectators feel Christ's pain – emotional involvement.

8.4 The Expositor

A special use of audience address is the introduction of a figure functioning as an intermediary between characters and spectators.

In Jean Fouquet's miniature of 'The Martyrdom of St Apollonia' there is, on the right, a figure in blue with book and stick magisterially addressing the audience: he informs, explains, instructs, and gives authority to the representation guaranteeing that what is being acted corresponds to what is in the book – which is inaccessible to the audience.

One such figure is in the cycles of Chester and N-Town: his role is exegetical in the former, narrative in the latter.

8.4.1 Chester

He is called Expositor. In play 4, at the end of the episode of Abraham and Isaac, he comes on stage to give the audience a theological explanation of it, as a prefiguration of Christ's passion:

EXPOSITOR	
460 Lordinges, this significacyon	
461 Of this deed of devotyon –	
462 And yee will, yee wytt mon –	if you know may

463 May torne you to myche good.	if
464 This deed yee seene done here in this place,	
465 In example of Jesus done yt was,	
466 That for to wynne mankinde grace	earn
467 Was sacrificyed one the roode.	cross
468 By Abraham I may understand	
469 The Father of heaven that cann fonde	did arrange
470 With his Sonnes blood to breake that bonde	
471 That the dyvell had brought us to.	
472 By Isaack understande I maye	
473 Jesus that was obedyent aye,	always
474 His Fathers will to worke alwaye	
475 And death for to confounde.	

This is his second appearance in the play, which stages two episodes. And he appears twice also in play 12, at the end of the first and the second episode, on each of which he quotes the commentary of a Church Father, Gregory and Agustine – exegetical popularization.

8.4.2 N-Town

Here he is called Contemplacio. In play 13 Mary and Joseph set out on their visit to Elizabeth, the stage direction explaining that they ‘go around the *platea*’ to simulate the journey. And while they go Contemplacio addresses the audience to inform them about Elizabeth and her husband Zachariah. When he has finished Mary and Joseph have reached their destination and the action is resumed:

Et sic transient circa placeam.

CONTEMPLACIO

23 Sovereynes, vndyrstondyth that Kynge Davyd here	excellent people
24 Ordeyned foure and twenty prestys of grett devocyon,	
25 In the temple of God aftere here lot to apere.	their lot (=by drawing lots)
26 thei were clepyd summi sacerdots for here mynistracyon.	called service as minister
27 And on was prynce of prestys, havynge domynacyon;	one
28 Amonge whiche was an old prest clepyd Zakarye,	whom called
29 And he had an old woman to his wyff of holy conversacyon,	manner of living
30 Whiche hyth Elizabeth, that nevyr had childe, verylye.	was called
31 In hese mynistracyon, the howre of incense,	his service as minister
32 The aungel Gabryel apperyd hym to.	
33 That hese wyff xulde conscyve he gaff hym intelligence,	conceive
34 He, seinge hese vnwurthynes and age, not belevyd so;	
35 The plage of dompnese hise lippis lappyd, lo.	affliction of dumbness
36 Thei wenten hom and his wyff was consevyenge –	
37 This concepcyon Gabryel tolde oure Lady to –	
38 And in soth, sone aftere, that sage sche was sekyng.	truth
39 And of here tweyners metyng	them two meeting
40 Here gynnyth the proces.	begins performance
41 Now God be oure begynnyng,	
42 And of my tonge I wole ses.	will cease

JOSEPH

43 A, a, wyff, in feyth I am wery.	wearry
44 Therefore I wole sytt downe and rest me ryght here.	rest myself

45 Lo, wyff, here is the hous of Zakary;

46 Wole ye I clepe Elyzabeth to yow to apere?

will you call

The stage direction opening Passion II presents him as an ‘expositor in doctor’s garb’

than xal come ther an exposytour in doctorys wede, thus seyng shall

who introduces the sequel of Passion I staged the previous year:

The last yere we shewyd here how oure Lord for love of man

year

Cam to the cety of Jherusalem mekely his deth to take [...]

city

Now wold we procede how he was browth than

brought

Beform Annas and Cayphas, and syth beform Pylate

His name, ‘contemplation’, suggests that the stage images are to be used for devotional meditation.

9 Books for the Illiterate

A Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge is a short tract against religious drama that is found in a manuscript of the early 15th century. Its anonymous author starts from the assumption that drama is a form of ‘play’, and as such it is incompatible with the ‘earnest’, or seriousness, of religion. The miracles (and in general the events in the life) of Christ are spiritually efficacious only if taken seriously; to take them playfully is to abolish dread, which is the nail that fixes our faith to God, and to incur God’s vengeance – as does a servant who plays ‘too familiarly’ with his master.

Myraclis [...] that Crist dude heere in erthe outhur in himsilf outhur in hise seintis weren so efectuel and in earnest done that to sinful men that erren thei broughten forgivenessse of sinne, settinge hem in the weye of right bileve; to doutouse men not stedefast they broughten in kunning to betere plesen God, and verry hope in God to been stedefast in him; and to the wery of the weye of God, for the grette penaunce and suffraunce of the tribulacioun that men moten have therinne, they broughten in love of brynninge [...].

Thanne, sithen miraclis of Crist and of hise seintis weren thus efectuel [...] no man shulde usen in bourde and pleye the miraclis and werkis that Crist so ernystfully wroughte to oure helthe. For whoevere so doth, he errith in the byleve, reversith Crist and scornyth God. He errith in the bileve, for in that he takith the most precious werkis of God in pley and bourde, and so takith his name in idil, and so misusith oure byleve.

A Lord, sithen an erthely servaunt dar not takun in pley and in bourde that that his erthely lord takith in earnest, myche more we shulden not maken oure pleye and bourde of tho miraclis and werkis that God so earnestfully wrought to us. For sothely whan we so doun, drede to sinne is takun away, as a servaunt, whan he bourdith with his maister, leesith his drede to offendyn him, namely whanne he bourdith with his maister in that that his maister takith in earnest. And right as a nail smiten in holdith two thingis togidere, so drede smiten to Godward holdith and susteineth oure bileve to him.

Therefore right as pleyinge and bourdinge of the most earnestful werkis of God takith awaye the drede of God that men shulden han in the same, so it takith awaye oure bileve, and so oure most helpe of oure savacioun [...]. Thanne, whanne we pleyin his miraclis as men don nowe on dayes, God takith more venjaunce on us than a lord that sodaynly sleeth his servaunt for he pleyide to homely with him. And right as that lord thanne in dede seith to his servaunt, “Pley not with me but pley with thy pere,” so whanne we takun in pley and in bourde the miraclis of God, he, fro us takinge his grace, seith more earnestfully to us than the forseid lord, “Pley not with me but pley with thy pere”.

did here either
or efficacious
err
them faith doubtful
knowledge please
true be
weary
must

since
jest

faith

in vain

jest much
those
truly
do
jests loses

have

do nowadays

slays too familiarly

peer
from

These plays, he adds, scorn God as the Jews mocked Christ during the Passion:

Also, siche miraclis pleying is scornynge of God [...] Sithen thes miraclis pleyeris taken in bourde the earnestful werkis of God, no doute that ne they scornen God as diden the Jewis that bobbiden Crist, for they lowen at his passioun as these lowyn and japen of the miraclis of God [...].

players jest

mocked laugh
jest

and his mervelous werkis in the pleyinge of hem than in the peyntege, and betere they ben holden in mennes minde and oftere rehersed by the pleyinge of hem than by the peyntyng, for this is a deed bok, the tother a quick.

them
men's
recited
dead the other living (one)

To the first reason the author answers that these plays are made to please the world, not God, and moreover they are signs without deeds, gestures that do not become works:

[1'] To the first reson we answeryn seying that sicke miraculis pleyinge is not to the worschipe of God, for they ben don more to ben seen of the worlde and to plesyn to the world thanne to ben seen of God or to plesyn to him, as Crist never ensaumplide hem [...] So sithen these miraculis pleyinge ben onely singnis, love withoute dedis, they ben not onely contrarious to the worschipe of God – that is, bothe in signe and in dede – but also they ben gynnys of the devvel to cacchen men to byleve of Anticrist [...] These miraculis pleyinge ben verrey leeing as they ben signis withoute dede [...].

are by
by
gave examples of them since
signs deeds

snares devil catch faith
true
lies

To the second the answer is that these plays pervert people, because they induce the conviction that the pains of hell may be in play, not in earnest, a fiction like drama, signs without deeds:

[2'] And as anentis the secound reson, we seyen that [...] miraculis pleyinge [...], as it is sinne it is fer more occasion of perverting of men, not onely of oon singuler persone but of al an hool comynte, as it makith al a puple to ben ocupied in vein [...]. And therefore many men wenen that ther is no helle of everelasting peine, but that God doth but thretith us, not to do it in dede, as ben pleyinge of miraculis in signe and not in dede [...].

against

one single
a whole community
think

threaten

To the third he answers that the compassion does not arise from contrition:

[3'] By this we answeren to the thridde resoun seyinge that sicke miraculis pleyinge giveth noon occasioun of werrey wepinge and medeful, but the weping that fallith to men and wymmen by the sighte of sicke miraculis pleyinge, as they ben not principaly for their oune sinnes ne of their gode feith withinneforthe, but more of their sight withouteforth is not allowable byfore God but more reprowable [...].

no
true meriting reward

own
inwardly
outwardly
reprehensible

To the fourth he answers that conversion through play can be only feigned or illusory, thus implying that no seriousness can be born from play:

[4'] And by this we answeren to the furthe resoun, seyinge that no man may be convertid to God but onely by the earnestful doyinge of God and by noon vein pleying, for that that the word of God worchith not ne his sacramentis, how shulde pleyinge wochen that is of no vertue but ful of defaute? [...] The convertinge that men semen to ben convertid by sicke pleyinge is but feynyd holinesse, worse than is othere sinne beforehand [...].

works

defect

feigned

To the fifth he answers that true recreation is in the works of mercy to one's neighbour:

[5'] And herby we answeren to the fifthe resoun seyinge
that [...] sicke miraculis pleyinge ne the sighte of hem is them
no verrey recreation but fals and worldly [...]. Recreation true
shulde ben in the werkis of mercy to his neiebores [...]. neighbour

To the sixth he answers that unlike unadorned painting, which is indeed like a book to read the truth, plays are made to delight people and induce them to wickedness:

[6'] And to the last reson we seyn that peinture, yif
it be verrey withoute menginge of lesingis and not to
curious, to myche fedinge mennus wittis, and not
occasion of maumetrie to the puple, they ben but as
nakyd lettris to a clerk to riden the treuthe. But so ben
not miraculis pleyinge that ben made more to deliten
men bodily than to ben bokis to lewid men. And
therefore yif they ben quike bookis, they ben quike
bookis to shrewidenesse more than to godenesse [...].

say if
true mixture lies too
elaborate men's minds
idolatry people are
read
delight
illiterate
if living
wickedness

In the analogy of the servant playing familiarly with his master the author of the *Tretise* provides an apt description of medieval religious drama: the familiarization of the sacred, the representation of characters and events from sacred history in the forms of contemporary life, rooted in the present of the spectators, who are thus put into close, unawed contact with them. The author's religiosity of seriousness and dread looks forward to the Reformation and Counter-Reformation; that of religious drama is based instead on spiritual and emotional involvement, and on the modulation of the comic and the serious (the jester and the expositor in the Fouquet miniature).

We might recognise in the sixth argument the basic reason for this drama's existence: the laity's access to the Holy Scriptures. And here the counter-argument will come from the Reformation: translation from Latin (or Greek or Hebrew) into the vernacular. When the audience in the Fouquet miniature will be able to read the book in the expositor's hand, they will not need the spectacle any longer. The Bible translated will dismiss the Bible dramatized.

Clifford Davidson ed., *A Tretise of Miraculis Pleyinge*, Kalamazoo, Michigan, Western Michigan University 1993.

An Italian translation is in Giuseppe Brunetti, "Il gioco di Ismaele: un trattato medio inglese sul teatro", in *Riscritture del testo medievale: dialogo tra culture e tradizioni*, a cura di Maria Grazia Cammarota, Edizioni Sestante, Bergamo University Press 2005, pp. 159-190.