# Medieval English Drama – Miscellaneous

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1 The York Plays

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

~ 2 ~

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Known as the Register and copied between 1463 and 1477, the manuscript of the cycle was the city’s official record of the plays and the craft-guilds staging them. It was called the “Corpus Christi plaie” (in the singular) and its overall design extends from Creation to Doom, but it is actually devoted to the life of Christ, concentrating on the events of Holy Week and their aftermath (plays 25 to 43); episodes of the Old Testament are added as motivation (the Fall) or prefiguration (Noah and the Ark anticipate Christ and the Church).

It is a civic cycle, intended for Christian devotion and the city honour. Municipal records give information about its processional staging:
- the mayor’s authorization for the performance of the plays was notified to the guilds in the first or second week of Lent;
- during Lent four expert players examined players, plays and pageants, and admitted those that were judged adequate to the honour of the city and the guilds;
- there was a public proclamation (or banns) on the eve of the performance;
- on Corpus Christi day the performance began at 4:30 in the morning;
- the 47 pageant wagons stopped at 12 stations, from the southern gate to the city centre, and acted their plays twelve times, the 14,000 lines of the cycle requiring 300 speaking parts (a map of the pageant route is in R. Beadle ed., The York Plays, London, Edward Arnold 1982, p. 34).

The first mention of the cycle is in 1377; the last performance was in 1569.


### 2 The Towneley Plays

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

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.

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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

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

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 fy rst pag ent we the nke to play

15 How God dede make thu rowe his owyn myth did through might
Hevyn so clere upon the fy rst 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 pag ent the knythys 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 kyllyng. 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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Proclamation Play</th>
<th>1-7</th>
<th>12</th>
<th>14-16, 18</th>
<th>20-25</th>
<th>34-40</th>
<th>42</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mary Play</td>
<td></td>
<td>8-11</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>26-33</td>
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<tr>
<td>others</td>
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<td>19</td>
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<td>41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* 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”.

gb 2009
4 The Chester Plays

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>crafts</th>
<th>pageants</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Tanners</td>
<td>Fall of Lucifer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Drapers</td>
<td>Adam and Eve; Cain and Abel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Waterleaders</td>
<td>Noah’s Flood</td>
</tr>
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<td>4 Barbers</td>
<td>Abraham, Lot and Mechysedeck; Abraham and Isaac</td>
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<tr>
<td>5 Cappers</td>
<td>Moses and the Law; Balaack and Balaam</td>
</tr>
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<td>6 Wrights</td>
<td>Annunciation and Nativity</td>
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<td>7 Painters</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Vintners</td>
<td>Three Kings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Mercers</td>
<td>Offerings of the Three Kings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Goldsmiths</td>
<td>Slaughter of the Innocents</td>
</tr>
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<td>11 Blacksmiths</td>
<td>Purification; Christ and the Doctors</td>
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<tr>
<td>12 Butchers</td>
<td>Temptation; Woman taken in Adultery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Glovers</td>
<td>Blind Chelidonian; Raising of Lazarus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 Corvisors</td>
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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

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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 noght wrang
Thus wittely sen I the wyshye.  

**NOAH**

89: A, blistfull lord, that al may beylde,
I thanke the hartely both euer and ay;
Fyne 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 fylde
Al be myselfe I will assaye.

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 gynn
And sadly sett it with symonde fyne:
Thurgh techyng of God, maistir myne.

104: [...] 

More suttelly kan no man sewe;
It sall be cleyngked euerlka 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.

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 I**

47: Fader we are all redy heere,
Youre biddying baynly to fulfille.
49: Goos calle youre modir, and comes nere,  
And spede vs faste that we nouyot spille.  
FILIUS 1
51: Fadir, we shal nouyot fyne  
To youre biddyng be done.  
NOAH
53: Alle that leues vndir lyne  
Sall, sone, soner passe to pyne.  
FILIUS 1
55: Where are ye, modir myne?  
Come to my fadir sone.

UXOR
57: What sais thou sone?  
FILIUS 1
57: Moder, certeyne  
My fadir thinkis to flitte full ferre.  
He biddis you haste with al youre mayne  
Vnto hym, that no thyng you marre.  
UXOR
61: Yoa, goode sone, hy the faste agayne  
And telle hym I wol come no narre.  
FILIUS 1
63: Dame, I wolde do youre biddyng fayne,  
But yow bus wende, els bese it warre.  
UXOR
We bowrde al wrange, I wene.  
FILIUS 1
67: Modir, I saie you yitte,  
My fadir is bowne to flitte.  
UXOR
69: Now certis, I sall nouyot sitte  
Or I se what he mene.  

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
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.  
UXOR
81: Nay, certis, sothly than mon ye drowne.  
UXOR
83: In faythe thou were als goode come downe
And go do somewhat ellis.

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.

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.

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.

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

NOAH
99: What now, what cheere?

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

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

FILIUS 2
103: Beis mery modir, and mende youre chere;
This worlde beis drowned, withouten drede.

UXOR
105: Allas, that I this lare shuld lere.

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

FILIUS 3
107: Dere modir, wonne with vs,
Ther shal no thyng you greve.

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

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

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.

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?
Nay, be my trouthe, thou getis a clowte.  
NOAH  
121: I pray the dame, be stille.  
Thus God wolde haue it wroght.  
UXOR  
123: Thynd shulde haue withe my wille,  
Yf I wolde sente thertille,  
And Noye, for that same skylle,  

This bargan sall be bought. (=you will pay the penalty for this) 
Nowe at firste I fynde and feele  
Wher thou hast to the forest soght,  
The shuld haue tolde me for oure seele  
When we were to slyke bargane broght.  
NOAH  
131: Now dame, the thar noyot drede a dele,  
For till accounte it cost the noght.  
A hundereth wyntyr, I watte wele,  
Is wente sen I this werke had wrought.  
And when I made endyng,  
God gaffe me mesore fayre  
Of euery like a thyng;  
He bad that I shuld bryng  
Of beestis and foules hoyng,  
Of ilke a kynde a peyre.  
UXOR  
141: Nowe certis, and we shulde skape fro skathe  
And so be saffyed as ye saye here,  
My commodrys and my cosynes bathe,  
Tham wolde I wente with vs in feere.  
NOAH  
145: To wende in the watir it were wathe,  
Loke in and loke withouten were.  
UXOR  
147: Allas, my lyff me is full lath,  
I lyffe ouere-lange this lare to lere.  
FILIA 1  
149: Dere modir, mende youre moode,  
For we sall wende you with.  
UXOR  
151: My frendis that I fra yoode  
Are ouere flowen with floode.  
FILIA 2  
153: Nowe thanke we God al goode  
That vs has grauntid grith.  
FILIA 3  
155: Modir, of this werke nowe wolde ye noyot wene,  
That alle shuld worthe to watres wan.
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 speketh unto Noe standinge without the arke with all his famlye

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

Then Noe with all his famlye 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 witnesse 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 sayncete 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 famlye, his wyffe excepte, and the arke muste bee borded rounde 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 fear lest that wee drowne. fear that
NOES WYFFE. Yea, syr, sett up your seale sail
and rowe forthe with evell hayle evil health
for withowten any fayle
I will not owt of this towne.

But I have my gossips everyechone, unless everyone
one foote further I will not gone. go
They shall not drowne, by sayncte John, if their
and I may save there life.
The loved me full well, by Christe. they very well
But thou wilte lett them into thy chiste, unless ark
elles rowe forthe, Noe, when thy liste you like
and gett thee a newe wyfe.

NOE. Sem, sonne, loe thy mother is wrawe; angry
by God, such another I doe not knowe.
SEM. Father, I shall fetch her in, I trowe, believe
withowten any fayle.
Mother, my father after thee sende
and byddes thee into yonder wende.
Looke up and see the wynde,
for wee benne readye to sayle. be

NOES WYFFE. Sonne, goe agayne to him and saye
I will not come therin todaye.
NOE. Come in, wife, in twentye devylles waye,
or ells stand there withowte.
CAM. Shall we all fetch hir in?
NOE. Yea, sonne, in Chrystes blessinge and myne,
I would yee hyed you betyme hurried in good time
for of this fludd I stande in doubte. flood fear

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

JAPHETT. Mother, wee praye you all together – children
for we are here, your owne childer –
come into the shipe for feare of the wedder,
for his love that [you] bought.
NOES WYFFE. That will I not for all your call
but I have my gosseppes all.
SEM. In fayth, mother, yett thow shall,
whether thou will or nought.

[ Tunc ibit ] she will go
245 NOE. Welcome, wyffe, into this boote.

246 NOES WYFFE. Have thou that for thy note!

[ Et dat alapam ]

247 NOE. Aha, marye, this ys hotte;

248 yt is good for to be still.

249 Ah, chylde, meethinke my boote remeves.

250 Our tarryinge here mee highly greeves.

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 Archae 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:

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

358 In the firmament shall bee,

359 By verry token that you may see

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,
   *Et tunc cantant*
   And make mirthe and melody
   With sange to seke oure Saviour

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”;              their
So mereli the shepards ther pipes can blow.  merrily their

Doune from heaven, from heaven so hie,
Of angeles ther came a great companie
With mirthe and ioy and great solemnitye;
The sange “terly terlow”;                  they
So mereli the shepards 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 awey 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
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

~ 18 ~
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 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!

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 speakeoth unto Noe*

In N-Town the scaffolds have curtains:

*the counsel hous beforwseyd 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**

- **Heaven**
- **Last Supper 11**
- **Virgin 16**
- **Satan 1**
- **Hell**
- **Mount Olivet 13**
- **Council House 7**
- **Caiphas 5**
- **Annas 3**
- **P & J 8**
- **Baptist 2**
- **Entry 9**
- **Arrest 14**
- **Mary M 15**
- **R & L 6**
- **Judas 12**
- **Simon 10**
- **messenger 4**

The 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

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~ 20 ~
8.2 Stage Properties

Noah’s Ark is the most remarkable property of the cycles, perhaps assembled on stage from prefabricated parts; it should be large enough to contain eight people. The Chester Ark is complete with the animals painted on its boards and a mechanical dove returning with the olive branch.

The Wakefield Killing of Abel opens with a plough drawn by eight animals: these may be imaginary, but the plough is mentioned also at the end,

I shall hang the apon this plo thee plough

In Chester play 4 Melchysedeck rides on horseback towards Abraham,

*Tune Melchisadeck equitabit versus Abraham* will ride

and an ass is needed in play 5 of the same cycle.

The York Crucifixion requires a cross, which will have to be raised with the actor tied to it and dropped into the mortise; and ropes, nails and hammers are much in evidence.

In the N-Town pageant 11 the Conception is represented by some device simulating beams of light entering into each other and then into Mary’s bosom:

*Here the holy gost discendit with iij bemys to our Lady,* 3 beams
*the Sone of the Godhed nest with iij bemys to the Holy Gost* son next
*the Fadyr godly with iij bemys to the Sone.*
*And so entre all thre to here bosom* her

Mary’s words celebrate the physical nature and the joy of the event:

293 A, now I fele in my body be feel
parfyte God and parfyte man
havyng al schappe of chyldly carnalyte […] shape
I can not telle what joy, what blisse
now I fele in my body.

The Nativity play in the same cycle stages the miracle of the cherry tree which Mary sees on the way to Bethlehem. The tree suddenly blooms and bears fruit, and Mary asks Joseph to pluck cherries for her; Joseph complies but the tree is high and he is old and weak – and out of patience he gives Mary a rude answer:

therfore lete hym pluk yow cheryes begatt yow with childe! who got you

The child in her womb promptly makes the tree bow to her mother (there is a famous ballad on the subject, *The Cherry-Tree Carol*).

8.3 Adience Address and Spoken Action

In acting the two basic features are audience address and spoken action.

The characters address the public to signal beginning and end: they greet the spectators, ask for silence, introduce themselves or each other; and they take leave, as in these lines in the York Emmaus pageant:

*Here may we notte melle of more at this tyde,* not talk time
*For prosesse of plaies that precis in plight* procession press urgently

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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  
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 [...]  
378 Now my gowne will I cast,  
379 And wyrk in my cote

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,  
Thurgh bones and senous it schall be soght –

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 signifacyon
461 Of this deed of devotyon –
462 And yee will, yee wytt mon – if you know may
463 May torne you to myche good.  
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  
467 Was sacrifyced one the roode.  
468 By Abraham I may understand  
469 The Father of heaven that cann fonde  
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,  
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  
24 Ordeyned foure and twenty prestys of grett devocyon,  
25 In the temple of God aftar here lot to apere.  
26 thei were clepyd summi sacerdotes 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 belevd so;  
35 The plag of dompnesse hise lippis lappyd, lo. affliction of dumbness  
36 Thei wenten hom and his wyff was conseyvenge –  
37 This concepcyon Gabryel told eoure Lady to –  
38 And in soth, sone aftere, that sage sche was skelynge. truth  

39 And of here tweyners metyng  
40 Here gynnyth the proces.  
41 Now God be eoure begynnyng, begins performance  
42 And of my tonge I wole ses. will cease  

**JOSEPH**

43 A, a, wyff, in feyth I am wery. weary  
44 Therfore I wole sytt downe and rest me ryght here. rest myself
Lo, wyff, here is the hous of Zakary;  
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’

\[ \text{than xal come ther an exposytour in doctorys wede, thus seyn} \]

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
Beforn 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 Miracle 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 outher in himself did here either outher in hisse seintis weren so effectuel and in ernest or efficacious done that to sinful men that erren thei broughten forgivenesse err of sinne, settinge hem in the weye of right blyve; to douteouse them faith doubtful men not stedestaff they broughten in kunning to betere plesen knowledge please God, andverry hope in God to been stedestaff in him; and to the true be wery of the weye of God, for the grette penaunce and suffraunce weary of the tribulacioun that men moten have therinne, they broughten in love of bryningge [...].

Thanne, sithen miraclis of Crist and of hise seintis weren since thus effectuel [...] no man shulde usen in bourde and pleye the jest miracle and werks that Crist so ernystfully wroughte to oure faith helthe. For whoevere so doth, he errith in the blyve, reversith jest Crist and scornyth God. He errith in the blyve, for in that he takith the most precious werks of God in pley and bourde, and so takith his name in idil, and so misusith oure blyve. in vain

A Lord, sithen an erthely servaunt dar not takun in pley and jest weyn he bourdith with his maister, leesith his drede to of fendyn him, namely whanne he bourdith with his maister in that that his jests loses maister takith in ernest. And right as a nail smiten in holdith two thingis togidere, so drede smiten to Godward holthid and susteineth oure blyve to him. jest much

Therfore right as pleyinge and bourdinge of the most jest earnestful werks of God takith aweye the drede of God that we shulden not maken oure pleye and bourde of tho miraclis and those werks that God so ernestfully wroughte to us. For sothely whan we so doun, drede to sinne is takun awey, as a servaunt, whan truly he bourdith with his maister, leesith his drede to of fendyn him, and so oure most helpe of oure savacioun [...]. Thanne, jestslays whanne we pleyin his miraclis as men don nowe on dayes, God takith more venjaunce on us than a lord that sodaynly do slays too familiarly 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.peer takun in pley and in bourde the miraclis of God, he, fro us from takinge his grace, seith more ernestfully to us than the forseed lord, “Pley not with me but pley with thy pere”.

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

Also, siche miraclis pleying is scornyng of God [...] players jest
Sithen thes miraclis pleyeris taken in bourde the ernestful mocked laugh werks of God, no doute that ne they scornen God as diden jest the Jewis that bobbiden Crist, for they lowen at his passioun as these lowyn and japen of the miraclis of God [...].

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Religious drama, for him, desacralizes religion by subverting the hierarchy between God and man.
Then he expounds six reasons in its favour proposed by its advocates.

It is a form of worship:

[1] But here agenus they seyen that they pleyen these
miracles in the worship of God and so diden not thes Jewis
that bobiden Crist.

[2] Also ofte sithis by siche miraclis pleyinge ben men
committed to gode livinge, as men and wymmen seing in
miraclis pleyinge that the devul by ther aray, by the whiche
they moven eche on other to leccherie and to pride, makith
hem his serveautis to bringen hemsilf and many othere to
helle, and to han fer more vileneys herafter by ther proude
aray heere than they han worschipe heere, and seeinge
furthermore that al this worldly being heere is but vanite
for a while, as is miraclis pleying, wherthoru they leeven
ther pride and taken to hem afterward the meke conversacion
of Crist and of hise seintis. And so miraclis pleying turneth
men to the bileve and not pervertith.

It can induce people to good living by showing them their subjection to the devil and the vanity of the world:

[3] Also ofte sithis by siche miraclis pleyinge men and wymmen, seinge the passioun of Crist and of hise seintis, ben movyd to compassion and devocion, wepinge are bitere teris, thanne they ben not scorninge of God but worshipping.

It moves to compassion and devotion by representing Christ’s Passion:

[4] Also prophitable to men and to the worschipe of God it is to fulfillun and sechen alle the menes by the whiche men mowen leeve sinne and drawen hem to vertues; and sithen as ther ben men that only by ernestful doinge wilen be convertid to God, so ther been othere men that wilen not be convertid to God but by gamen and pley. And now on dayes men ben not convertid by the ernestful doing of God ne of men, thanne now it is time and skilful to assayen to convertyn the puple by pley and gamen as by miraclis pleyinge and other maner myrthes.

It converts people who are impervious to earnestness but receptive to play:

[5] Also summe recreacion men moten han, and bettere it is (or lesse yvele) that they han theire recreacion by pleyinge of miraclis than by pleyinge of other japis.

It is a form of recreation:

[6] Also sithen it is leveful to han the miraclis of God peyled, why is not as wel leveful to han the miraclis of God peyled? sithen men mowen bettere reden the wille of God may read
and his marvelous werkis in the pleyinge of hem than in
the peintinge, and betere they ben holden in mennes minde
and oftere rehersid by the pleyinge of hem than by the
peintynge, for this is a deed bok, the other a quick.

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 siche
miraclis 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 thane to ben seen of God or to plesyn to him,
as Crist never ensaumplide hem [...] So sithen thise
miraclis 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 miraclis pleyinge ben verrey
leesing as they ben signis withoute dede [...].

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 [...] miraclis pleyinge [...] as it is sinne it is fer more occasion
of perverting of men, not onely of oon singular persone
but of al an hool comynte, as it makith al a puple to ben
ocupied in vein [...]. And therfore many men wenen
that ther is no helle of everelastinge peine, but that God
doth but thretith us, not to do it in dede, as ben pleyinge
of miraclis in signe and not in dede [...].

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

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

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 ernestful doyinge of God and by noon vein pleying,
for that the word of God worchith not ne his
sacramentis, how shulde pleyinge worchen that is of
no vertue but ful of defaute? [...] The convertinge that
men semen to ben convertid by siche pleyinge is but
feinyd holinesse, worse than is othere sinne beforehand [...].

To the fifth he answers that true recreation is in the works of mercy to one’s neighbour:
And herby we answeren to the fiftthe resoun seyinge
that [...] siche miraclis pleyinge ne the sighte of hem is
no verrey recreasion but fals and worldly [...] Recreacioun
shulde ben in the werkis of mercy to his neiebore [...].

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:

And to the last reson we seyn that peinture, yif it be verry 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 treuth. But so ben not miraclis pleyinge that ben made more to deliten men bodily than to ben bokis to lewid men. And therfore yif they ben quike bookis, they ben quike bookis to shrewidenesse more than to godenesse [...].

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.