A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE CORPUS CHRISTI DISPUTATION PLAYS

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PREFACE

The Corpus Christi plays comprise one of the most enigmatical areas of English literature, for the paucity of records and play manuscripts prevents modern scholars from recognizing the origin and tracing the development of these plays with complete accuracy. However, many scholars have investigated this area, and, as a result of their endeavors, it is now possible to view the plays with much more clarity than ever before.

In the present study I have chosen to devote Chapter I to a study of the Corpus Christi plays in general. The remaining chapters, however, have been utilized to present a thorough investigation of the Disputation play as it appears in the York, Towneley, Coventry, Chester, and Hegge cycles. This comparative study revealed, among other things, that the authors of these plays were allowed a considerable amount of license in their composition, examples of which may be noted in the appendices, which list the various metres used in the plays and the Ten Commandments as they are found in four of the cycles.

In order validly to compare the plays to the Biblical source, a Wycliffe New Testament, extant in medieval times, was used. Readings from the Wycliffe New Testament were similar in meaning (although not of the exact wording) to the King James version of the Bible. Therefore, all references, both to the Old and New Testaments, have been made from a King James Bible.

I wish to express my sincere appreciation to Dr. Charles E. Walton for his most helpful assistance, encouragement, and guidance during the

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CHAPTER I

The Corpus Christi Play

The term, Corpus Christi play, is a generic term used to denote a dramatic performance of many separate plays, the summation of which portrays a Biblical history from the Fall of Lucifer to Doomsday.[1] In most cases these individual plays were acted processionally by craft gilds, the trading and manufacturing associations of a town, and were, to a greater or lesser degree, under the control of the city government.[2] Seemingly an institution of Northern and Eastern England,[3] the Corpus Christi play derived from its association with the feast of Corpus Christi, though just how the plays were first associated with this feast is not known.[4]

The Feast was originally instituted by Pope Urban IV in 1264, but his death prevented its celebration in that year.[5] After some unsuccessful attempts at observing the holiday, it was confirmed by Pope Clement V at the Council of Vienne in 1311.[6] The holiday was established in honor of

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[1]Hardin Craig, "The Corpus Christi Procession and the Corpus Christi Play," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, XIII (October, 1914), 594.

[2]E. K. Chambers, *The Medieval Stage*, II, 113-114.

[3]Craig, "The Corpus Christi Procession and the Corpus Christi Play," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, XIII (October, 1914), 590.

[4]Hardin Craig, *English Religious Drama of the Middle Ages*, pp.125, 128. Hereafter referred to as *English Religious Drama*.

[5]A. W. Pollard (ed.), *English Miracle Plays Moralities and Interludes*, p. xxv. Hereafter referred to as *English Miracle Plays*.

[6]Craig, *English Religious Drama*, p. 127.

the Holy Eucharist, and after Pope John XXII called for a procession to accompany the feast, processions seem to have become one of its characteristics.[7] In fact, the church seemed quite willing to leave the form which the celebration was to follow to the ingenuity of the clergy and the people in each diocese.[8]

The procession itself consisted of the ecclesiastics and laity of a city who marched in worshipful order after the Host as it was carried throughout the town and, thence, back to the starting place.[9] Almost all of the citizens of the municipality would participate in the procession by dressing in the livery of their craft with each gild forming a unit of the parade.[10] Thus, the entire city was greatly interested and involved in the Feast of Corpus Christi.

It has been hypothesized that the linking of plays with the festival came about through a sort of evolutionary process involving six steps.[11] The first was that crafts marched in the procession; the second, that they carried banners; the third, that they performed dumb shows; the fourth, that there was spoken drama in the procession; the fifth, that the plays were separated from the procession; and the last step, that after the

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[7]*Loc. cit.*

[8]*Ibid.*, p. 129.

[9]*Ibid.*, p. 127.

[10]Craig, "The Corpus Christi Procession and the Corpus Christi Play", *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, XIII (October, 1914), 600.

[11]Merle Pierson, "Relation of the Corpus Christi Procession to the Corpus Christi Play in England," *Transactions of the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts, and Letters*, XVIII (October, 1915), 110-111.

separation of the plays from the procession, actors and pageant wagons joined in the procession without performing.[12] Though this theory sounds plausible, it needs to be proved that the first five steps actually occurred at one given place before its facets may be accepted.[13] So far, only one locale, York, boasts the important step of spoken drama in the procession, and no town has all of the steps.[14]

Although one does not know exactly how the plays came to be joined to the Feast of Corpus Christi,[15] he is aware of the theory that the main part of the plays used in a Corpus Christi presentation, based on liturgical subjects, were not especially composed for this particular celebration, but, rather, were already in existence.[16] These plays were the forms of the liturgical drama that had been developing in the church since the ninth century.[17] In the thirteenth century in England, these plays were still maintained in their original groupings of Christmas and Easter,[18] but sometime after 1318 they were evidently joined together in their present

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[12]Loc. cit.

[13]Lawrence Blair, "Note on the Relation of the Corpus Christi Procession to the Corpus Christi Play in England," Modern Language Notes, LV (February, 1940), 83-95.

[14]Loc. cit.

[15]Craig, "The Corpus Christi Procession and the Corpus Christi Play," Journal of English and Germanic Philology, XIII (October, 1914), 599.

[16]Craig, English Religious Drama, p. 131.

[17]The subject of liturgical drama has been definitively studied and reported upon by Karl Young in The Drama of the Medieval Church, in II Vols.

[18]Craig, English Religious Drama, p. 131.

sequence as they are found in the cycles, with the addition of new plays to fill gaps, and were performed together at a new time in the year.[19]

Why Corpus Christi Day was chosen as the usual time for the presentation of the story of the fall of man and his salvation is not known. Since the people and clergy were allowed ample freedom in selecting the method by which they would celebrate this feast, it is probable that the custom was begun as an invention of one town and thence spread over Europe and into England.[20] This expansion was irregular, however, for since each diocese was free to devise its own type of worship serivce, as long as a procession was included, many did not choose to include plays.[21] It is doubtful if the plays developed from the procession, however, for not only had the originals of these plays been in existence long before the institution of the festival, but the very nature of the plays and the procession would also have prevented them from being closely associated.[22] Even the presentation of the minimum number of plays would have taken hours and would have required the town officials, the clergy, and the bearers of the Host to spend a great amount of time waiting on the road.[23] It is, therefore, probable that the idea of presenting these plays in conjunction with the holiday was a special invention, not the

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[19] Ibid., pp. 131-132.

[20] Ibid., p. 128.

[21] A. C. Baugh (ed.), A Literary History of England, p. 278.

[22] Craig, English Religious Drama, p. 138.

[23] Loc. cit.

result of an evolutionary process.[24]

As to why the story of man's fall and redemption should be presented on this particular feast, it has been suggested that the service of Corpus Christi Day might have provided a model. Since this service was a ritualistic portrayal of the entire scheme of salvation, it is quite possible to see in it a model for the plays, for they, too, illustrate the plan of salvation.[25]

Just how the plays came to be performed by the craft gilds is a mystery still to be solved.[26] One supposition is that since the production of the plays became too expensive for the church, and the officials were unable to supply enough actors, therefore, it was necessary to require help from the laity.[27] While records exist of liturgical drama and of gild drama, the process by which the gilds were granted the right to perform the plays, if, indeed, there were any such grant, is not known.[28]

It has been assumed that the plays were moved out of the church because the building would not hold the many people who came to see them.[29] Therefore, the area in which the plays were performed was changed, first, to the porch of the church, then, to the churchyard, and finally, to the

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[24]Ibid., p. 132.

[25]Ibid., p. 133.

[26]Kenneth Sisam (ed.), Fourteenth Century Verse and Prose, p. xxv.

[27]Chambers, The Medieval Stage, II, 87.

[28]Baugh, op. cit., p. 277.

[29]Sidney W. Clarke, The Miracle Play in England, p. 11.

streets of the city, at which time they were taken over by the gilds.[30] This theory has credence, but it overlooks several facts that render it untenable. For example, the very scarcity of records in this period makes impossible a definitive solution.[31] The space between plays in the exclusive hands of the church and plays in the hands of the gilds is an empty one, causing any theory at all to be conjecture.[32] But the main argument against this concept lies in the fact that there is no convincing evidence that these plays ever did leave the church.[33] It is possible to think that those plays actually in the Corpus Christi presentation were no longer under the direct control of the church; however, there is no reason to suppose that plays, *per se*, were no longer performed in the church. Although the clergy were forbidden to participate in mummings and buffoonery in churches in 1207,[34] they were still performing the plays of Easter and Christmas in 1300.[35] In fact, it was not until 1589 that Rome forbade all ecclesiastics to play in miracle plays, and not until 1603 were plays prohibited from churches in England.[36]

It is important to note that tropes and liturgical plays continued

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[30]*Loc. cit.*

[31]Craig, *English Religious Drama*, p. 130.

[32]Baugh, *op. cit.*, p. 277.

[33]F. M. Salter, *Medieval Drama in Chester*, p. 43.

[34]Sisam, *op. cit.*, p. xxiii.

[35]Clarke, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

[36]*Ibid.*, p. 13.

to be presented within the churches.[37] Indeed, these plays, still in Latin, were part of the service of the church long after the Corpus Christi plays had been established.[38] Actually, the service of the church, including liturgical histrionics and all else closely connected with the liturgy, had become static by the end of the twelfth century.[39] Thus, the contention that plays were disassociated from the church is false; to be accurate, one would have to speak of the miracle or mystery play as the development of an offshoot of church drama and not as the end result of the evolution of church drama.

Indeed, it is appropriate at this point to define the terms _miracle play_ and _mystery play_. Each is used to signify a religious play, the miracle play being one that depicts the story of a saint or martyr, whereas the mystery play pertains to material of a scriptural nature.[40] Both kinds of plays originated in the liturgy.[41] The distinction between them is a comparatively modern one, however, for in medieval times _miracle_ was used to describe all religious plays not connected with the liturgy; whereas, _mystery_ was not used in connection with dramatic performances until 1744, long after they were no longer performed.[42] It must be remembered that

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[37]H. C. Scheikert (ed.), _Early English Plays_, p. 17.

[38]David Zesmer, _Guide to English Literature from Beowulf through Chaucer and Medieval Drama_, pp. 269-270.

[39]A. P. Rossiter, _English Drama from Early Times to the Elizabethans_, p. 48.

[40]Clarke, _op. cit._, pp. 4-5.

[41]Craig, _English Religious Drama_, p. 320.

[42]A. C. Cawley (ed.), _Everyman and Medieval Miracle Plays_, p. vii. Hereafter referred to as _Everyman_.

while these designations are legitimate, they have been imposed by modern scholars.[43] There is a medieval French word, mystere, used to signify a dramatic performance of comparable nature to the English mystery play, but it seems not to have affected the contemporary English usage.[44] It is interesting, if not significant, to note that crafts in England were termed mysteries as early as 1375.[45] Since the term was not applied to plays until the eighteenth century, and since the plays denoted by this term were quite often performed by crafts (or mysteries), it is plausible to think that there might be some connection here, but nothing definite can be maintained.[46]

An examination of the nature of craft gilds, though not clarifying the exact method by which they came to produce the Corpus Christi plays, can, nevertheless, reveal the appropriateness of the sponsoring of such a religious endeavor by these apparently commercial groups. The original meaning of the word, gild, was that of a feast, a sacrificial meal by ancient pagan Germanic peoples.[47] As Christianity spread, God replaced the names of pagan deities, but the banquets and gatherings remained.[48] These earlier meetings had been tribal gatherings, and later, as the population

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[43]Pollard, English Miracle Plays, p. xx.

[44]Loc. cit.

[45]Salter, Medieval Drama in Chester, p. 9.

[46]W. T. H. Jackson, Literature of the Middle Ages, p. 289.

[47]Lujo Brentano, "Preliminary Essay in Five Parts on the History and Development of Gilds," English Gilds, Toulmin Smith (ed.), p. lxviii.

[48]Loc. cit.

grew, gilds were formed, based on the family pattern of mutual help, for as family ties loosened, people needed the kind of protection that had been provided by the tribes and which the state was too weak to give.[49] These gilds were organized extensively from the eighth through the tenth centuries, and from their bylaws came the town constitutions.[50]

As trade became more important, a new type of gild, the gild-merchant, arose independently of the town.[51] Eventually these new gilds replaced the original ones. Usually, in fact, all of the free citizens of a town belonged to the gild-merchant.[52] These gilds became aristocratic and hereditary, excluding workers and admitting only merchants, so that eventually the craft gilds, which had been formed by the artisans, gained control of the cities.[53] Gilds-merchant, like the protective gilds they replaced, were formed for mutual aid. The gilds dispensed help, loans, aid in sickness, burials for their members, and alms to the poor.[54] A spotless reputation was required for admission. Wives and daughters of members could be admitted to membership, although they were not allowed a vote.[55]

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[49] Ibid., pp. lxx-lxxiv.

[50] Ibid., p. lxviii.

[51] Ibid., p. xciii.

[52] Loc. cit.

[53] Ibid., p. xcvii.

[54] Loc. cit.

[55] Ibid., p. civ.

Developing side by side with the protective gilds (which later were replaced by the gilds-merchant) were religious gilds, which had evolved from the merger of pagan feasts and Christianity.[56] Where there were gilds for clergy and gilds for laymen, their aims were the same--offerings, worship, mutual assistance, pious deeds, and funeral services for members.[57] These gilds were widespread over Europe and England, and there would be many discovered in each city, some founded in veneration of saints, some for specific religious exercises, some for schools, and some for mutual aid.[58]

It will be noticed that these religious gilds, though differing from the gilds-merchant in that the latter were founded specifically for protection and the former for devotional purposes, had much in common with the gilds-merchant. Both were based on a concept of mutual assistance, both required good behavior, and both promulgated good works. Members of the gilds-merchant belonged also to religious gilds, and it was also quite permissible for an individual to belong to more than one religious gild.[59] These religious gilds were important organizations in England until the time of the Reformation, when they were disbanded and their wealth confiscated by the king.[60]

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[56] Ibid., p. lxxxi.

[57] Loc. cit.

[58] Ibid., pp. lxxxii-lxxxiv.

[59] H. F. Westlake, The Parish Gilds of Medieval England, p. 51.

[60] Brentano, op. cit., p. 60.

As stated earlier, the craft gilds eventually gained control of the cities. This assumption of control was generally established during the fourteenth century.[61] These gilds matured alongside the already established gilds-merchant and religious gilds, with many craftsmen belonging to religious gilds, as well. It is not surprising, therefore, to find that the fundamental aims of the craft gilds are similar to the aims of the earlier two types of gilds. The craft gilds were founded on the principle of mutual protection and brotherly relationship; however, the protection provided now was economic by nature; whereas in early times the original gilds had been formed for reasons of physical protection.[62] Religious motives were important in the craft gilds, with funerals being provided for dead brothers, and priests being given positions of importance within the gild.[63] Some gilds had patron saints, and many performed specific services for the church.[64] In other words, the same functions and principles applied to the craft gilds as had applied to all other gilds before, be they protective gilds or religious gilds.[65]

It will be noted that the craft gilds, primarily trading and manufacturing companies, were greatly concerned with religious matters. In addition to the points mentioned in the preceeding paragraph, there are

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[61] _Ibid._, p. cx.

[62] _Ibid._, p. cxxiv.

[63] _Loc. cit._

[64] _Ibid._, p. cxxxiii.

[65] _Loc. cit._

two other aspects of craft gilds that are especially pertinent. One is that the entire gild, dressed in livery, would often march in solemn procession from their gild hall to the church.[66] The other is that one of the chief concerns of the gilds was for the welfare of the soul. To that end a requiem was sung each year for the dead, with special prayers, services, and offerings in their honor.[67]

Thus it would not only be appropriate for the craft gilds to present religious plays, but it would also coincide with one of their main reasons for being. We do not know just how or why the Corpus Christi plays were given to the gilds for production, but when we recognize the religious motives of craftsmen who retained chaplains, who were accustomed to marching processionally for religious purposes, and whose very organization was perhaps modeled after, if not derived from, religious gilds,[68] it is obvious that the transition would be of no great difficulty. The unexplained chasm between church and secular drama, though still unexplained,[69] would be more easily bridged than might be supposed.

There were formed in England, as early as 1278, religious gilds called Corpus Christi Gilds, which became proliferated throughout the country during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.[70] The members of these

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[66]Loc. cit.

[67]Ibid., p. cxxiv.

[68]Ibid., p. cxviii.

[69]Baugh, op. cit., p. 277.

[70]Westlake, op. cit., p. 49.

gilds were particularly concerned with honoring the Host, and often served as bearers of the Eucharist in the Corpus Christi procession.[71] Despite their name, the Corpus Christi Gilds had nothing to do with the Corpus Christi plays; indeed, they were enjoined against interfering with the pageants of the craft gilds.[72] At York, the Corpus Christi Gild was established in 1408, at least 25 years after the plays had been initiated in that city.[73]

As the name would imply, most of the Corpus Christi cycles were originally performed on Corpus Christi Day, although one suspects that there was variation in this aspect from place to place.[74] For instance, the Chester cycle was performed on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday of Whit Week.[75] Whitsunday was seven weeks after Easter, and Corpus Christi Day was the Thursday after Trinity Sunday, or a week and a half later.[76] Both dates coincide with the long, warm, fair days of late May or early June, an indispensible asset for outdoor performance.[77] This time of year was popular for the presentation of outdoor entertainments, for secular celebrations were often held on Whitsun throughout the late Middle Ages.[78]

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[71]Ibid., p. 54.

[72]Ibid., p. 57.

[73]Ibid., p. 53.

[74]Sisam, op. cit., p. xxiv.

[75]Martial Rose (ed.), The Wakefield Mystery Plays, p. 21.

[76]Westlake, op. cit., p. 54.

[77]Sisam, op. cit., p. xxiv.

[78]C. R. Baskerville, "Dramatic Aspects of the Medieval Folk Festival," Studies in Philology, XLIX (January, 1920), 49.

Throughout the Medieval period there were religious plays being performed all over England (and Europe as well); some were Corpus Christi cycles, some were single plays or small groups of plays.[79] Of the probable twelve full cycles, only four complete ones remain, the Chester, York, Wakefield (Towneley), and Hegge (Ludus Coventriae).[80] There are also individual plays from the cycles of Coventry, Newcastle, and Norwich.[81] In addition to these cycles and parts of cycles, other individual plays are preserved, such as a play of Noah at Hull (that was processional),[82] and a famous play of Abraham and Isaac from Brome.[83]

The scarcity of records and of manuscripts of plays seems rather unusual, since plays were known to have been performed at over one hundred towns in England.[84] However, this lack of manuscripts is not due to chance, nor to the supposition that the plays declined in popularity, as has been suggested.[85] Instead, it is the result of conscious destruction of what the new protestant English church considered to be Catholic doctrine.[86]

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[79]Allardyce Nicoll, British Drama, p. 29.

[80]Eleanor Prosser, Drama and Religion in the English Mystery Plays, p. 4.

[81]Cawley, Everyman, p. xi.

[82]Anna J. Mill, "Hull Noah Play," Modern Language Review, XXXIII (October, 1938), 489-503.

[83]Margaret Dancy Fort, "The Metres of the Brome and Chester Abraham and Isaac Plays," Publications of the Modern Language Association, XLI (December, 1926), 832-939.

[84]Salter, Medieval Drama in Chester, p. 43.

[85]Clarke, op. cit., p. 54.

[86]Salter, Medieval Drama in Chester, p. 43.

The plays did not lose their popularity; indeed, they were popular until the end, and only after fifty years was the Reformation able to suppress them.[87] What was the basis of this enormous popularity that supported these plays for over two hundred years? The answer is most probably to be found in their dramatic value.[88]

Over the years critics have discovered much of importance in the mystery plays; they have also tended to grow more sympathetic toward them. The value of the plays was once thought to be primarily historic and linguistic,[89] and their workmanship crude,[90] but later studies have proved that there is actually much artistry involved in their composition and production. An examination of the manner in which the plays were produced, followed by a study of the conscious dramatic effort that has been found in the plays, will reveal that they not only are historically interesting, but that they also possess intrinsic dramatic worth.

The most common conception of a Corpus Christi play production is that of a procession of pageant wagons (one for each gild presenting a play) that stop at predetermined locations in order to act their play, and which then move on to the next locale.[91] Apparently the York, Coventry, Chester, and Wakefield cycles were acted in this manner.[92]

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[87] Ibid., p. 45.

[88] George R. Coffman, "A Plea for the Study of the Corpus Christi Plays as Drama," Studies in Philology, XXVI (October, 1929), p. 417.

[89] Nicoll, op. cit., p. 32.

[90] Rossiter, op. cit., p. 66.

[91] Craig, English Religious Drama, p. 124.

[92] Cawley, Everyman, p. xii.

Upon close examination this processional system of production offers some serious questions as to its effectiveness, indeed, to its actual ability to function at all. It seems that the actors and pageants all gathered at the starting place early in the morning, at which time the first play would be acted at the first station.[93] At its completion it would move to the second station while the second pageant wagon would move into position at the first station. Each would present its play and then move on, the first pageant to the third station, the second to the second station, and the third to the first station. This would supposedly continue until all the pageants had played at all the stations.[94]

To see how this would actually operate let us examine the York cycle, which was seemingly presented all in one day.[95] The present cycle has forty-eight plays,[96] and at one time it contained fifty-seven.[97] These plays had to be presented at from twelve to sixteen stations.[98] A conservative estimate has placed the playing time of the entire cycle at fifteen hours, allowing fifteen minutes per play and ten minutes to move and set up for another performance.[99] These figures are based on the average length

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[93]F. J. Tickner, Earlier English Drama, p. 55.

[94]Loc. cit.

[95]Prosser, op. cit., p. 46.

[96]Lucy Toulmin Smith (ed.), York Plays, p. xviii. All references to York plays will be from this edition.

[97]Ibid., p. xxxii.

[98]Ibid., p. xxxiv.

[99]Rose, op. cit., p. 26.

of a play in the cycle as it now stands, forty-eight plays and 13,121 lines, the average of which is 273.[100]

If the first pageant got under way at 4:30 a.m., it would be ready to play at the second station at 4:55 a.m., the same time that the second pageant would be playing at the first station.[101] Then at 5:20 a.m. the first pageant would play at the third station, and so on at twenty-five minute intervals. At this rate, the first pageant would begin its twelfth and last performance at 9:05 a.m., at the same time that the twelfth pageant would be performing at the first station.[102] The last pageant would finish playing at the first station at 7:55 p.m., and it would finish playing at the last station at just after midnight.[103]

The fact that such a tight schedule would put a heavy strain on those involved in production, and that the plays varied in length from around 150 lines to well over 500 lines, would undoubtedly cause many delays which could well make the entire production last almost twenty-four hours.[104] There is also the matter of playing at night. Records indicate lamps and torches for the pageants, yet in 1457 Queen Margaret, at the first station in Coventry, saw all the cycle except the pageant of Doomsday which was not played because of the darkness.[105] It should be remembered, too, that

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[100] Ibid., p. 25.

[101] Ibid., p. 26.

[102] Loc. cit.

[103] Loc. cit.

[104] Loc. cit.

[105] Loc. cit.

Coventry presented only ten pageants at about six stations, and though the total number of lines may have been approximately equal, there would be much less time lost in moving and setting up than at York.[106]

That the York cycle was entirely presented in one day is made even less probable by the fact that the Chester plays, a cycle of originally twenty-five pageants, were performed on three separate days, with nine plays the first day, nine the second, and seven on the third.[107] This cycle was performed at only four stations.[108] No records are extant which indicate the hour at which the plays were to begin. If it required three days to present a cycle only 2,000 lines shorter than the York plays at only one-third of the stopping places, it makes the possibility of a one-day presentation at York even more remote.

The vehicle assumed to have been used as the stage was the pageant wagon.[109] There is only one description of a performance on a pageant wagon, that of David Rogers found in his book, A Breviary, or Some few Collections of the City of Chester.[110] This work was based on the collected writings of his father, Robert Rogers, Archdeacon of Chester.[111] The wagon is said to be a high, house-like structure of two rooms, one over the other, the

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[106]Craig, English Religious Drama, pp. 284-294.

[107]F. M. Salter, "Banns of the Chester Plays," Review of English Studies, XVI (January, 1940), 4.

[108]Salter, Medieval Drama in Chester, p. 12.

[109]L. T. Smith, op. cit., p. xxxv.

[110]Craig, English Religious Drama, p. 123.

[111]Loc. cit.

upper level being used for acting, the lower for dressing, with the wagon being open on top.[112] This description, though important as the only one of a Corpus Christi performance by a near contemporary, must not be accepted without reservation, for Rogers would be a hostile witness.[113]

Several facts have been deduced about these wagons. They were apparently very heavy, for it took seven men to pull a pageant wagon at Chester, where the route is short and on a slight downgrade.[114] They were also expensive and ornate.[115] Basing his opinion upon a thorough knowledge of stage conventions of the period, Wickham has reconstructed a plausible pageant vehicle that fits the facts known about the wagons and also the requirements of a successful stage for the plays contained in the cycles.[116] This movable stage is composed of two vehicles, one back of the other.[117] The rear wagon has a house and other scenery and props built upon it, while the fore wagon is bare, being used as an acting area.[118]

The problem of reconstructing the pageant wagon, however, can be brought into focus when one realizes that wagons most probably varied in

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[112] Loc. cit.

[113] Glynne Wickham, Early English Stages, I, 169.

[114] Salter, "The Trial and Flagellation," W. W. Grey (ed.), The Trial and Flagellation and Other Chester Play Studies, pp. 25-26. This book will hereafter be referred to as Chester Play Studies.

[115] Prosser, op. cit., p. 52.

[116] Wickham, op. cit., pp. 168-175.

[117] Ibid., p. 173.

[118] Loc. cit.

physical structure from place to place.[119] They also were likely to be different from each other even in the same town, for the different requirements of different plays would necessitate differences in the construction of the vehicles.[120]

The discussion so far has dealt with processional drama; yet Corpus Christi plays were presented on fixed as well as on movable stages.[121] Not much evidence remains, but it seems that perhaps the European convention of presenting plays in a stage which contains an unlocalized area, as well as localized stations, was followed in the production of the Hegge cycle.[122]

Rose has developed an ingenious theory, combining processional and fixed staging, in regard to the Wakefield cycle. Taking into account the small population of Wakefield, the theory suggests that the plays were produced by one religious gild which supplied actors and directed the plays, while the craft gilds lent material support.[123]

The production would supposedly follow the ensuing pattern.[124] On Corpus Christi Day the procession would begin at the parish church, where the Host would be brought out and carried through town at the head of the procession. At each of several stations, the pageant wagons would

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[119] Craig, English Religious Drama, p. 125.

[120] Loc. cit.

[121] Schweikert, op. cit. p. 28.

[122] Prosser, op. cit., pp. 46-47.

[123] Rose, op. cit., pp. 31-32.

[124] Ibid., pp. 46-48.

stop, giving a brief dumb show depicting the climax of their play. In the evening the procession would return to the church after a full day of parading.

On the succeeding three days the plays would be performed in one place, though that place could possibly vary from year to year. The audience would sit in a circle encompassing the unlocalized playing area, with gaps left in the seating, in which pageant wagons would be pulled. The wagons of heaven and hell would remain in one place throughout the performance, while the other localized pageants would be changed as the plays changed.

This theory calls for a smaller cast, since the main characters would remain constant throughout. It would also allow ample time for presentation of the thirty-two plays, and take into consideration what is known of the processional and stationary features of this cycle. This theory is also quite interesting in that it accounts for the time element that is so puzzling in the presentation of the York plays, while offering a more effective staging area than has been possible with the conventional approach to pageant wagons.[125] Yet it is only a conjecture.[126]

Despite the variations from town to town in the type of staging used, one can assume that the medieval stage was quite adequate and appropriate to its function.[127] Though primitive in the sense of lacking modern

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[125]Clarke, op. cit., p. 61.

[126]Rose, op. cit., p. 46.

[127]Wickham, op. cit., p. 151.

machinery, (which is an unjustified criticism anyway), the Corpus Christi stage, for its purpose of providing an acting area and background scenery conducive to the successful presentation of the religious plays that were performed on it, was adequate.[128]

The actors, though perhaps not professional in our sense, were, nonetheless, far from being untrained and unskilled.[129] Officials in charge of production held try-outs, selecting the best players.[130] That the talents of actors were appreciated is seen in the size of the salaries they commanded. At Chester, some actors received as much as forty pence for their work, which, compared to the salary of one cent per day received by an ordinary workman, seems large indeed.[131]

In addition to selecting good actors, several rehearsals were required.[132] A play of approximately four hundred lines should be quite ably prepared for presentation if it is rehearsed four or five times.[133] It is obvious, then, from the standpoint of a workable stage and of the quality of actors, that the actual presentation of the plays would result in a meaningful performance that was esthetically pleasing.

It remains to look at the plays themselves. There are several

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[128] _Loc. cit._

[129] Prosser, _op. cit._, p. 54.

[130] L. T. Smith, _op. cit._, p. xxxvii.

[131] Salter, _Medieval Drama in Chester_, p. 78.

[132] _Loc. cit._

[133] Prosser, _op. cit._, p. 54.

approaches that could be taken, but it would, perhaps, be appropriate to examine the findings of scholars which reveal artistry and dramatic techniques within the various cycles. A study of both the drama inherent in the plays and of the poetry and literary qualities to be found should help answer the question of why the plays were popular.

It has been felt that the audiences of these plays were composed of simple-minded people who were so slow and clumsy that anything approaching dramatic art and skill would not be comprehended at all.[134] With this opinion prevalent, it is not unusual that early critics found little of dramatic value in the individual Corpus Christi plays.[135] Only in the cycle as a whole was any drama perceived.[136] Indeed, the entire body of Corpus Christi plays has been branded as oratorical and epical, rather than as spectacular and dramatic.[137] That they were spectular can be proved by one example. The procession of colorful pageant wagons with their symbolic representations and their complicated machinations that caused sudden appearances and disappearances could not have helped but appear spectacular.[138]

They were dramatic, also. There is no doubt that the overall theme of the fall and redemption of man gave scope and unity to the individual pageants.[139] However, this is no reason to consider them naive, with a

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[134]Tickner, _op. cit._, p. viii.

[135]Prosser, _op. cit._, p. 54.

[136]C. M. Gayley, _Representative English Comedies_, p. xxxi.

[137]J. M. Manly, "The Miracle Play in Medieval England," _Transactions of the Royal Society of Literature of the United Kingdom_, VII, 140.

[138]Wickham, _op. cit._, p. 174.

[139]Coffman, _op. cit._, p. 417.

scarcely discernible dramatic framework.[140]

This opinion has been challenged by MacKinnon, who sees, within this overall plan of redemption, definite dramatic situations.[141] In various groupings of plays in the York cycle, conflicts are raised that must be resolved before the next is developed.[142] These groupings are the Preparation (plays I-VII), the Saving of Chosen People (VII-XI), the Central Action (XII-XLIII), and the Conclusion (XLIV-XLVIII). The idea, here, is that large groupings, not separate pageants, are the dramatic units.[143]

McNeir's study of the Passion plays of each of the complete cycles reveals that these plays do contain much in the way of dramatic technique.[144] Within this selected area McNeir has discovered a wealth of good drama in individual plays and in the relationships between plays. The study revealed that medieval dramatists were capable of such varied techniques as dramatic irony, symbolism, careful characterization, foreshadowing, satire, subtlety, spectacle, and stage effect, as well as a building of tension and its release, the contrast of both situation and character, dialogue appropriate to an action, and some excellent poetry.[145]

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[140]Katherine Lee Bates, The English Religious Drama, p. 181.

[141]Effie MacKinnon, "Notes on the Dramatic Structure of the York Cycle," Studies in Philology, XXVIII (July, 1931), 436.

[142]Ibid., p. 438.

[143]Ibid., p. 441

[144]Waldo F. McNeir, "Corpus Christi Passion Plays as Dramatic Art," Studies in Philology, XLVIII (July, 1951), 601-628.

[145]Loc. cit.

Perhaps, a closer examination of the method followed in McNeir's study would be of value. First, McNeir chose the Passion plays because they offered a cross-section of dramatic technique.[146] He studied each cycle carefully, looking for all instances of dramatic art, and finding, in various places, examples of the techniques cited in the preceeding paragraph. In the actual crucifixion scene of each cycle, he was able to discern a very profound dramatic effect, evidently the work of conscious artistry.[147]

The apex of medieval realism was found in the crucifixion. This realistic scene of physical suffering made the Christian story a real experience for its viewers.[148] In York and Towneley, the agony which Christ experiences is almost unbearable to witness; it becomes a nightmare.[149] In its depiction of extreme brutality, however, McNeir sees a subtle use of fundamental psychology to relieve the tensions that have mounted. Instead of the more obvious release by humor, often found in Corpus Christi plays,[150] here he notes that there is a resort to melodrama.[151] In other words, the situation is heightened to such a degree that the audience becomes engrossed in the details of torture, and thus the extreme agony of

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[146] _Ibid._, pp. 602-603.

[147] _Ibid._, p. 623.

[148] _Ibid._, p. 621.

[149] _Ibid._, p. 622.

[150] Pollard, _English Miracle Plays_, p. xli.

[151] McNeir, _op. cit._, p. 623.

the man on the cross can be blurred in their minds.[152]

The scene in the Chester and Hegge plays is somewhat milder than that in York and Towneley. In the Chester play there is no shock effect, and though the tormentors are diabolical, they are not malignant.[153] In this play, the dramatic effectiveness is created by the dramatist's requiring his audience steadily to contemplate the scene; there is no relief that comes through exaggeration.[154]

In the Hegge play, the author seems to have created intentionally a less straightforward account than that found in the other versions. Here, one has the hanging of the thieves with Christ and the added diversion of a Maypole dance.[155]

One thing is obvious from this study. Although one does not know the authors of these plays,[156] it is certain that these dramas contained much of what is termed dramatic technique, so that one may speak confidently of playwrights and dramatists who were searching for conscious dramatic effects.[157] A study of this type, _i. e._, a careful, objective search for dramatic elements, has been authorized,[158] and has yielded

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[152] _Loc. cit._

[153] _Loc. cit._

[154] _Loc. cit._

[155] _Loc. cit._

[156] Cawley, _Everyman_, p. xv.

[157] McNeir, _op. cit._, p. 628.

[158] Coffman, _op. cit._, p. 418.

much to an understanding of these plays.[159] It has been noted that earlier critics saw the plays unified only by the encompassing scope of the cycle as a whole, that the schematic plan of man's fall and redemption was the device that gave the plays coherence.[160] It has been shown, however, that this binding force may be more subtle than imagined by earlier critics.[161]

The Hegge plays have long been thought to contain the most heterogenous group of plays of the four extant cycles.[162] The heterogeneity of the cycle was caused by the addition of several other plays from different sources, including a five-scene St. Anne's Day play and a two-part Passion play.[163] Despite the conglomeration of component parts, the cycle as a whole was skillfully and purposefully put together, and it is marked by learning and dignity coupled with a correct use of words and metrics.[164]

Though the sources used in the extensive rewriting of this cycle were diverse, the overall effect is one of a uniformity of tone, which was no accident, for the compiler of the Hegge cycle used the antagonism

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[159]Prosser, _op. cit._, p. 194.

[160]Coffman, _op. cit._, p. 417.

[161]Timothy Fry, "Unity of the Ludus Coventriae," _Studies in Philology_, XLVIII (July, 1951), 527.

[162]E. K. Chambers, _English Literature at the Close of the Middle Ages_, p. 48.

[163]Craig, _English Religious Drama_, pp. 249, 251.

[164]_Ibid._, p. 260.

between destructive evil forces and redemptive good forces as a unifying device.[165]

More profound, even, is the conception of the cycle as revealed in a study by Fry. By noting recurring themes, Fry discovered that the cycle as a whole has a definite, architectonic structure unified by a particular theological theory.[166] This theory, the Abuse-of-Power doctrine, holds that the devil abused his alloted privileges, thus enabling Christ to redeem mankind.[167] To prove his theory, Fry notes the fact that redemption is emphasized more in this cycle than in any other.[168] He also points out plays such as the Parliament of Heaven and Christ and the Doctors that provide a definite link between the Old and New Testaments.[169] Thus, instead of being loosely joined by the general theme of the fall and redemption of man, the Hegge cycle is a carefully planned and skillfully written group of plays.[170]

As an example of unity and development in a single play, the celebrated Second Shepherd's Play of the Towneley Cycle will serve well. This play has long been regarded as a masterpiece of comedy,[171] but it has also

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[165]Miriam J. Benovitz, "Notes to the Prologue of the Demon of the Ludus Coventriae," Modern Language Notes, LX (February, 1945), 80.

[166]Fry, op. cit., p. 570.

[167]Ibid., p. 528.

[168]Ibid., p. 536.

[169]Ibid., pp. 551, 556.

[170]Ibid., p. 570.

[171]Baugh, op. cit., p. 281.

been shown that it is a much deeper drama, for there are four separate levels of unity inherent in it.[172] There is a literal level, an allegoric level, a moral level, and an anagogic level.[173] The play, thus, becomes not merely a comedy, nor is it simply a satire on the Nativity, instead it is a subtle foreshadowing of the Nativity.[174]

The foregoing studies are important in illustrating that an objective search for theme, tone, character, and other dramatic aspects of the plays, can be as valuable to their understanding as are the studies based on text, rhyme, metrics, handwriting, and other technical details. Both approaches are valid and important to an understanding of these plays and to their appreciation as drama.

One aspect of the Corpus Christi plays particularly intriguing to modern scholars is their anonymity.[175] The names of only a few men can positively be linked with even the revision of these plays. Thomas Bynham wrote the banns of the Beverly plays in 1423,[176] and Robert Croo rewrote several of the Coventry pageants in and around the year 1534.[177] Ranulf Higden supposedly was responsible for translating a French source into what

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172Francis J. Thompson, "Unity in The Second Shepherds Tale," Modern Language Notes, LXIV (May, 1949), 302.

173Ibid., p. 303.

174Ibid., p. 306.

175Craig, English Religious Drama, p. 15.

176Cawley, Everyman, p. xv.

177Grace Frank, "Revisions in the English Mystery Plays," Modern Philology, XV (January, 1918), 183.

is now the Chester cycle.[178] This last contention, however, has been thoroughly shaken by Salter, and the assignment of the plays to Higden is open, now, to serious doubts.[179] Salter believes Henry Francis to be the initiator, if not the writer, of the Chester plays, but he admits that most modern scholars do not agree with him.[180] As far as composers of original Corpus Christi plays are concerned, however, no names are extant.[181] It seems that the only name that can be authoritatively linked with the plays is that of Robert Croo, the redactor of the Coventry cycle.[182]

The plays are anonymous; yet they have had the touches of many different men, for they were constantly being written, revised, and rewritten to fit the needs of production.[183] Some were skilled dramatists as has been shown in the preceeding discussion of dramatic techniques. Others were not. The work of these skilled men, especially, has been the subject of many studies, with the result that scholars were able to assign certain plays and passages to the work of certain writers, even though their names are not known. The most famous of these anonymous authors and/or redactors is the Wakefield Master,[184] who is responsible for rewriting

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[178]Craig, English Religious Drama, pp. 168-171.

[179]Salter, Medieval Drama in Chester, p. 41.

[180]Loc. cit.

[181]Craig, English Religious Drama, p. 15.

[182]Ibid., p. 295.

[183]Frank, "Revisions in the English Mystery Plays," Modern Philology, XV (January, 1918), p. 188.

[184]Baugh, op. cit., p. 281.

five complete plays, Towneley III, XII, XIII, XIV, XXI, and parts of at least three others, XXII, XXIV, XXX.[185] It is also quite probable that he revised Towneley II.[186] His work is characterized by its abundance of humor,[187] and by a characteristic stanza form, a complicated nine-line form with central rimes in the first four lines and the last five lines riming cdddc.[188] The first four lines are of four stressed syllables, the fifth of one stressed syllable, and the last four of two stressed syllables.[189]

It has been suggested that this man was primarily a revisor who was well versed in peasant speech and manners, yet who was quite learned and widely read.[190] Probably a secular priest, he was more interested in humor and realistic characterization than in poetic merit.[191] Despite the occasional vulgarity, his plays seem concerned with the interrelationship of religion and life. The realism and humor are both used to

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[185] A. W. Pollard, "Introduction," George England (ed.), _The Towneley Plays_, p. xxii. All references to plays from the Towneley cycle will be made from this edition.

[186] Mendal G. Frampton, "The Brewbarret Interpolation in the York 'Sacrificium of Cayne and Abell,'" _Publications of the Modern Language Association_, LII (September, 1937), 900.

[187] A. C. Cawley, _The Wakefield Pageants in the Towneley Cycle_, p. xxx.

[188] Pollard, _The Towneley Plays_, p. xxii.

[189] _Loc. cit._

[190] Margaret Trusler, "The Language of the Wakefield Playwright," _Studies in Philology_, XXXIII (January, 1936), 39.

[191] _Loc. cit._

emphasize this relationship.[192]

Scholars have longed to be able to identify the Wakefield Master.[193] The most noteworthy attempt in this direction was made by Cargill, who felt that the Wakefield poet showed resemblances to the supposed author of the Turnament of Totenham, Gilbert Pilkington.[194] His contention, however, has been definitely refuted on the evidence of dates.[195] Cargill placed the dates of authorship at c. 1355.[196] Nevertheless, there is evidence to show that the Wakefield Master was active during the early years of the reign of Henry VI, probably from 1425 to 1450.[197] In addition, further evidence suggests that borrowings from the York cycle substantiate this belief that the reign of Henry VI coincided with the activity of the Wakefield Master.[198]

Placing the Wakefield Master in the second quarter of the fifteenth century has not met with unanimous approval, for it is felt that he may

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[192] A. C. Cawley (ed.), The Wakefield Pageants in the Towneley Cycle, p. xxxi.

[193] Pollard, "Introduction," George England (ed.), The Towneley Plays, p. xxii.

[194] Oscar Cargill, "Authorship of the Secunda Pastorum," Publications of the Modern Language Association, XLI (December, 1926), 831.

[195] Frances A. Foster, "Was Gilbert Pilkington the Author of the Secunda Pastorum?" Publications of the Modern Language Association, XLIII (March, 1928), 136.

[196] Cargill, op. cit., pp. 811-812.

[197] Mendal G. Frampton, "Date of the Wakefield Master: Biographical Evidence," Publications of the Modern Language Association, LIII (March, 1938), 86.

[198] Mendal G. Frampton, "The Process Talontorum XXXIV," Publications of the Modern Language Association, LIX, (September, 1944), 654.

have written earlier, namely, sometime after 1390, but before 1415.[199] At any rate, it seems probable that the Wakefield Master wrote much later than would be possible were Gilbert Pilkington the poet.

A second author, who left his mark upon much of the York cycle, is called generally the York Realist and is probably a contemporary (and possibly a rival) of the Wakefield Master.[200] His hand has been detected in York plays XXVI, XXVIII, XXIX, XXX, XXXI, XXXII, and XXXIII, which are primarily the Passion plays of the cycle.[201] Scholars think it most probable that the York Realist wrote between the years 1410 and 1430.[202]

There is also seen, in the seven York plays listed in the preceeding paragraph, and in plays I, XVI, XXXVI, XL, and XLV, the hand of an extremely skilled metrist.[203] It is possible that the Metrist and Realist were the same man, although there is no positive proof.[204] This York Metrist worked within a very complicated poetic system that used both syllabic and alliterative stanzas.[205] Critics agree that this Metrist-Realist was

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[199]John Harrington Smith, "Date of Some Wakefield Borrowings from York," Publications of the Modern Language Association, LIII (June, 1938), 600.

[200]Trusler, op. cit., p. 35.

[201]Charles M. Gayley, Plays of Our Forefathers, p. 154.

[202]Frampton, "Date of the Wakefield Master: Biographical Evidence," Publications of the Modern Language Association, LIII (March, 1938), 112.

[203]Jesse Byers Reese, "Alliterative Verse in the York Cycle," Studies in Philology, XLVIII (July, 1951), 640.

[204]Ibid., p. 667.

[205]Ibid., p. 666.

a genius in his use of a complicated form, in his subtlety in fitting the movement of the poem to the sense of the dialogue, and in his use of irony.[206]

Another composer or revisor is the compiler of the Hegge cycle, who was a very competent writer and a learned man.[207] He was apparently able to do what no other writer could, that is, compile an entire cycle of component parts from different sources and consciously unify it by the infusion of a theologic concept.[208]

The search for sources of the Corpus Christi plays has been widely conducted. It is deemed probable that the main parts of the Corpus Christi cycle were already in existence as partial developments of liturgical plays.[209] It is certain that the Vulgate Bible and the liturgy had a great influence on all four extant cycles.[210] The liturgy was especially important, for the liturgical drama established the basic mode of dramatizing sacred subjects, a mode that lasted throughout the entire Middle Ages.[211] Plays with liturgical origins often formed the most essential parts of a Corpus Christi cycle. For example, liturgical sources have been

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[206] _Ibid_., p. 660.

[207] Craig, _English Religious Drama_, p. 260.

[208] Fry, _op. cit_., p. 570.

[209] Craig, _English Religious Drama_, p. 131.

[210] Cawley, _Everyman_, p. xxii.

[211] Mary Hatch Marshall, "The Dramatic Tradition Established by the Liturgical Plays," _Publications of the Modern Language Association_, LVI (December, 1949), 991.

established for the stories of Adam, Cain and Abel, and Jacob.[212] The New Testament plays of the Nativity, the Passion, and the Resurrection are also of liturgical origin.[213]

In addition to these liturgical origins, other sources have been ascertained. Scholars think it probable, for instance, that a large part of the Chester cycle may be a translation of a French original.[214] Definite links between parts of the various cycles and certain vernacular poems have also been discovered. The *Stanzaic Life of Christ* has influenced the Chester cycle;[215] York play XXXVII is thought to be a direct borrowing from the *Gospel of Nichodemus*;[216] the *Christus Redivius* exhibits similarities to the Hegge plays;[217] the *Cursor Mundi* has been detected as an influence upon the York cycle;[218] and the *Northern Passion* is thought to have had a great effect upon the York and Towneley plays.[219] Besides the *Gospel of Nichodemus*, many of the apocryphal gospels affected the Corpus Christi

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[212]Craig, *English Religious Drama*, p. 65.

[213]Marshall, *op. cit.*, pp. 965, 972, 986.

[214]Craig, *English Religious Drama*, p. 176.

[215]Robert H. Wilson, "The Stanzaic Life of Christ and the Chester Plays," *Studies in Philology*, XXVIII (July, 1931), 414.

[216]Eleanor Grace Clark, "The York Plays and the Gospel of Nichodemus," *Publications of the Modern Language Association*, XLIII (March, 1928), 61.

[217]George Coffin Taylor, "The *Christus Redivius* of Nicholas Grimald and the Hegge Resurrection Plays," *Publications of the Modern Language Association*, XLI (December, 1926), 840.

[218]*Loc. cit.*

[219]Craig, *English Religious Drama*, p. 155.

plays.[220] Even an element of folklore has been seen in the reluctance of Noah's wife to come aboard the ark.[221]

Perhaps even more intriguing than the source studies of the plays are the interrelationships that exist, especially between the York and Towneley plays. However, the Chester cycle and the Hegge cycle have practically no close connection with each other or with the other two cycles. An attempt was made to prove that the Old Testament plays of the Hegge cycle were based upon the Old Testament plays of the Chester cycle.[222] This attempt was of faulty scholarship, however, and was quickly and thoroughly debased.[223]

The only play that shows a marked degree of similarity in almost all of the cycles is that of the Disputation. It reveals a definite relationship among the York, Towneley, Chester, and Coventry versions of the play. The Hegge Disputation play has no resemblance whatever to the other four Disputation plays.[224]

The major instances of interdependence, however, are to be found between the York and the Towneley plays. There is a similarity in dialect

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[220] Ibid., pp. 156-157.

[221] Anna J. Mill, "Noah's Wife Again," Publications of the Modern Language Association, LVI (September, 1941), 626.

[222] T. B. Clarke, "A Theory Concerning the Identity and History of the Ludus Coventriae Cycle of Mystery Plays," Philological Quarterly, XII (April, 1933), 144.

[223] F. M. Salter, "The Old Testament Plays of the Ludus Coventriae," Philological Quarterly, XII (October, 1933), 406-409.

[224] W. W. Grey, The Trial and Flagellation and Other Chester Play Studies, p. 101.

between the two cycles, possibly because the towns were but a few miles apart, and, indeed, five of the York and Towneley plays exhibit a remarkable correlation of text, presenting almost identical readings.[225]

There have been many attempts to discern the exact nature of the relationship between the two cycles. Perhaps the most important study was undertaken by Lyle, entitled *The Original Identity of the York and Towneley Cycles*.[226] Lyle believed that originally the York and Towneley cycles, at a time earlier than the extant version of either cycle, were one and the same.[227] After they were eventually separated into two cycles, the revisions of individual plays then occurred, causing differences to develop.[228] To prove her theory, Lyle points to the virtually identical parts of the cycles and to structural similarity in other parts.[229]

Lyle's theory has encountered a somewhat mixed reception. Craig feels that it is the only theory that completely explains the similarities and dissimilarities of both cycles.[230] Other critics have been more cautious in accepting the theory. Frank, for instance, expresses the opinion that, instead of a parent cycle common to York and Towneley, the Towneley

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[225] L. T. Smith, *op. cit.*, p. xlvi.

[226] Craig, *English Religious Drama*, p. 214.

[227] Marie C. Lyle, "The Original Identities of the York and Towneley Cycles--A Rejoinder," *Publications of the Modern Language Association*, XLIV (March, 1929), 319.

[228] *Loc. cit.*

[229] *Ibid.*, p. 320.

[230] Craig, *English Religious Drama*, p. 214.

cycle borrowed a very large number of its plays directly from the York cycle, some of which were later revised.[231] Another scholar entertains the notion of a common source, not only for York and Towneley, but for Coventry as well.[232]

Studies of similar plays in the two cycles have in part supported Lyle in indicating that Towneley play XXV is based on a now lost, earlier version of the corresponding York play XXXVII.[233] Smith, however, expresses the opinion that the Towneley cycle was probably an *en bloc* borrowing of an early version of York plays.[234] There are opposing views, of course. Clark states that Lyle's arguments are self-contradictory.[235] On examination of certain similar plays in the York and Towneley cycles that are based on the *Gospel of Nichodemus,* Clark feels that there was probably no systematic borrowing.[236]

A possible objection to Lyle's theory is offered on the basis of time. According to Lyle's concept, the "borrowing" took place sometime between 1350 and 1390.[237] The population of Wakefield in 1379, however,

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[231]Grace Frank, "On the Relationship between the York and Towneley Plays," *Publications of the Modern Language Association,* XLIV (March, 1929), 319.

[232]F. W. Cady, "Towneley, York, and True Coventry," *Studies in Philology,* XXVI (July, 1929), 400.

[233]Chester G. Curtiss, "York and Towneley Plays on the Harrowing of Hell," *Studies in Philology,* XXX (January, 1933), 32.

[234]J. H. Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 600.

[235]E. G. Clarke, *op. cit.*, p. 160.

[236]*Loc. cit.*

[237]Cady, *op. cit.*, p. 388.

was only 315, hardly large enough for such an undertaking as a Corpus Christi cycle.[238] Of this number, only forty-nine were craftsmen, and the largest gild was that of the Tailors, which boasted eight members.[239] It would seem, then, that Wakefield must have acquired its cycle some little time after 1379.

The above contention as to the size of Wakefield, and, therefore, to its ability to support a Corpus Christi cycle can be qualified. It is known that professional actors were used in Corpus Christi plays.[240] It is also known that the small religious community of Woodkirk, four miles north of Wakefield, sponsored two fairs each year, attended by large crowds, thereby greatly profiting the village.[241] If Woodkirk was capable of attracting profitable crowds to its fairs, it seems probable that Wakefield, too, could have had attracted many people to its festival, even if its population was small. With some professional help, a minimum of local actors could have presented the plays.[242] Thus, size alone would not have prevented the early inception of mystery plays at Wakefield.

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[238] Mendal G. Frampton, "Dates of the Flourishing of the Wakefield Master," Publications of the Modern Language Association, L (September, 1935), 651-652.

[239] Frampton, "Date of the Wakefield Master: Bibliographical Evidence," Publications of the Modern Language Association, LIII (March, 1938), 86.

[240] Salter, Medieval Drama in Chester, p. 78.

[241] Pollard, "Introduction," George England (ed.), The Towneley Plays, p. xii.

[242] Rose, op. cit., p. 31.

An approach to the study of the Corpus Christi plays that has proved illuminating where applicable is that of the subject of linguistics. For instance, some critics have felt that the Towneley play of the Talents belongs to the work of the Wakefield Master; others have felt that it was based upon a lost York play.[243] However, after a careful examination of its dialectic characteristics, scholars have concluded that neither of the above theories was correct.[244] Therefore, it was deemed possible that the play was actually composed at Wakefield or at Norwich, and that it was not a lost York play. The Wakefield Master probably revised parts of it, but basically it is not his play, either.[245] Stevens was unable to advance a theory as to the probable origin of the Talents play, but his linguistic examination did prove the previously held theories to be untenable.[246] Linguistic studies must be approached with caution, however, for there are strict criteria that must be recognized before studies of this nature can be regarded valid.[247] Middle English in all of its dialects, was a changing, developing language.[248] Therefore, before a work of unknown origin can be accurately placed in any given geographic region, it must be

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[243]Martin Stevens, "The Composition of the Towneley *Talents* Play: A Linguistic Examination," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, LVIII (July, 1959), 424-425.

[244]*Ibid.*, p. 432.

[245]*Ibid.*, pp. 432-433.

[246]*Loc. cit.*

[247]Morton W. Bloomfield and Leonard Newmark, *A Linguistic Introduction to the History of English*, p. 209.

[248]Sisam, *op. cit.*, p. 276.

compared with the linguistic characteristics of manuscripts of contemporary time and determined origin.[249] Even then, however, the problem of scribal predeliction can keep the study from having validity.[250] Important work is being done in this area, however, and it seems likely that the importance of the study of linguistics will increase as a significant tool for research in these areas of medieval literature.[251]

Perhaps one should mention a final dramatic element of the Corpus Christi plays involving the humor to be found within some of these dramas. Much has been made of the intrusion of humor into plays of such a religious nature; in fact, the use of comedy as a relief from the harsh reality contained within these plays has been termed evidence of their most dramatic element.[252] This opinion is held primarily by those who see in the mystery plays a foreshadowing of an aspect of Elizabethan comedy.[253] The idea that there is value in the plays for what they contributed to later drama is valid,[254] but it should not be permitted to overshadow the critical approach to the plays as drama.[255]

What, then, was the purpose of humor besides that of providing

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[249]*Ibid.*, p. 268.

[250]Bloomfield and Newmark, *op. cit.*, p. 209.

[251]*Ibid.*, p. 219.

[252]Pollard, *English Miracle Plays*, p. xl.

[253]Charles M. Gayley, *Plays of Our Forefathers*, p. 147.

[254]Robert Withington, "The Corpus Christi Plays as Drama," *Studies in Philology*, XXVII (October, 1930), 577.

[255]Prosser, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

relief? It has been suggested that the farce was necessary to establish a completely realistic scene, since, in order that the plays be dramatically effective (and, thus, more meaningful to the life of the spectator), one must accept them as historical reality.[256] It has also been thought that, perhaps, the medieval people did not find the humor so intrusive as do modern scholars.[257]

The present investigation of the foregoing studies of dramatic and artistic qualities of the plays reveals, that, while the cycles may be of an organic growth,[258] the writing that went into their makeup was that of individuals, sometimes talented, sometimes not.[259] These plays demonstrate specific application of dramatic techniques effective in their own time span. The combination of effective staging, careful preparation, talented actors, and competent dramatists (some of whom were gifted) must result in successful drama, and the Corpus Christi plays were successful.[260] They were not casual, crude affairs, for their production was quite expensive, requiring hard work from everyone in the city.[261]

Recent criticism by scholars has seen a need to judge the individual plays as units of drama, rather than attempting to discern dramatic aspects

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[256]Coffman, *op. cit.*, p. 423.

[257]Salter, *Medieval Drama in Chester*, p. 104.

[258]*Ibid.*, p. 101.

[259]Prosser, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

[260]Coffman, *op. cit.*, p. 417.

[261]Salter, *Medieval Drama in Chester*, p. 80.

in the complete cycles, for the plays can be considered as separate works of individual authors, not merely as organic growths.[262] Even if the plays are didactic, it is possible to see in them the various ways in which an author altered his source in order to produce a more effective drama.

In the subsequent chapters each of the extant Disputation plays will be subjected to a careful study in an attempt to reveal how each author developed his story from the source material. In the process of this study, such matters as metrical irregularities, references to stage properties and costume, use of symbolism, and topical allusions will also be carefully scrutinized in the attempt to clarify the plays further.

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[262]Prosser, _op. cit._, p. 56.

CHAPTER II

THE YORK AND TOWNELEY DISPUTATION PLAYS

The story upon which medieval dramatists probably based the play of Christ's Disputation with the Doctors is extant in three versions. One of these is the account found in Luke 2:41-52. It is brief, explaining that Mary and Joseph went annually to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover, and that Christ accompanied them for the first time when he was twelve years old. After the festival, they returned to Nazareth; but Christ, unknown to them, remained behind. Upon travelling a full day, they discovered that He was missing, whereupon they sought Him among their friends and relatives. Failing in their efforts to find Him, they returned to Jerusalem, where, after three days, He was discovered in the temple, astounding the learned men with his questions and answers. Mary asked why He had treated Joseph and her in such a manner as to cause them sorrow. In reply Christ asked Mary why she had searched for Him and wondered why she had not known that He must be about His Father's business. These words were not understood by Mary, who pondered in her heart all that had happened. Christ went home obediently with his parents and increased in wisdom and age.[263]

Another account of the Disputation comes from the <u>Gospel of the</u>

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[263]This account of the Disputation was taken from a Wycliffe New Testament, available in England in the early 1380's. Even if this Bible were not the one used by the writers of the plays under consideration, one assumes that their source was surely much like it in content, for Wycliffe's Bible was translated very faithfully from the Vulgate Bible, the universal version used by the Western Church.

Infancy of Jesus, which forms part of the New Testament apocrypha.[264] This version differs from the Biblical account in that the portion of the story in which Christ is in the temple is greatly expanded. The beginning of this account is similar to that in Luke in presenting Joseph and Mary as they go to the Feast of the Passover, taking Christ with them for the first time when He is twelve years old. When they leave, Christ remains behind in the temple where He is questioned, in turn, by a rabbi, an astronomer, and a philosopher. His answers reveal that He has read all of their books and that He is well versed in all areas of knowledge. The rabbi states that he has never yet witnessed such wisdom in one so young, while the philosopher rises from his seat to worship Christ, vowing to be His disciple. At this point, Mary and Joseph, who have been searching three days, discover their son, and, as in the Biblical narrative, Mary asks Him why He has treated His parents in such a way as to cause them to sorrow. His answer differs slightly from that in Luke, for, after asking the reason for seeking Him, Christ explains that he must be employed at his Father's house. His parents do not comprehend Him, but Mary keeps His words in her heart. Prior to the departure of the Holy Family, the doctors honor Mary, calling her "happy Mary" because she is blessed with such a child.

The only other account of the Disputation is found in the Cursor Mundi, an extremely long poem that attempted to relate the complete story of man on earth, from the Garden of Eden to the time that it was written.[265]

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[264]The Apocryphal Books of the New Testament, pp. 156-157. This source will be termed the "apocryphal Infancy" in the text.

[265]Craig, English Religious Drama, p. 94.

However, the only essential difference between this version and the Biblical story is that here it is told that Christ looked upon the books of those in the temple and astounded them with His questions and answers; no one could argue against His logic.[266] Nothing in this account appears to have influenced the Disputation plays that could not be more easily discernable in the Biblical and apocryphal sources.

The various plays of the Disputation show similarities to and divergences from the above sources, though none of them appear to have served as an immediate source. While Craig asserts that the York Disputation play reflects the influence of the Gospel of Nicodemus,[267] it seems that this influence is manifested only in metre and rhyme, for the story itself did not come from that apocryphal gospel.[268] No further sources have, as yet, been discovered.[269]

An examination of the plot of the York play of the Disputation, XX, noting its divergences from the sources, can be important in revealing how the dramatist utilized the material available in composing his drama. This study can be facilitated by the adoption of Greg's system of scenic division in these plays. He has divided them, according to units of action,

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[266]Richard Morris (ed.), Cursor Mundi, III, 723-727.

[267]Craig, English Religious Drama, p. 237.

[268]W. A. Craigie, "The Gospel of Nicodemus and the York Mystery Plays," An English Miscellany Presented to Dr. Furnival in Honour of His Seventy-fifth Birthday, pp. 52-60.

[269]An examination of the Stanzaic Life of Christ, Frances A. Foster (ed.), and of the liturgical subjects dramatized as listed in Young's The Drama of the Medieval Church in II vols. reveals no possible source.

into four scenes: (1) Mary and Joseph search for their lost child; (2) the doctors dispute in the temple; (3) Christ and the doctors dispute; and (4) Christ is found and the Holy Family departs.[270]

Scene one of the York play is a scene of forty-eight lines in which Joseph and Mary are returning to Nazareth from the Feast of the Passover. In the midst of their speaking of the awesome sights that they have seen, Mary misses the presence of Christ. Joseph at first asserts that Christ will overtake them, but Mary is inconsolable in her sorrow, so they return to Jerusalem to look for Christ.

It will be noted that the first part of the source story is omitted: _i.e._, they do not make the original journey to Jerusalem; rather, they have already attended the feast and are now returning. The dramatist has enlarged upon his source, thereby providing for a natural development of the characters. This amplification has created a dramatically effective opening scene in which the story of the lost child is introduced in such a manner as to obtain and then heighten audience interest. It is possible that the dramatist has taken advantage of the circumstances of the production of his play in order to afford the audience an opportunity to identify itself more fully with the characters. Furthermore, one observes that this play was presented to an audience which was celebrating a religious festival; similarly, Joseph and Mary had been in attendance at a religious celebration. It is also possible that the author has effected an emotional bond

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[270]W. W. Greg, _Bibliographical and Textual Problems of the English Miracle Cycles_, p. 87. This study was originally published as an article in _The Library_, XV (July, 1914), and will hereafter be referred to as _The Library_.

with the mothers in his audience by means of the lamentations of Mary. Any mother whose child has been lost in a crowd has probably felt that there would have been no trouble had he been left at home. At least, this is exactly the way in which Mary expresses her feeling:

> My barne is lost, allas! þe whille!
> þat euere we wente þer oute
> With him in companye. (32-34)

Scene two contains twenty-four lines in which the dramatist introduces the doctors. Unlike the apocryphal doctors, they are not delegated to a certain field of knowledge, nor do they encompass the entire range of human endeavor. Instead, all are masters of law, who have assembled to give an exposition of their law, proclaiming themselves unequaled in knowledge and authority. They appear more arrogant than the doctors in the apocryphal source.

Scene three, also, which extends through line 204, is quite different from the apocryphal source. Instead of being questioned immediately by the doctors, Christ is first looked upon with annoyance (73-80). As His words and sayings begin to indicate His possession of an inordinate mind, however, the doctors become more interested in Him (87-100). At the same time, His assertion that He has been annointed by the Holy Ghost is met with disbelief, and the doctors reprimand Him for being too presumptuous (101-124). It is obvious that these attitudes entertained by the doctors are not contained in the source.

Next, the substantiation of Christ's claim to knowledge also varies from the manner He employs in the source. For example, instead of answering specific questions as to theology, science, or philosophy, He is

required, here, to give the Ten Commandments, the exposition of which presents an interesting situation (139-192). Rather than answering when the first doctor asks Him to tell the first law of Moses, Christ tells the doctors, that, since they have their books open before them, they can read it to him. Thus the dramatist brings the drama to a high pitch, for on the surface it appears that Christ will not be able to substantiate His claim and that the doctors will be proven right. However, requiring the doctors to read the first law not only heightens the tension, but serves also to contrast the doctors' learned knowledge with Christ's intuitive knowledge, for in the next speech Christ states that no more books are necessary and gives the second commandment, saying that all the law hinges on these two rules. One of the doctors then asks Him what the other eight Commandments are, and Christ recites them.

In the preceeding scene, the matter of the Ten Commandments merits some discussion. The First Commandment, given by one of the doctors, is not the first law of Moses, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me," but is the New Testament rule given by Christ to His disciples in Matthew 22:37-40 and Mark 12:30-31, "Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy mind." The Second Commandment, given by Christ, is also taken from Matthew and Mark, "Love thy neighbor as thyself." When the first doctor asks Christ what the other eight Commandments are, Christ recites seven of the last eight Old Testament Commandments. His Third Commandment is the Fourth Commandment as it is found in Exodus 20:3-17, and the Commandments continue in this order through the Ninth Commandment, which is the eighth one given by Christ. His Ninth

Commandment states that one should not take by force the wife or women of one's neighbor, a law not found in Moses' list. The Tenth Commandment is the same here as in Exodus. Just why the commandments were given in this order, with two New Testament laws, seven Old Testament laws, and one original law is not known.

After hearing Christ's recitation of the Commandments, the doctors then evince concern over the security of their positions of esteem and desire Him to go (193-204). The doctors' reactions differ markedly from the feelings accorded the doctors in the source. The dramatist has, therefore, created a conflict between Christ and the doctors, skillfully building to a climax in the recitation of the law. He has brought the scene to its conclusion at precisely the right moment, for if it were to be extended, it would become anticlimactic.

The last scene, eighty-four lines long, opens with Mary and Joseph searching for Christ. Following the Biblical account, Christ has been missing for three days when He is found in the temple. Other than for this small detail, the source has been enlarged upon by the dramatist. For example, when Christ is first detected, Mary wants Joseph to go to Him (225). Joseph, however, is too ashamed to enter the presence of these men of renown, although Mary tells him that his age will protect him (229-236).

As it is detailed in both the Biblical source and the apocryphal Infancy, Mary speaks to Christ, asking Him why He has caused such concern (251-254). His answer resembles that given in the Biblical account more than that in the apocryphal source, however, for after asking Mary why she has searched for Him, Christ reminds her that she has often been told that

He was sent to fulfill His Father's works (257-260). Next, Mary's reaction is similar to that described in both sources: she does not understand Christ's words, but she announces that she will meditate upon them with hopes of discovering their meaning (261-264).

From this point the play undergoes expansion, for the Biblical source relates only that Christ was obedient and that He had accompanied His parents home. While the apocryphal Infancy inserts a verse in which the doctors praise Mary, it otherwise resembles the Biblical version. In the play, however, Joseph bids Christ to come with His parents (267-268), Christ bids the doctors farewell (269-270), and the doctors compliment Him, admonish Him not to speak of what has transpired, and invite Him to stay if He so desires (271-280). However, Christ declines this offer, and the Holy Family departs as Joseph bids the audience farewell (281-288).

The author has extensively expanded the sources that were available to him in the composition of this play. In the process, he has developed the characters to a far greater degree than they appear in either source. He does not seem to have relied heavily upon either the Biblical account or the apocryphal Infancy for anything other than an outline of the plot and some basic facts. Only the portion which occurs at the end of Mary's asking Christ why He has gone and His answer closely resemble the source; all other aspects of the story have been altered or expanded.

These expansions sometimes enabled the dramatist to enhance the dramatic effectiveness of his play. As an example, the triumph of Christ over the doctors is made more significant by the emphasis placed upon their eminence as revealed in Joseph's being afraid to approach them (229-240).

Joseph's attitude toward them indicates that they are, indeed, men of repute with whom commoners should not be bold. With their claim to superiority thus verified by Joseph's attitude, Christ's victory over them is made more important.

There is one allusion to stage property in this play, and one allusion to costume. In scene two the second doctor instructs the other doctors to put their books out in front of them (67). These books are also mentioned by Christ when He tells the doctors to read the first law to Him (142). An allusion to costume occurs when Joseph is refusing to approach the doctors. He says that, ". . . they are so gay in furres fyne." (232)

Another expansion of the source that has helped unify the play has been the wise utilization of the "lost boy" theme. Mary cannot believe that Christ would intentionally have stayed behind, for when His presence is first missed, she blames Joseph and herself for not looking for Christ before departing (35). Thus, Christ is depicted as a dependable child, one who would not deliberately have strayed. When Mary finds Him, however, she cannot understand the meaning of the words He speaks to her (261-262). He is still "lost," as far as Mary is concerned. He has not been talking as a little boy in speaking to the doctors, but as God. Thus, Mary actually does not find the boy whom she has lost; instead, she finds a divine being. Only at the end of the play, when He is returning to His home with His parents, does He, again, become the child whom Mary had lost (281-284).

It would appear, then, that the dramatist used both his source material and his own inventions to create an effective play. This author's

name is not known, but he did exhibit a tendency toward the use of certain idioms. For example, he uses the expression, ". . . als haue I cele," three times: it is employed once by the first doctor (109), once by Joseph (238), and once by Mary (261). Two variants of the above phrase are spoken by Mary, ". . . als we haue cele," (225) and ". . . als haue I reste." (243) There is another form of expression used repeatedly throughout this play. The first doctor uses the expression, ". . . he wate full wele," (115) Joseph states, ". . . þis wate þou wele," (231) and Mary says, ". . . þis wate ȝe wele." (236) The reliance upon stock phrases, as evidenced above, could serve as a guide for denoting this author's hand in other plays.

This play is composed of twenty-four northern septenar stanzas.[271] For the most part, the stanzas are regular in metre; nevertheless, there are some irregularities. There is one instance of the absence of one stress in a line (128), and several instances in which there is an added stress (225-228, 237-240, 245, 277).

There are also several instances of imperfect rhyme in the play (2, 4, 6, 8, 127, 141, 143, 153, 155, 184, 193, 202, 204, 213, 215, 253, 270), but most, if not all, of these discrepancies can be accounted for by scribal alteration of Northern forms to Midland forms.[272] In only one instance does there appear to be a serious confusion of rhyme. The rhyme words in the first four lines (229-232) of stanza twenty-four are <u>mell</u>,

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[271]A description of all the metric forms appearing in the various Disputation plays appears in Appendix A.

[272]L. T. Smith, <u>op</u>. <u>cit</u>., p. lxix.

tyne, wele, and fyne, whereas the next four lines (233-236) end with these words, say, dele, way, wele. Even the transposition of lines 234 and 236 with lines 233 and 235, respectively (which would result in an unintelligible reading), would not give a correct rhyming, for lines 233 and 235 would not rhyme with lines 230 and 232. These errors in rhyme and metre would indicate either that the York dramatist was not a skilled poet, or else that the extant York play is a scribal copy which has accumulated errors in transcription.

The Towneley Disputation play, XVIII, shows marked similarity to York play XX.[273] In fact, with the exception of two long passages, it has been termed virtually identical to the York play.[274] The Towneley play is imperfect in its beginning, for the first page of the Disputation play is one that is missing from the manuscript.[275] It is, therefore, impossible to know whether or not the Towneley play ever contained a scene one in which Joseph and Mary discover that Christ is missing.

In its extant form, the play opens with the doctors in the temple (which is scene two according to Greg's method of dividing the plays). Commencing in the middle of a speech by the second doctor and extending for forty-eight lines, this scene differs from the corresponding York scene. Rather than boasting of their superiority in the law as they do in York,

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[273]Pollard, The Towneley Plays, p. xvii.

[274]Greg, Chester Play Studies, p. 101.

[275]Louis Wann, "A New Examination of the Manuscript of the Towneley Plays," Publications of the Modern Language Association, XLIII (March, 1928), 140.

the doctors, here, discuss the coming of the Messiah. After the prophecies have been related, the doctors wonder when the Messiah will arrive, for none of the prophets has told when He should come. This scene is apparently an invention of the dramatist, for besides differing widely from the York version, it has no basis in either source. It proves, however, to be a very effective invention, for when Christ appears and debates with the doctors and they fail to recognize His as the Messiah of whom they have just been speaking, a situation of obvious dramatic irony is created.

The other Towneley passage that does not resemble the York play concerns Christ's recital of the last eight Commandments (145-180). This section, which has no basis in the Biblical source or in the apocryphal Infancy, varies from the York account in presenting a much more detailed description of each Commandment. The Towneley playwright has broadened the scope of the Commandments, thus, perhaps, rendering them more applicable to the everyday lives of the members of his audience; in other words, he has taken a utilitarian approach in this matter. For instance, the law against killing (153-156) is expanded so that sin is now clearly inherent, not only in the taking of another person's life, but also in refusing assistance to anyone who would require such help. Furthermore, stealing (161-164) also now includes anything gained by treachery or usury. The other Commandments are similarly enlarged.

At the same time, one notes that the order and content of the Commandments as given in the Towneley play differ slightly from their order in Exodus. Beginning with the fourth law of Moses, Christ's recitation presents the last seven Old Testament Commandments in order, while utilizing the Tenth Commandment twice, once (169-172) in regard to coveting the

property of one's neighbor. The reason for listing the Commandments in this order is not known, but it could, perhaps, be the result of a specific contemporary circumstance heretofore unrecognized. Perhaps local conditions dictated the order of their recitation and the emphasizing of one Commandment by giving it twice. This idea, however, is mere conjecture.

Besides these two main areas of difference between the York and Towneley Disputation plays, there are a few divergencies of a minor nature that merit one's attention. One occurs in stanza twenty as the first doctor is speaking of David's proverb concerning wisdom's being uttered from the mouths of children (81-88). In the midst of this speech, the dramatist has inserted a Latin quotation followed immediately with the translation. It is difficult to judge the effect of this insertion, however, because, while breaking into the stanza and speech pattern, thus interrupting the flow of the line, the quotation may have transmitted the appearance of verisimilitude of character, therefore aiding in the characterization of the doctors. It is also possible that this line could be a holdover from an earlier, Latin version of the play, though nothing else in the play indicates such a condition.

Another deviation from the York play concerns a reassignment of speakers. In Towneley, Christ has the following speech:

> Thise sawes, as haue I ceyll,
> I can well vnderstonde,
> I shall thynk on them weyll
> To fownd what is folowand. (249-252)

In the York play, however, the speech belongs to Mary:

> There sawes, als haue I cele,
> Can I no3t vndirstande;
> I schall thynke on þam wele,
> To ffonde what is folowand. (261-264)

It is important to note that the York version is supported by both the Biblical and apocryphal narratives. In the Towneley play, however, the same speech, altered so as not to contradict His previous words relating to going about His Father's business, has been assigned to Christ. If this change is one of a deliberate nature, it would seem to have a detrimental effect on the drama, for Christ's words would not be coherent. Why should He have to think well on His own words in order to determine what they mean, especially after He has just stated that He well understands His sayings? There is the possibility that the confusion is due to a scribal mistake, yet it seems that the change was a conscious one, for the substitution of well for not in Towneley (250) indicates an intentional alteration.[276]

However, if the change is deliberate, and not the result of a scribal error, it is a weakness in the play, because it is obvious both from the source material and from the sense of the passage that the speech belongs to Mary, not to Christ. As the passage now stands, the meaning of the speech causes Christ's words to seem vague, and it does not contribute any beneficial effect to the play. The only other possibility of explaining the confusion inherent in the altered speech is that the words ceyll (Towneley 249) and cele (York 261) may have had different meanings in medieval times, thus rendering the speeches more intelligible to a contemporary

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[276]Craig, Two Coventry Corpus Christi Plays, fn.1, p. xxxiii.

audience than they appear to be to modern readers. However, as far as is known today, the words were simply variations in spelling; the meanings of both are apparently identical.

Another significant aspect in which the Towneley play differs from the York one reveals the hand of a different playwright in the construction of this drama. The passages of identifying expressions in Towneley run as follows:

> . . . as we haue ceyll, (81)
> . . . as haue ye seyll, (213)
> . . . as haue I ceyll, (226)
> . . . as haue I rest, (231)
> . . . as haue I ceyll, (249)
> . . . sayth dauid, wele, (87)
> . . . that wote ye well, (219)
> . . . this wote I weyll, (224)

It will be noted that these lines vary from the corresponding York lines noticibly. Some of these differences may be due to a dialect change, but some, such as line 115 in York and line 87 in Towneley, are the result of deliberate alteration.

The Towneley play, in those passages in which it differs from the York play, is composed of quatrains. The parts similar to those of the York play are in the northern septenar stanza, with the exception of lines 205-228. These lines are arranged in double quatrains. A comparison of this passage with the corresponding York passage (217-240) reveals that these are the two York stanzas with caudaes of four stresses rather than customary three stresses. These twenty-four lines, as they appear in York, can be arranged in double quatrains, thus preserving correct rhyme. If, however, they are placed in two northern stanzas, as has been done by

the editor,[277] then the rhyme pattern is disrupted. Apparently these twenty-four York lines should be arranged into double quatrains as are the corresponding Towneley lines.

In the scene of the doctors which begins the play, there are nine instances of lines with three stresses instead of the usual four stresses (2, 6, 10, 14, 18, 24, 26, 28, 36). There are three other instances of the shortage of one stress (76, 124, 130), but only one instance of an extra stress (202). Furthermore, there is only one example of bad rhyme in the part of the play that is similar to the York play (181). However there are four instances of bad rhyme in the passages that vary from the York play (9, 11, 165, 167). The absence of errors in the part of the Towneley play that is similar to the York could indicate that the Towneley dramatist was a more meticulous poet than the York playwright. However, the occurrence of irregularities in the passages unique to Towneley would seem to show that the Towneley author was following a correct copy in the passages similar to York, and that he committed some errors in his own composition.

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[277]L. T. Smith, op. cit., pp. 167-168.

CHAPTER III

THE CHESTER DISPUTATION PLAY

Before one can undertake an investigation of the dramatic construction of Chester play XI,[278] presented by the Blacksmiths, he must attempt to clarify a problem which immediately is presented. There appear to have been two plays joined together, here, namely, the Purification and the Disputation plays. However, the practice of combining plays for presentation on one pageant was common in the production of Corpus Christi cycles.[279] Despite this fact, however, the title of the extant play, _Pagina undecima de purificatione Beatae virginis,_ indicates a play of the Purification.[280] Indeed, the first 208 lines of the 336 line play do encompass the story of Mary's purification. However, from this point to line 328, with no indication that there is a break in the progression of the play, one finds the play of Christ and the doctors.[281] The remaining eight lines of the pageant are spoken by an angel, a character also appearing in the first part of the play. However, these final lines concern only the Purification play. This last speech and the first 208 lines are composed in the Chester stanza, the most common rhyme scheme in the cycle, while

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[278]Herman Deimling, _The Chester Plays,_ p. 205. All references to Chester plays will be from this edition.

[279]Salter, "The Trial and the Flagellation," _Chester Play Studies,_ p. 11.

[280]Deimling, _op. cit._, p. 205.

[281]Craig, _English Religious Drama,_ p. 189.

the intervening Disputation play is written in quatrains and double quatrains.[282]

In the first part of the play, Christ is only forty days old (143). Quite obviously, He has no speaking part. Yet, without pause in the action, the play shifts in point of time to the period when Christ is twelve years old (according to the Biblical source). While no age is mentioned in the play, Christ is definitely a young lad, old enough to stray from His parents and not have them miss Him for a day, and old enough to speak fluently and cogently to the doctors.

Why this play was composed in this manner, and just how it was acted have not been resolved, but a solution may be gleaned from an inspection of the records of the Company of Smiths and of the Banns of the Chester plays. The banns, of which there are two sets, one early and one late, were cried throughout the streets of Chester weeks in advance of the plays in order to advertise them.[283] Chambers dates the earlier banns c. 1544, but in a more recent study, Salter indicates that they were composed at a much earlier time, and that, whereas the manuscript they are preserved in was written in 1540, the banns themselves were actually written by 1467.[284] These early banns, constructed in the form of the Chester stanza, seem to be more attuned to the spirit of the cycle and give a more straightforward account of

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[282] Ibid., pp. 159, 165.

[283] Salter, "Banns of the Chester Plays," Review of English Studies, XV (October, 1939), 442.

[284] Salter, "Banns of the Chester Plays," Review of English Studies, XVI (January, 1940), 4.

the surviving plays than do the much later banns.[285]

The later banns, contained in four manuscripts dating from the first of the seventeenth century, were evidently written for the last performance of the Chester plays in 1575.[286] Certainly, they are not written in as good a style as were the early ones.[287] They also contain discrepancies which apparently were caused by revision necessary in order that the plays might be presented at all at this time.[288] At any rate, it has been determined that the intelligent scribes did not include the later banns when they copied the plays in the Chester cycle.[289]

The account of the Smith's play is different in both sets of banns. In the early banns the play is described as follows:

> Semely Smythis also in Syght
> a louely Caryage the will dyght
> Candilmas day for soth it hyght
> the find it with good will. (81-84)[290]

These lines show that at the time the early banns were written in 1467, the Smiths' play consisted only of the Purification. The later banns are different, however:

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[285]Craig, English Religious Drama, p. 182.

[286]Salter, "Banns of the Chester Plays," Review of English Studies, XV (October, 1939), 432, 449.

[287]Craig, English Religious Drama, p. 182.

[288]Salter, "Banns of the Chester Plays," Review of English Studies, XV (October, 1939), 449.

[289]Ibid., p. 442.

[290]Salter, "Banns of the Chester Plays," Review of English Studies, XVI (April, 1940), 139.

> You Smythes, honest men and of honest arte,
> howe Christe among the docters in the Temple did dispute
> To set out in playe comely yt shalbe your parte,
> get mynstrilles to that shewe, pipe, tabart and flute.(115-118)[291]

These lines, written for what turned out to be the last performance of the Chester plays, show the Smith's pageant to have included only the Disputation.

It is known that plays, for various reasons, were often revised--added to or reduced or combined--and that crafts joined together, or separated, in the production of a play.[292] There is the possibility, then, that the Disputation episode was an addition to the Smith's play. This addition was evidently made sometime after the early banns were written in 1467, yet before 1488.[293] However, it was not necessarily an addition to the Purification play, for the possibility exists that it was a separate play. Sometimes, in the performance of the Chester cycle, not all of the plays were performed each year.[294] In addition, a record of the Smiths' Company states that in 1575 two plays were presented to the corporation for consideration, apparently indicating that the corporation would choose one of the two for production for that year.[295] Therefore, it is possible

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[291]Deimling, _op. cit._, p. 6.

[292]Clarke, _op. cit._, p. 17.

[293]Salter, "Banns of the Chester Plays," _Review of English Studies_, XVI (January, 1940), 17.

[294]Salter, "The Trial and the Flagellation," _Chester Play Studies_, p. 25.

[295]Salter, "Banns of the Chester Plays," _Review of English Studies_, XVI (January, 1940), 17.

to suggest that the two plays that the Smiths submitted in 1575 were the separate plays of the Purification and the Disputation.[296]

Between the years 1488, the time by which the Smiths were in possession of the Disputation play, and 1575, it is not known whether both plays were presented in the same year or if one were presented in one year and another in the next. There is an indication, however, that, perhaps, these plays were usually presented separately. In 1561, the Smiths paid four shillings each for the production of their play. In 1567 they were assessed an additional two shillings, two pence per member.[297] In itself, this fact proves nothing, but the extra expense does cause one to wonder if both plays may have been presented in 1567, as opposed to the usual production of only one play. Greg shows that, despite the petition to present only one play in 1575, the Smiths produced both the Purification and the Disputation in that year, citing this fact as evidence that the two plays considered for production were the extant play combining the Purification and the Disputation, and another play.[298] However, with no indication to the contrary, it is possible that their request to present only one of the two plays contained in the extant version was rejected.

It seems possible, then, if not probable, that the Purification and the Disputation were separate plays, although both were acted by the same

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[296]This possibility was arrived at independently, although it has also been posited by W. W. Greg, The Library, p. 90.

[297]Salter, "Banns of the Chester Plays," Review of English Studies, XV (October, 1939), 447.

[298]Greg, The Library, p. 90.

gild. The cause for the insertion of the Disputation play into the Purification play without stage directions or markings of any kind is due, perhaps, to a confusion in the authorized copy from which the cycle was copied by scribes. It has been hypothesized that such a true copy existed,[299] and that constant changes were occurring at all times in the mystery plays.[300] Consequently, the true copy had probably been reduced to a very garbled condition.[301] Thus, the scribe might have copied both plays as they appeared in the true copy, not realizing they were intended to be separate plays, thereby preserving a puzzling situation.

Scene one of the Chester Disputation play (considering it separate from the Purification play for the purposes of the present discussion), twenty-four lines long, opens with Joseph and Mary as they are journeying home from Jerusalem. Mention is made of the awesome sights of the city (219-220), and the scene is concluded with a speech by Mary in which she suggests that they hurry home in order that they might overtake Christ, who she supposes has gone on ahead of them (221-228). This account is distinctly different from those in both the Biblical narrative and the apocryphal story, for Joseph and Mary are depicted as they leave the city, rather than before they go. In addition, there is no mention made of their having attended a feast or festival of any kind. But an even more

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[299]Craig, English Religious Drama, p. 180.

[300]Frank, "Revisions in the English Mystery Plays," Modern Philology, XV (January, 1918), 181-188.

[301]Salter, "The Trial and the Flagellation," Chester Play Studies, p. 39.

significant divergence is that Christ's parents do not realize that He is lost. They presume that He is somewhere ahead of them, with the result being that Mary and Joseph, at the end of the scene, are still on their homeward trek, whereas in the Biblical account and the apocryphal Infancy they realize that He is missing and return to Jerusalem. Evidently the dramatist expects his audience to assume that Mary and Joseph will miss Christ and later come seeking for Him.

Furthermore, the Chester play does not include a colloquy of the doctors (229-232). It implies, however, that such a colloquy had been held, for Christ had evidently been paying close heed to the words that the doctors were speaking. This entire passage (229-304) bears a close examination, for there appear to be some speeches which have been displaced.[302] Perhaps it can be shown that these speeches are not so incongruous as they might appear at first glance.

In lines 229-232 the first doctor asserts that Christ, through the attention He is giving to the discourse of the doctors, is attempting to learn the law, of which they are the masters. In replying to the first doctor's speech, Christ affirms His unity with God (233-240). The subsequent speeches of the doctors (241-252) mention specifically their belief that the boy could not know the "law." Christ counters by claiming that the Holy Ghost has annointed Him as a teacher (253-256). The doctors are astounded upon hearing these words, remarking at how Christ has learned their laws without being able to read (257-258). Whereas one doctor

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[302]Greg, Chester Play Studies, p. 101.

desires Christ to leave (261-264), another demurs, perceiving Christ's words to be marvellous (265-268), while the other doctor hopes that Christ's knowledge of the law is a sign that He has been sent from heaven to aid the people on earth (269-272). The point of contention in the foregoing part of the play is that although the doctors are amazed at Christ's knowledge of the law, He has not yet recited the Ten Commandments. This situation has given rise to the belief that the doctor's lines have been haphazardly rearranged from an earlier version of the Disputation play.[303] One proposes, however, that it is also possible to view this problem in a different light. Since the playwright seems to be building toward the recognition of Christ as a divine person (301-304), perhaps the "law" that the doctors refer to prior to Christ's recitation of the Ten Commandments concerns the prophecies of a Messiah. The dramatist might have expected his audience to assume that such was the case, just as he expects them to assume the search for Christ by Mary and Joseph, and as he also expects them to assume the colloquy of the doctors. If the assumption is granted that the "law" spoken of by the doctors pertains to Messianic prophecy, then Christ's recital of the Ten Commandments would establish His divine nature in the doctors' minds, as, indeed, it does. On the other hand, if this assumption be not granted, and if the doctors' speeches mentioning the law do relate to the Commandments, then they are, indeed, misplaced, and do constitute a problem in the construction of the play.

After the doctors have given utterance to the thought that Christ

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[303]Greg, The Library, p. 104.

might have been sent from heaven (269-272), He asks them to tell Him one Commandment (273-276). At His behest, the first doctor reads to Him the requirement from the New Testament to love God above all else, with all one's might and mind (277-280). At the end of the doctor's speech, Christ immediately utters the admonition to love God diligently with all one's heart (281-282). He, then, continues (283-300), relating nine more Commandments. The remaining Commandment from the New Testament (the injunction to love one's neighbor as oneself) is not spoken. Instead, the last eight of the Ten Commandments from Exodus are related, one of them (the law against stealing) twice. The order of the Commandments, as they appear in Exodus (confused here), is given in the following sequence: three, four, five, eight, nine, six, seven, ten, and eight. Apparently the dramatist did not choose to follow the order of the Commandments as they were given in Exodus, neither did he choose to give the other New Testament Commandment. As in the case of the York and Towneley rendering of the Ten Commandments, this circumstance could perhaps indicate a local need for emphasizing certain of the Commandments. It certainly reveals that the dramatist of each city was accorded some amount of freedom in the matter of the Commandments.

After Christ has spoken the Commandments and the doctors have expressed the opinion that He is the Messiah, the scene ends, and Mary and Joseph are encountered in the process of their searching for Christ. Mary's first speech (305-312) explains that she sees Christ sitting among the doctors, and, consequently, she sends Joseph to get Him, a situation that is not found in the Biblical or apocryphal sources. Joseph's reply,

that he cannot talk to men of might (313-316), also has no foundation in either source.

The remainder of the Disputation play exhibits some additional divergences from the sources. For example, when Mary speaks to Christ (317-320), she tells Him only that she is glad that they have found Him; she does not reprove Him as she does in the Biblical story and the apocryphal Infancy. Christ's answer (321-324) differs from both sources in that He does not ask Mary why she has sought Him, but, instead, He simply tells her that He has been sent to do His Father's works, and He must fulfill this task before He goes. Mary's reply (325-328) closely resembles both sources in relating that she does not understand Christ's words, but that she will think well on their meaning. No more is said, thereby omitting the concluding portion of the Biblical narrative wherein Christ exhibits His obedience and the Holy Family departs for Nazareth. Moreover, there is no speech by any of the doctors after Joseph and Mary appear. In this matter, the story follows the Biblical account rather than the apocryphal Infancy, for in the latter work the doctors do speak to Mary before she and her son and husband depart. Yet another deviation from both sources is to be discerned in the fact that nowhere in the Disputation play is Christ's age mentioned, nor is there any mention concerning the amount of time that Christ has been lost.

In regard to the matters of costume and stage properties, the dramatist has indicated that the doctors are costumed in furs (316), and that they exhibit only one book (252). However, these are the only references of this nature to be found in the play. There are no topical allusions,

nor are there any speeches directed to the audience. In fact, the play seems barren of extraneous matter. It appears that the playwright wished to present a compact play, free of interpolations; yet in his writing, he did not strictly follow his sources.

The dramatist does show a tendency to repeat phrases and to follow certain word patterns, a practice which would serve to identify his hand in other works. For instance, ". . . upon his way," (210) bears similarity to, ". . . on his wayes," (261) and to, ". . . upon your way." (309) Another example is found in the similarity of, ". . . you take good heede!" (234) and, ". . . if you take heede." (260) Finally, ". . . you clarkes that be of great coning," (230) closely resembles, ". . . you clarkes that be of great degree." (233) The recurrence of these expressions seems to illustrate the hand of a single author in this play, one who relied on certain stock phrases in order to aid in rhyming.

Concerning matters of structure, the play is entirely composed of quatrains and double quatrains in which the metre is regular, except for one instance of a line that lacks one stress (223). The double quatrains exhibit a tendency to vary in their rhyme schemes, however. Some of them rhyme abababab (233-240, 265-272), some rhyme ababacac (217-224, 285-292), some rhyme ababbcbc (209-216, 293-300), while one rhymes ababcaca (273-280), and another rhymes ababcbcb (257-264). There are also many instances of forced rhyme, probably all of which can be classed as scribal errors in the alteration of Northern dialect to Midland dialect.[304] These rhyme

[304]L. T. Smith, op. cit., p. lxix.

deficiencies occur at lines 229, 231, 241-244, 246, 248, 265, 267, 270, 272, 273, and 275. There are, however, three cases in which there is a distinct lack of rhyme (223, 293, 295). It would seem, since most of the metrical errors appear to be scribal, that the author of this play used a play of Northern dialect for his source, altering it to fit his particular needs.

Finally, there is one other aspect about this play that should be mentioned, and that is that speeches of each character are formed of entire quatrains. Not once do two speakers share lines from the same stanza, a circumstance unique among the Disputation plays. This situation would seem to promote a more declamatory style of presentation than if stanzas were divided, and perhaps is an indication that the poet did not feel competent to handle a more natural-sounding style of speech.

CHAPTER IV

THE COVENTRY DISPUTATION PLAY

The Coventry pageant performed by the Weavers' Company begins with a prophet play, and includes the play of the Purification as well as the Disputation play.[305] However, this situation presents no obstacle to the consideration of the Disputation play as a dramatic unit, for there is a definite break between the Purification and the Disputation plays. Seventeen lines before the end of the Purification play, a stage direction indicates that Joseph and Mary leave the area of the pageant in which the purifying ceremony has occurred. At line 721, a stage direction states that Simeon and his clerks leave the temple, an action which signifies the end of the Purification play. At this juncture there is a division indicated by asterisks.[306]

The evidence that conclusively indicates that the Purification and Disputation plays are not indiscriminately joined is the fact that in the Disputation play, Mary and Joseph are presented before they depart for Jerusalem. Therefore, if this latter portion were not separate from the Purification play, by logic Mary and Joseph would still be in Jerusalem when the Disputation play begins.

The author of the Coventry play has added much material to the

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[305]Craig, _Two Coventry Corpus Christi Plays_, pp. 33-71. All references to the Coventry plays are from this edition.

[306]Presumably, this break was shown in the manuscript, for the astericks are not bracketed by the editor.

Biblical and apocryphal sources. For example, in scene one it is learned that Christ, who is twelve years old, will accompany Mary and Joseph to Jerusalem for the festival day (755-757). It is also learned, from a stage direction (814), that Christ slips away from His parents, who later miss Him as they journey homeward (830). No mention is made of searching for Christ among their relatives, but Mary and Joseph do return to Jerusalem in order to look for Christ (852). Thus far, the playwright has faithfully related the story elements that are to be found in the sources. But he has added a vast amount of material to the first scene, resulting in a greater detailing of plot and a greater amplification of character. For instance, several speeches are devoted to the praise of Christ, explaining that He is a child of extraordinary accomplishment and thoughtfulness (722-727, 791-797). Also, Joseph is depicted as being the master of his family (cf. 754-755, 806-810, 831, 851-852), while still exhibiting a tendency to withdraw from the company of others (cf. 762-767). Mary's speeches reveal her concern over Christ (cf. 738-741, 775), and her great distress when He is discovered to be missing (cf. 829-830, 835-838, 847-848). The dramatist has also characterized Christ not only as an obedient child, but as a typical small boy, one who likes to run ahead of His slow parents and play with other children (cf. 778-782, 845).

The second stage of action serves to introduce the doctors (857-884). This scene, which has no basis in either of the two sources, apparently has been exploited by the dramatist as a device for establishing a bond between his play and his audience. The doctors announce that they will hold a disputation in order to clarify the law for the edification of

the people (878-884). The doctors speak directly to the people in the assembled crowd, requesting that they draw near and give their attention to the subsequent dispute of the learned doctors (871-877).

Scene three begins at line 885 with Christ's entry into the temple. In this scene, He is questioned by the doctors, but this questioning does not follow the form contained in the apocryphal narrative. Instead, the doctors, here, are first annoyed by His intrusion into their debate (cf. 887-889), then gradually intrigued (cf. 912-917, 922-923, 926-927) by Christ's assertion of His heavenly knowledge (cf. 908-911) and of His powers granted by the Holy Ghost (cf. 918-921). When the first doctor admonishes Christ for being presumptuous (937-944), Christ offers to prove His claims (945-948), which He does in the subsequent speeches in which He recites the Ten Commandments.

Moreover, in the scene of the recital of the Ten Commandments, the dramatist focuses upon the conflict between Christ and the doctors. For example, the first doctor charges Christ to prove His claims of special powers by recounting the First Commandment (959-964). Instead of answering, Christ tells the doctors to read the law from the open books before them (961-964). This speech suggests that Christ will not be able to substantiate His claims, thus heightening the tension in the situation, and this turn of events also serves to contrast the learned knowledge of the doctors with Christ's intuitive wisdom, by means of a basic form of dramatic irony.

The recital of the Commandments should be noted for their divergencies from the order in which they are found in Exodus. The second doctor

recites the two commandments of the New Testament which require one to love God above all else, and to love one's neighbor as oneself (965-970). When the doctor has finished, Christ asserts that all the law "hangs" on these two commandments (971-974). The third doctor then asks if He can tell the other eight Commandments (975-976). In reply, Christ recites the last eight Old Testament Commandments in their proper sequence, beginning with the Fourth Commandment and inserting the Third Commandment between the Ninth and the Tenth Commandments (975-1000).

The dramatist then concludes scene three with speeches by the doctors in which they admit that Christ has proved himself and predict that if He stays, the people will praise Him more than they will the doctors; therefore, they wish Him to leave (1001-1012). These speeches culminate the dramatist's efforts to characterize the doctors. They have been depicted as haughty and self-important men, who have suddenly been toppled from their positions of eminence. They are, therefore, greatly confused. Later, however, after their confusion has dissipated, and when they perceive that Christ has no intention of undermining their esteem, they then wish Him to remain with them.

After line 1012 a stage direction indicates that Mary and Joseph enter the acting area and begin scene four. It is now learned that Christ has been missing for three days and that His parents are very sorrowful (1013-1026). As they approach the temple, Mary perceives Christ (1027-1029), and instructs Joseph to "fetch" the boy (1033-1034). Joseph is unable to perform this deed, however, for he is too ashamed to approach the venerated doctors (1037-1040). The dramatist has prepared for this

situation earlier in the play by portraying Joseph as a man who feels uncomfortable in company. In depicting Mary's extreme concern over the welfare of her son, the playwright has made it plausible for her to approach the doctors when Joseph cannot do so (1049-1052).

Mary's speech when she confronts Christ (1057-1064) portrays a meaning similar to that of the Biblical and apocryphal incidents, but it is expanded by its emphasis upon the sorrow which she and Joseph have undergone. Christ's answer approximates the Biblical source, because He asks Mary why she has sought Him, since she has often been told that He must fulfill His Father's will (1065-1068). Mary's response, here, differs slightly from the reaction found in both sources, for while she does not understand His words, she says nothing concerning her intentions of pondering in her heart the words of Christ. Instead, she states that her heart is glad that Christ has been found (1069-1072).

Furthermore, the dramatist has made Christ's words ("going about His Father's business") dramatically effective. By having characterized Him, in the first scene, as an extraordinarily obedient boy, the dramatist can now show that Mary has never before heard Him speak in such a manner, for prior to this time He has always exactly followed His parents' wishes. Now, however, He utters words impossible for Mary to comprehend, since they come from a Christ she has not yet known. Thus, the playwright, through his additions to the source which he has used to provide motivation and characterization, has also effectively presented the transformation of Christ from the boy to the voice of God now speaking to the doctors.

The remainder of scene four (1073-1145) consists of dialogue between

the members of the Holy Family and the doctors, in the process of which the doctors attempt to detain Christ (1087-1091). They are unsuccessful in their endeavors, however, for Mary and Joseph will not allow the boy to be taken from them (1092-1102). This interchange is an addition to the source, as is also the final action in this scene, the departure of Mary, Joseph, and Christ. Included in this departure scene, the dramatist has placed words of farewell which are directed to the audience (1134-1145).

An unusual feature of this play is its inclusion of a fifth scene, one in which the doctors ruminate over what they have just witnessed. One concludes that this is an invention of the Coventry playwright, for it appears in no other play, nor is it implied in either source. In the progression of the scene, the doctors reveal their opinion that the boy who has been with them is one of God's elect (1152), and that He is the recipient of special grace (1163), yet they do not recognize His divinity. One suspects that these musings of the doctors would be dramatically effective, because the audience is very much aware of the nature of the boy and already realizes His superiority over the doctors. The dramatic irony inherent in the situation is obvious and functional.

In the remaining portion of the play (1169-1192), the dramatist has assigned some intriguing speeches to the doctors. They speak of putting their musings aside, explaining that the day has almost ended and they must leave (1169-1175). They further state that a day will be set for the resumption of their debate, and they dismiss the crowd on the condition that the people pledge themselves to attend the next summons (1180-1186). They then explain that there is nothing else to be said concerning their

festival day, and, as they leave, they speak of the swift approach of night (1187-1190). These lines serve to unify the play by referring to the dispute that was introduced in scene two.

These same lines contain, also, however, a reference to a festival (1187), implying the Corpus Christi festival. This reference, combined with the admonition to attend the next summons (1186) and the allusion to the approaching night (1175, 1190), gives cause for specific considerations. For example, are these allusions intended to indicate simply the end of the play of this particular pageant and the beginning of the next? Is the crowd "dismissed" only for a short intermission, which will end when the people are again "summoned" to the succeeding play? Or is this pageant actually the last one of the day, in which case, the next summons for the audience to attend will occur the following morning? An examination of the staging of the Coventry cycle may help to clarify some of these problems.

There seem to have been only ten separate pageants presented at Coventry. At least only ten companies had possession of a pageant and a play, although other companies were required to help support pageants if they had none of their own.[307] Therefore, the Weaver's Pageant, if it were to conclude a day of playing, should be located somewhere near the middle of the playing positions, perhaps in the fourth, fifth, or sixth position. If the hypothesis that Coventry had no Old Testament plays were true, this pageant would be only the second one to be presented and,

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[307]Craig, English Religious Drama, p. 284.

thus, could not possibly have ended a day of playing.[308]

However, it is now deemed quite possible that there could have been at least three pageants devoted to Old Testament subjects.[309] Since there was a definite tendency to group many subjects into one play, most of the stories essential to a Corpus Christi play (see page 1 of the first chapter) such as the Fall of Lucifer, the Creation and Fall of Man, Cain and Abel, Noah, and Abraham and Isaac, could be included in three pageants.[310] Thus, if the playing time at Coventry _were_ two days and if there _were_ three Old Testament plays, the _Weaver's Pageant_ would be the fifth play and would end the playing for the day, and, therefore, the remarks of the doctors concerning the falling of night would be literal, and the admonition to attend the next summons would refer to the first play of the next morning.

The case for a two-day performance has no other support, however, than the internal evidence of the _Weaver's Pageant_. It is assumed that the Coventry plays were all performed in the same day, probably at half a dozen stations.[311] It is possible that there were ten stations at which the pageants were played, one in each ward of the city.[312] But only six stations are definitely mentioned in the Coventry records as having been sites for pageants.[313] It is even possible that there were only three

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[308]Craig, _Two Coventry Corpus Christi Plays_, pp. xv, xviii.

[309]Craig, _English Religious Drama_, p. 291.

[310]_Ibid._, pp. 288, 291.

[311]_Ibid._, p. 294.

[312]Craig, _Two Coventry Corpus Christi Plays_, p. xiii.

[313]_Ibid._, pp. xiii-xiv.

playing sites, for an account of the Draper's Company indicates that they burned three representations of worlds in their pageant of Doomsday.[314] Since it would seem that each presentation of the play would require the burning of a representation of the world, one concludes that the play was presented only three times, *i.e.*, at three stations, during the Corpus Christi festival. At any rate, it seems likely that there were somewhat fewer than ten stations.

If there were only approximately a half dozen playing stations, it is improbable that the cycle, unusually short as it was, would have been divided for a two-day performance.[315] What, then, is to be made of the reference to the approach of night? Perhaps, it is the dramatist's way of saying that it is time for another pageant to be presented. The charge to the audience to attend the next summons could apply as easily to the next pageant as to the next day. When the first doctor asks if there is anything else that need be said about the festival day, the second one tells him there is no more now and suggests they hurry away as night is approaching fast. The third doctor wants to accompany them and takes leave of the audience (1187-1192). These speeches could quite possibly refer to their moving on to the next station. Until further records are discovered the question will remain.

The metrics of this play are preserved in a somewhat garbled state, indicating that the composer of this play was not an experienced, indeed,

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[314]*Ibid.*, p. 99.

[315]Craig, *English Religious Drama*, pp. 288, 294.

hardly a competent poet. The editor of the play felt that it was divided into the following stanzaic patterns: double quatrains (722-745); seven-line stanza (747-753, 857-884, 1146-1192); Chester stanza (754-815, 1089-1145); and quatrains adapted from the northern septenar stanza (816-856, 885-1088).[316]

There are so many discrepancies in metrics contained in this play, however, that the task of commenting upon them meaningfully becomes difficult. For example, it is especially difficult to note errors in rhyme, because the stanzas are often in such a confused state that it is impossible to know exactly where the rhyme should fall. There are, however, definite rhyme deficiencies at lines 749, 823, 1029, 1031, 1065, and 1067. Also found in this play are two inserted lines (746, 761), apparently extraneous, for they do not fit into the rhyme scheme of the stanza pattern, and, in addition, are marginal insertions in the manuscript.[317]

In discussing the discrepancies in stanza formation, one chooses to follow Craig's system, noting deviations and irregularities as they occur. There are no errors of a serious nature in the first section of double quatrains (722-745). However, in the first section of the Chester stanza (754-815), there are several confused constructions. Lines 754-760, for instance, rhyme aaaaaab with only line 757 containing three stresses. The next grouping (762-767) rhymes $aa^4b^3cc^4b^3$. Next comes a very long and awkward assemblage (768-777) that rhymes $abaa^4b^3abcc^4b^3$. Following

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[316]Craig, Two Coventry Corpus Christi Plays, p. xxvii.

[317]*Ibid.*, pp. 56-57.

this is a five-line grouping that rhymes $a^4b^3cc^4b^3$. Immediately subsequent to this is a Chester stanza in perfect form. The only other correct stanza in this section occurs at lines 798-805. Of the two remaining stanzas, one lacks a line (791-797), while the other contains an extra line (806-814).[318]

The first section couched in the quatrains adapted from the northern septenar stanza contains only one discrepancy, a six-line grouping rhyming ababab (843-848). The second section (884-1088), however, has several confusing interruptions. For instance, there is a seven-line stanza inserted into the section (893-899), followed by two lines that

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[318]Although no one seems to have noticed, the extra line of the one stanza would very well fit into the shortened stanza. The shortened one, with Joseph speaking, reads thus:

Now, thys ys wyttele sayde and wyll
Now, Lord, whens I to mynde do call
In vthe when I was werre small,
Many wynturs agone,--
Lord God, benedicete!
Yong chyldur now more wyser be.
Nor wase then an olde mon. (791-797)

The longer one, begun by Joseph, is as follows:

Now, Mare, my wyff, cum hethur to me!
(Now, Mare, harke what I shall say!)
All thyng ys done ase yt schuld be
And serves song full sollamle
For this owre festefawll dey.
(Mary) Now, husebond, then lett vs
Make the hast that ma be
Whom to goo with cumpane
To bryng vs on the wey! (806-814)

Line 807 would fit both the metre and the sense of the passage if it were inserted between lines 795-796. Unfortunately, there is nothing other than this appropriateness to support such a conclusion.

are not associated with any other lines. Between lines 925-933, another seven-line stanza has been interspersed with the quatrains. A grouping that rhymes ababcb is found between lines 964-971, and another grouping that rhymes abbcbc is placed between lines 974-981. The last divergence from the quatrains in this section is a Chester half-stanza (1077-1080).

The last section of Chester stanza, according to Craig, is found in lines 1086-1145. Actually, this section seems to extend through line 1168, with correct Chester stanzas found at lines 1099-1106, 1107-1114, 1138-1145, 1153-1160, and 1161-1168. From lines 1089-1094 is found a stanza of *rime couee,* followed by a Chester half-stanza. The stanza from lines 1115-1121 is missing a line between lines 1119-1120. Subsequent to this short stanza is a grouping that rhymes $aaaaa^4b^3aa^4b^3$, which, in turn, is followed by this unusual arrangement, $aa^4b^3cccb^4$. The last alteration occurs at lines 1146-1152 where the rhyme scheme is $aabccc^4b^3$.

Craig felt that the last passage of the play (1146-1192) was originally in the seven-line stanza, although it was shown in the preceeding paragraph that the Chester stanza extended to line 1168. Actually there are only two seven-line stanzas (1169-1175, 1180-1186) in this passage, in addition to a quatrain (1176-1179) and a six-line form that rhymes thus: $aaa^4b^3ab^4$.

The abundance of metrical irregularities in this play points to a situation involving much revision.[319] It has been noted by scholars that Robert Croo is, perhaps, responsible for many of these irregularities.[320]

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[319]Craig, *Two Coventry Corpus Christi Plays,* p. xxiv.

[320]Craig, *English Religious Drama,* p. 163.

It has also been noted that the older part of the Doctors' play, containing the essential story, is couched in the quatrain form that resembles the northern septenar, while the seven-line stanza is used mainly in the prologue of the doctors, and the Chester metre never occurs, except for a half stanza, within the older form, being used solely for matters of interpolation.[321]

A final note of interest in connection with this play is that there are several lucid stage directions, stating definite actions that are to be made by the actors. This circumstance would give evidence that the extant Coventry Disputation play was, perhaps, a working copy of the play, and not the copy on register at the city corporation.

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[321]Craig, Two Coventry Corpus Christi Plays, p. xxvii.

CHAPTER V

THE HEGGE DISPUTATION PLAY

Play XXI of the Hegge cycle bears no resemblance to any of the four other extant Disputation plays.[322] The lack of similarity to the corresponding plays in the other cycles, in addition to the emphasis given in this play to Christ's role as the redeemer of men's souls, has given rise to the suggestion that this drama was written to help illustrate a specific theological theory.[323] This hypothesis seems quite plausible, for scholars agree that the cycle exhibits a quality of intelligence, dignity, and theological correctness.[324] Keeping in mind the fact that the purpose of the discourse between Christ and the doctors is not to create a sensational exposition of the Ten Commandments, but is, instead, to explain certain doctrinal matters, one suggests that there are meaningful comments to be made with respect to the playwright's deviation from the Biblical and apocryphal sources in his attempt to shape the play to fit his needs.

The first thirty-two lines of the play are devoted to the doctors' speeches, of which there are only two, as opposed to the three in the apocryphal source. Whereas the doctors in the apocryphal _Infancy_ are representative of supreme knowledge in theology, science, and philosophy, the Hegge

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[322] K. S. Block (ed.), _Ludus Coventriae, or The plaie called Corpus Christi_, p. liii. All references to the Hegge cycle are from this edition.

[323] Fry, _op. cit._, p. 556.

[324] Craig, _English Religious Drama_, p. 260.

doctors proclaim themselves superior to all people in all areas of knowledge (1-4). Some of these fields mentioned, here, are those of writing, poetry, music, dialectic, philosophy, metaphysics, astronomy, magic, mathematics, rhetoric, and canon and civil law (6-25). Indeed, they leave no area of human endeavor untouched in their boasting that no man compares with them in matters of learning and intelligence (27-28). In order to signify their states of unsurpassed knowledge, the dramatist innovates with the device of an elevated seat in the temple (29-32), so that the doctors' occupancy of this "high seat" becomes symbolic of their superiority in knowledge.

At this point, a second phase of the action is denoted by the entry of Christ, who immediately establishes Himself as the protagonist, reminding the doctors that all wisdom is the gift of God and warning them that the learning which they have acquired may be lost if they should incur God's displeasure through boasting (33-40). Furthermore, the reception afforded Christ by the doctors, here, is distinctly different from that which occurs in the apocryphal account. Instead of greeting Christ with the amazement implied in the apocryphal Infancy, the doctors, now, exhibit not only derision, but also cruelty. For instance, the first doctor commands Christ to run home to His mother and feed at her breast, explaining that they have no desire to learn from Him (41-44). The second doctor also echoes this advice, adding that Christ is better suited to being nursed and to sleeping in a cradle than He is to learning from books (45-48). These are sarcastic speeches, especially when one recalls that Christ is a twelve-year-old boy and not a baby.

In response to these arrogant commands, Christ challenges the doctors' "wisdom" and demands that they explain how the world was created and how long it will last (49-52). Their answer to this question marks a turning point in their attitude toward Christ, because, for the first time, they admit a limitation to their knowledge, maintaining that no earthly person could possess the answer to Christ's question (53-56). From this juncture, the dramatist gradually leads the doctors through a series of changing attitudes which dramatize the theological doctrine apparent in this play. For instance, when the doctors evince scorn (61-64) for Christ's claim of knowing when the world was created and how long it will endure (57-60), Christ states that His knowledge is derived from a Godhead composed of three persons, one of whom was incarnated on earth through the agency of a virgin birth (65-72). Their response to Christ's explanation reveals, for the first time, their interest in His words. For example, they grant that God is responsible for all things, yet they confess that they cannot perceive how three persons could be shadowed forth in one God (73-80). When Christ, therefore, uses the sun as an image, explaining that it is composed of three elements (spendor, heat, and light),(81-84), the doctors are amazed by the workings of logic, and evince a further interest by their questioning (89-92). Christ, then, explains the miracle of the virgin birth (93-96), in which explanation the dramatist again resorts to the use of the sun as an image, stating that the Godhead was able to enter the virgin's womb without harm just as the sun can pierce glass and not change the glass in any manner (97-104). The doctors' reaction to Christ's explanation reveals, now, that they have completely reversed their attitude

toward Him. Whereas, at first their feelings were hostile, they now admit freely that Christ's reasoning surpasses the range of their combined knowledge, and they concede that He must be an angel (105-106).

Thus far the dramatist has exploited the changing opinion of Christ held by the doctors, in the attempt more effectively to relate these theological concepts. Following this juncture, the playwright utilizes the doctors' desire to increase their understanding of hitherto unexplained matters in order plausibly to present doctrinal problems. For instance, in answers to searching questions from the doctors, Christ explains why the second person of the Trinity was chosen to do battle with Satan (115-130).

Furthermore, as a sign of their respect for Christ's knowledge, the doctors freely surrender their high seats to Him (136-144). By having the doctors voluntarily turn over to Christ the cherished symbol of their supremacy in learning, the dramatist establishes them as being men of integrity, thus causing them to become more admirable in character than they were at the beginning of the play. Moreover, the dramatist directs the play, now, along new lines of thought through this development of the character traits of the doctors. For instance, they display a typical human emotion, i.e., wounded pride, in wondering who has been Christ's teacher (145-148). This question leads to an explanation of the double birth of Christ (157-168), and the revealing of His name and His mother's name (179-186). Next, the doctors wish to withdraw in order to discuss all that has transpired, but they request Christ to remain, in case they should have new questions (193-196). By this means, the dramatist draws the second

scene of action to an appropriate close, and prepares for the next scene, at the same time preparing for a further interchange of ideas between Christ and the doctors.

The exchange of speeches between Mary and Joseph (201-232) shows little similarity to either of the two possible sources. Here, there is no mention whatever of a festival or of a trip to Jerusalem. Instead, Mary, after having failed to see Christ for three days, thinks that perhaps Joseph has sent Him on an errand (201-208). Joseph suggests that they search in Jerusalem, because he thinks it likely that the boy may have gone to visit one of His many cousins living there (217-220). Joseph's speech echoes a phrase in the Biblical account to the effect that Joseph and Mary searched among relatives for Christ, a search which occurred on their way home from the city; no mention whatever was made of their having any relatives in Jerusalem. In addition, Mary states that Christ's good works and native intelligence cause other children to dislike Him (221-224), an attitude not implied in either source. The scene ends as Mary and Joseph search for Christ, with Mary apparently addressing questions to members of the audience concerning the whereabouts of her son (225-232).

The final scene opens with a question that has arisen in the doctors' minds, concerning the name of Mary's husband (233-236), wondering why it was necessary for her to be wed (241-244). Christ informs them that Joseph was married to Mary so that His birth would be concealed from the devil and so that Mary would have a helper when flight to Egypt became necessary (245-256). Here, Mary breaks suddenly into the scene. It will be noticed that her abrupt entrance provides an appropriate contrast to the

careful conclusions afforded to scenes two and three. Moreover, the sudden entrance of the distraught mother suggests an effective entrance by means of the element of surprise.

Mary's words approximate those contained in both the Biblical and apocryphal sources, when she asks Christ why He has treated His parents in this manner, explaining that they have searched three days, and they are very sad (257-260). Christ's answer, also, closely follows that given in the sources. He asks Mary why she has looked for Him, inquiring if she does not know that He must oversee His Father's possessions (261-264). Here, Mary's response to His rejoinder differs decidedly from both sources, however, for she seems to understand just what Christ has said, and there is no mention of her having pondered His words in her heart. Instead, she agrees that His Father's will must be done, but she begs Him to consider her feelings by not leaving her again (265-272). As in the Biblical and apocryphal accounts, Christ, then, vows His obedience to Mary and utters a little sermon directed to all children, instructing them to forsake their own wills in pleasing their mothers (273-280).

However, in the last stanza, the first doctor tells Christ that they will accompany Him in order that they may learn more from His teachings (281-282), an action that does not occur in any other Disputation play, nor is it to be found in either source. Perhaps, since the Hegge plays are presumed to have had been given a stationary staging,[325] the dramatist found it necessary to clear the stage at the end of his play, thus preparing

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[325]*Ibid.*, p. 227.

for the advent of the next drama. By having the doctors depart with Christ, expressing their desire for further knowledge, the playwright would, plausibly and effectively, have removed all of his characters from the scene, rendering it available for the staging of the next play.

The doctors, also, laud Mary (283-284), although here the nature of their praise is different from that found in the apocryphal Infancy; and they pray that Christ, through His grace, will save all who have witnessed the performance (285-288). This direct reference to the audience is a fitting end to this pageant, one that intimately involves the spectators in the action.

As mentioned earlier, it is possible to think that this play was designed to explain a certain theological doctrine. In addition, another theme, discerned in many of the Hegge plays, would seem to fit this play. It is the theme manifested in a display of presumption and malice, followed by acts of repentance.[326] A presumption of the possession of all knowledge is also evident in the boasting of the doctors. Moreover, at first they treat Christ with cruelty and scorn, afterwards recognizing His supremacy; and they are very repentant. That this repentance might have become excessive is obvious, for their conversion occurs at an early point in the story, but the dramatic introduction of the lost-boy story and the interest in the inherent logic of Christ's speeches maintain a high level of concentration throughout the play.

One of the most unusual aspects of this play is that it contains

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[326]Prosser, op. cit., p. 195.

no irregularities in metre or rhyme. The only approach to strained rhyme is to be found in the rhyming of nowth (114), wrought (116), browth (117), and nowght (119). Furthermore, the author has made use of no particular dialectical phrase that would help to identify his work, although he has shown a tendency to use conscious symbolism (cf. the "high seat of learning," and the sun). The lack of close similarity in the basic points of this play to the source materials indicates that it is of a somewhat more recent origin than the other Disputation plays, and the purity of the rhyme and metre of this play offer proof of its being written expressly for the Hegge cycle.[327]

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[327] Pollard, The Towneley Plays, p. xxi.

CHAPTER VI

THE INTERRELATIONSHIP OF THE DISPUTATION PLAYS

The interrelationship of the York, Towneley, Chester, and Coventry Disputation plays has long been recognized by scholars.[328] It was first assumed that the York play, without scribal errors, comprised the original source from which the Towneley play was borrowed.[329] Next, the Coventry play was thought to have been derived from Towneley, while the Chester play was usually viewed as a borrowing from Coventry, sometime before Robert Croo rewrote the Coventry Disputation play in 1534.[330] A later study by Craig offered the theory that the Disputation play was originally part of some Northern cycle of plays, possibly from York, and that a form of the play differing from the present York play was used as a model for the Towneley play.[331] Furthermore, the Coventry play was presumed to be patterned from the model that influenced the Towneley, as was the Chester play.[332]

However, the most thorough textual study of these four plays, undertaken by Greg, revealed that the source of the extant York plays was

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[328]Bernhard Ten Brink, History of English Literature, English Edition, II, 281.

[329]Charles Davidson, "Studies in the English Mystery Plays," Transactions of the Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, IX (1892-1895), 291.

[330]Loc. cit.

[331]Craig, Two Coventry Corpus Christi Plays, p. xxxiv.

[332]Loc. cit.

probably the "original" held by the gild.[333] Greg proposes that derived from this original was the copy of the play that served as the basis of Towneley and also influenced the Coventry play.[334] He assumes that this copy of the play lacked scene two and the Ten Commandments, thus accounting for the differences in the plays in these two areas.[335] The Chester play, because of its transposed lines, suggests a more complicated relationship to him. It has been earlier assumed that the Chester play resulted from an oral borrowing.[336] However, Greg believes that the transpositions of certain lines in the text reveal that the playwright was selecting and arranging material from a manuscript, probably the manuscript used as the source of the extant Coventry play.[337] Furthermore, he points out that the Chester playwright freely altered the arrangement of his source material without changing the language, whereas the Coventry dramatist followed the order of the source but changed the language greatly.[338]

A re-examination of certain aspects of the Disputation plays may shed new light on these foregoing conclusions. For instance, it has been noted that the recital of the Ten Commandments in each of the four related plays is different, clearly seen in the comparison of the Ten Commandments

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[333]Greg, The Library, p. 100.

[334]Loc. cit.

[335]Ibid., p. 101.

[336]Craig, Two Coventry Corpus Christi Plays, p. xxxiv.

[337]Greg, The Library, p. 104.

[338]Ibid., p. 102.

given in Appendix B. It will be observed that each play begins with the New Testament Commandment to love God with all one's mind, but only the Chester play omits the second New Testament law, concerning the loving of one's neighbor as oneself. While these Commandments are found in Matthew 22:37-40, and in Mark 12:30-31, the Matthew account alone seems to have been followed, for the York, Towneley, and Coventry plays all include the dictum that all of the law hangs upon the two Commandments cited. In the recitation of the other commandments, one notes the expansion of the Towneley version over the York and the repetition of certain laws in the Chester cycle, indicating that these playwrights exercised some individual choice in the exploitation of their source material. Perhaps, the Commandments were adapted to meet specific local conditions, resulting in their variations from place to place.

Further indications of adapting the Disputation play to fit local requirements can be perceived in the deviations from the general structural pattern in the writing of these plays. For instance, scene two, the colloquy of the doctors, is lacking in the Chester play, yet it is implied. Since the rest of the Chester play is extremely brief, it would seem that there was an obvious need for brevity that exerted a decided influence upon the construction of the play. On the other hand, the Coventry play has, in addition to very long first and fourth scenes, an added scene, thus indicating a desire for a fuller production than that which was given the Disputation play in the other cycles. It was noted in Chapter IV that these additions helped to create a more effective play by emphasizing the development of character. Yet another variation in the plays that indicates a

certain amount of license to invent on the dramatists' parts is that scene two in the York, Towneley, and Coventry plays are all different. The York scene establishes the doctors as arrogant, self-assured men; whereas, the Towneley scene prepares for a dramatic entrance by Christ, and the Coventry scene presents the framework of a public debate. Finally, all of these scenes are written in different metres, another indication that each was written expressly for its own cycle.

In regard to metrical irregularities, the greater number of errors in the construction of the Coventry play, especially in the interpolations peculiar to itself, indicates that it was rewritten many times.[339] Also, it is interesting to note that the Towneley play, where it closely resembles the York play, is generally much more free of mistakes than York, yet, in its unique passages, it has several mistakes. This situation lends credence to the belief that the passages in Towneley that are similar to those in York are based upon an earlier, more correct version of the York play.[340] Furthermore, the errors in the passages that differ from York, contrasted with the relative correctness of the remaining portions of the play, support the idea that these passages were the invention of the playwright who copied the rest of the play from another source. It has been noted (Chapter III) that the metrical irregularities in the Chester play seem to be attributable to scribal error.

Thus far, the discussion of the relationship of the Disputation

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[339]Craig, English Religious Drama, p. 295.

[340]Greg, The Library, p. 100.

plays has been limited to the York, Towneley, Coventry, and Chester versions, for, despite their differences, it has been definitely posited that they all ultimately stem from a Northumbrian parent play.[341] The Hegge play, however, bears little resemblance to the other four plays in any respect. For instance, one finds two doctors in the Hegge play, not three, and they are of an entirely different character and undergo a more complete change in their attitude toward Christ than do any of the other doctors. Moreover, in regard to story, the Hegge play follows the two possible sources hardly at all, and the lost-boy story is not emphasized; indeed, the only similarities are that Christ is twelve years old and that he has been missing for three days. Finally, the Hegge play has no metrical irregularities whatever, a fact indicating that it has undergone few, if any, revisions.[342] This fact also distinguishes the Hegge play from the others which were apparently revised quite often.

In addition to the distinctions that exist between the Hegge play and the other plays (outlined in the preceeding paragraph), a further proof that there is no connection between them can be seen in a comparison of dramatic structures. Instead of following the scene division discerned by Greg in the similar versions, the Hegge play has its own distinct scenes. The Hegge scene one, a colloquy of the doctors, corresponds to scene two in the other plays. Scene two in Hegge, the disputation between Christ and the doctors, is scene three in the other plays. The third scene

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[341] Craig, Two Coventry Corpus Christi Plays, p. xxxiv.

[342] Pollard, The Towneley Plays, p. xxi.

in the Hegge plays, the missing of Christ by Mary and Joseph, is the first scene in the similar plays. Moreover, the fourth scene in Hegge, rather than opening with Mary and Joseph and continuing through their discovery of Christ and their departure (as in the other plays), begins with a renewal of the discourse between Christ and the doctors, which Mary interrupts, and ends with a mass exit of all of the characters. Thus there is no apparent relationship between the Hegge play and the other four plays.

There is, however, one point at which all five plays are in agreement: in the York (194), Towneley (182), Coventry (1002), Chester (258), and Hegge (62) plays, it is specified that Christ cannot read. Yet, in the apocryphal account, it is definitely stated that Christ has read all of the books alluded to by the doctors. This circumstance can possibly be interpreted as proof that the mystery play dramatists were free to alter parts of their source in order to create a more effective drama. That Christ's inability to read would be more dramatically effective may be seen in the fact that in all plays Christ's _a priori_ knowledge proves superior to the learned knowledge of the doctors.

Each of the Disputation plays also contains an allusion to an aspect of Medieval life rarely mentioned in the Corpus Christi plays, _i.e._, the upper-class. The Corpus Christi plays have been called the most democratic of medieval literature, having been managed by the city, produced by the gildsmen, and viewed by the entire city.[343] They have also been recognized as representative of the thought of the masses, as opposed to Chaucer's

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[343]Coffman, _op. cit._, p. 412.

works, for example, which reflect the life and opinions of the upper class.[344] Therefore, the pictures of contemporary life that are present in the Corpus Christi plays are often those of common people (cf. Towneley Secunda Pastorum). But in the Disputation plays, one finds in the portrayal of the doctors a depiction of members of a privileged caste who were accorded respect, even though their characters might not inspire admiration. It does not seem presumptuous for one to think that the medieval commoners, who comprised the greatest part of the audience, felt a degree of satisfaction in seeing the haughty doctors deflated by the small son of a carpenter. While the depiction of this event is neither harsh nor satirical, it does seem to be a definite reflection upon the aristocratic class.

In this connection, it is interesting to note that the Hegge doctors appear to have been accorded a more favorable representation than any of the doctors in the other four cycles. While they are extremely cruel and arrogant at first, they are the only doctors who undergo a complete transformation, recognizing Christ's superiority and becoming subservient to Him. Perhaps, this circumstance indicates that the writer of the Hegge plays was more sympathetic toward the upper class, but it could also mean that he was aiming at a more limited audience, or that he was simply creating an effective drama through the complete reversal of attitude exhibited by the Hegge doctors.

Although the many problems surrounding the Corpus Christi plays, their sources, their production, their authorship, may never be solved, the

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[344] J. S. Purvis, The York Cycle of Mystery Plays, p. 12.

foregoing discussion would tend to confirm many of the theories discussed in the first chapter of this study. For instance, the hands of several distinct authors have been noted in the various Disputation plays, authors capable of utilizing effective devices such as irony, surprise, symbolism, and characterization in order to create dramatically effective situations. Yet, perhaps one of the most important facts to be gleaned from this comparative investigation of the Disputation plays is that medieval dramatists were obviously free to add inventions of their own, indeed, free to alter the source itself, in order to develop their plays.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX "A"

The metrical forms found in the various Disputation plays are as follows:

Quatrains--$abab^4$

Double Quatrains--$abababab^4$ (with variation in the rhyme scheme)

Northern Septenar--$abababab^4cdcd^3$

Chester Metre--$aaa^4b^3aaa^4b^3$ or $aaa^4b^3ccc^4b^3$

Rime Couee--$aa^4b^3aa^4b^3$or $aa^4b^3cc^4b^3$

Seven-line stanza--$ababbcc^4$

APPENDIX "B"

The Ten Commandments as they appear in the York, Towneley, Coventry, and Chester Disputation plays are as follows: (The First Commandment is spoken by the first doctor in each play except Coventry, where it is spoken by the second doctor. The remaining Commandments are all spoken by Christ, with the exception of the Coventry Second Commandment, which, again, is spoken by the second doctor.)

First Commandment

York:

I rede þis is þe firste bidding
Þat Moyses taught vs here vntill,
To honnoure god ouere all thing,
With all thy witte and all þi will;
And all thyn harte in hym schall hyng,
Erlye and late both lowde and still. (145-150)

Towneley:

I rede that this is the fyrst bydyng
That moyses told vs here vntyll;
honoure thi god over ilka thyng,
with all thi wyt and all thi wyll;
And all thi hart in hym shall hyng,
Erly and late, both lowde and styll. (117-122)

Coventry:

I rede this in the furst byddyng,
Wyche Moses dyd rede vs vntill,
Furst honor God aboue all thyng
With all thy hartt and all thy wyll, (965-968)

Chester:

I read this is the first bidding,
and is the most in Moses lawe:
to love our God aboue all thing
with all our might and all our sawe. (277-280)

Second Commandment

York:

The secounde may men preve
And clerly knawe, wher by
Youre neghbours shall ȝe loue
Als youre selffe, sekirly. (153-156)

Towneley: The seconde may men profe
And clergy knaw therby;
youre neyghburs shall ye lofe
Right as youre self truly. (125-128)

Coventry: And asse thy-self love thy neybur
And in noo wyse to do hym yll. (969-970)

Chester: take you not his name in vayne,
this is my fathers comaundment. (283-284)

Third Commandment

York: The iij biddis whare so ȝe goo,
Þat ȝe schall halowe þe halyday. (171-172)

Towneley: The thyrd bydys, "where so ye go,
That ye shall halow the holy day;
ffrom bodely wark ye take youre rest;
youre household, looke the same thay do,
Both wyfe, chyld, seruande, and beest." (143-147)

Coventry: The thryd beddith the, in any wey,
Thatt of thy labur thow schuldyst reste,
And truly kepe thy Sabett day,
Thy-self, thi serwande, and thy best. (977-980)

Chester: Also you honour your holy daye,
no workes save almes-deedes ye doe. (285-286)

Fourth Commandment

York: Than is þe fourthe for frende or foo,
That fadir and modir honnoure ay. (173-174)

Towneley: The fourt is then in weyll and wo
"Thi fader, thi moder, thou shall honowre,
Not only with thi reuerence,
Bot in thare nede thou thaym socoure,
And kepe ay good obedyence." (148-152)

Coventry: The forthe bydithe the do thy best
Thy fathur and mothur for to honowre;
And when ther goodis are decrest,
With all thy myght thow schuldist them succure. (981-984)

Chester: Also father and mother worship aye (289)

Fifth Commandment

York: The vte you biddis noght for to sloo
No man nor woman by any way. (175-176)

Towneley: The fyft bydys the "no man slo,
Ne harme hym neuer in word ne dede,
Ne suffre hym not to be in wo
If thou may help hym in his nede." (153-156)

Coventry: The fyfte cummandythe for any reygur
Man nor woman that thou schuldist kyll. (985-986)

Chester: take no mans goodes without the right. (290)

Sixth Commandment

York: The vjte, suthly to see,
Comaundis both more and myne,
That thei schalle fande to flee
All filthes of flesshely synne. (177-180)

Towneley: The sext bydys the "thi wyfe to take,
Bot none othere lawfully:
lust of lechery thou fle and fast forsake,
And drede ay god where so thou be." (157-160)

Coventry: To fle advltre ys anothure,
And all thatt towchis any yll. (987-988)

Chester: all false witnesse you put away: (291)

Seventh Commandment

York: The vijte fo(r)bedis you to stele
3oure neghboures goodes, more or lesse,
Whilke faute3 nowe are founden fele
Emang þer folke þat ferly is. (181-184)

Towneley: The vii bydys the "be no thefe feyr,
Ne nothyng wyn with trechery:
Oker, ne symony, thou com not nere,
Bot conscyence clere ay kepe truly." (161-164)

Coventry: The vijth seyis thow schuldyst nott steyle
Thy neyburis goodis, more nor les. (989-990)

Chester: and slay no man by day nor night. (292)

Eighth Commandment

York: The viijte lernes ȝou for to be lele,
Here for to bere no false witnesse. (185-186)

Towneley: The viij byddys the "be true in dede,
And fals wytnes looke thou none bere;
looke thou not ly for freynd ne syb,
lest to thi saull that it do dere." (165-168)

Coventry: The viijth forbyddyth the to cownsayle
Or to bare any fawls syttines. (991-992)

Chester: Envye doe by no woman,
to doe her shame by night or day. (293-294)

Ninth Commandment

York: ȝoure neghbours house, whilkis ȝe haue hele,
The ixte biddis take noȝt be stresse. (187-188)

Towneley: The ix byddys the "not desyre
Thi neghburs wyfe ne his women,
Bot as holy kyrk wold it were,
Right so thi purpose sett it in." (169-172)

Coventry: The ixth forbyddyth othys grett,
In any wise thou schuldist nott sweyre. (993-994)

Chester: other mens wyves desire you not;
all such desires you put away. (295-296)

Tenth Commandment

York: His wiffe nor his women
The xte biddis noȝt coveyte. (189-190)

Towneley: The ten byddys the "for nothyng
Thi neghburs goodys yerne wrongwysly;
his house, his rent, ne his hafyng,
And crysten fayth trow stedfastly." (173-176)

Coventry: The last wold thou schuldist no(t) covett
Thy neyburs goodis, hym to apere; (995-996)

Chester: Looke you ne stele by night nor day,
whersoever that you be lent. (297-298)