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Re-Creation, Ritual Process and the N-Town Cycle

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RE-CREATION, RITUAL PROCESS AND THE N-TOWN CYCLE

by

Elizabeth J. El Itreby

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E. J. E.

VITA

The Author, Elizabeth Jeanne Grupp El Itreby, was born May 9, 1951, in Hazel Green, Wisconsin, to Rev. Robert L. Grupp and Susan E. (Lambert) Grupp. She attended public primary schools in Hopkinton, Iowa; Aurora, Illinois; and Stony Point, New York. In 1967, she was graduated from The American School, Schutz, in Alexandria, Egypt, where she completed primary and secondary education. Ms. El Itreby is an alumna of Macalester College (1967-9), The American University in Cairo (1969-70), DePaul University (1975-8), and Loyola University of Chicago (1978-84). From DePaul University, she received Bachelor's and Master's Degrees in English (1977 and 1980).

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	ii
VITA	iii
LIST OF PAGEANTS	vi
 Chapter	
I. TOWARD AN AESTHETIC FOR THE RITUAL DRAMA . . .	1
Drama, Religion and Life	4
Teaching, Conversion and the Didactic . .	9
Images and Types	15
Illusion and Reality--Mimesis and Verisimilitude	21
Game and Earnest	32
Signs and Sacrilege	41
II. RESPONSE, PILGRIMAGE, RITUAL	54
Affect and Meaning	56
Pilgrimage and Critical Process	67
Ritual Re-creation	86
III. FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE: THE N-TOWN CYCLE . . .	99
IV. CREATION TO MOSES: THE "FOUNDATIONAL MORAL EXPERIENCE"	124
Noah and the Death of Lameth	145
V. THE TRIUMPH OF LIFE: PROPHECY AND PILGRIMAGE .	192
Processing from Old to New: the Jesse Pageant	200
Ascending "þe fyftene grees"	204
VI. CONVERSION FROM DEATH TO LIFE IN CHRIST	235
"Devylys dome": Magi to Death of Herod . .	239
Prophecy III: Christ and the Doctors . . .	248
Christ's "Travayll" of Love	250
Farcical Justice/Chivalrous Mercy: The Woman Taken in Adultery	266
Despair Vanquished: The Raising of Lazarus	281

	Page
VII. PASSION PLAY I: SACRAMENTAL CLOSURE	293
VIII. "FROM PEYN TO PLEYS OF PARADYSE PLEYN"	322
"Tydyngys of game and gle:"	
Three Maries to Pentecost	354
Last Plays and Last Things	368
AFTERWARD	389
BIBLIOGRAPHY	395

LIST OF PAGEANTS

Pages

<u>Old Testament Sequence</u>	<u>ch. 4</u> , 193-8, 234, 290-91
The Creation	124, 190 n.33, 291, 293
Fall of Lucifer	124, 127, <u>131-4</u> , 156 n.18, 180, 183, 239
Fall of Man	124-7, 129, 131, <u>134-8</u> , 179-81, 183, 197-8, 213, 230, 262-3, 283, 390, 373
Cain and Abel	124-7, 129, 131, <u>138-44</u> , 180-1, 183, 190 n.33, 197-8, 213, 243, 300, 336
Noah and the Death of Lameth	122, 124-7, 129, <u>144-173</u> , 180-1, 183, 190 n.33, 197-8, <u>213-14</u> .
Abraham and Isaac	124-7, 154, <u>173-84</u> , 190 n.33, 220, 336
Moses	125-8, 173, 183, <u>186-9</u> , 190 n.33, 200, 380
<u>Marian Sequence</u>	<u>ch. 5</u> , 190 n.33, 235-6, 271, 372
Jesse Play / Procession of Prophets	192, <u>200-03</u>
The Conception of Mary (Barrenness of Anna)	204, <u>206-7</u> , 220
Mary in the Temple	204, <u>207-10</u> , 233-4
The Betrothal of Mary	169 n.28, 204, <u>208-16</u> , 218, 258, 374
The Parliament of Heaven	204, 219-20, 312
The Salutation and Conception / Incarnation	192-4, 204, 206, 213, <u>215-19</u> , 239, 349, 371
Joseph's Return / Doubts	154-5, 204, <u>219-21</u> , 268, 360
The Visit to Elizabeth	199, <u>222-4</u> , 258
Prologue of Summoner	225
The Purgation of Joseph and Mary	154, <u>224-8</u> , 275, 369
The Birth of Christ	29, 192-3, 199, 206, <u>229-35</u> , 258, 361

<u>Ministry Sequence</u>	<u>ch. 6</u> , 190 n.33, 192, 199, 234, 291
The Adoration of the Shepherds	235, 237
The Adoration of the Magi	235, <u>239-40</u> , 288-9
The Purification	<u>240-45</u> , 373
The Massacre of the Innocents	242-4
The Death of Herod	244-8, 288, 349
Christ and the Doctors	248-9, 260
The Baptism	190 n.33, 249-58, 279
The Temptation	192, 237, 249, 252, <u>258-67</u> , 288, 313
The Woman taken in Adultery	122, 237, 249, 252, 259, <u>265-80</u> , 314, 342
The Raising of Lazarus	192, 235, 237, 249, 251-2, 278, <u>280-90</u> , 309, 344, 361, 372-3
<u>Passion Play. I</u>	105-8, 113, 251, 279, 286-7, 290-2, <u>ch. 7</u> , 322, 352, 381, 384
Prologues of Demon and of John the Baptist	279, 286-7, 297-9
The Council of the Jews	298
The Entry into Jerusalem	298-9, 314
The Last Supper and Conspiracy of Jews and Judas	279, 293-97, <u>300-10</u> , 349, 352, 370
The Betrayal	301, <u>310-19</u> , 374
<u>Passion Play. II</u>	105-8, 113, 251, 258, 290-1, 293-97, 300-02, 316, <u>ch. 8</u>
King Herod	323, 329-30
The Trial of Christ before Pilate	330-33
The Trial of Christ before Herod	269, 340

Pilate's Wife's Dream	340-41
The Trial of Christ and the Thieves before Pilate	275-6, 327, 329, 341-2, 360
The Condemnation and Scourging	275, 327-29, 341-3
The Procession to Calvary	275, 329, 341-3
The Crucifixion	25-6, 29, 190 n.33, 219, 255, 259, 288, 293-7, 300-02, 304-5, 316, 321, 327, 329, 342-44, 370, 373
The Descent into Hell of Anima Christi	344-8, 350
The Embassy to Pilate of Joseph of Arimathea	345
The Episode of Longeus	345
The Descent from the Cross and Burial	345
The Guarding of the Sepulchre	350
The Harrowing of Hell	271-3, 289, 300-01, <u>344-8</u> , 350
The Resurrection and Appearance to the Virgin	247, 271, 321, 349, 358, 366
The Compact of the Soldiers and Pilate	350-1
The Announcement to the Three Maries	271, 351-58
The Appearance to Mary Magdalene	221, 279, 355-58, 364
The Appearance on the way to Emmaus	271, 357-63, 372
The Appearance to Thomas	362-3
The Ascension and the Choice of Matthias	364-5, 367
The Day of Pentecost	364-369
The Assumption of the Virgin	367-79, 381-83
Doomsday	190 n.33, 277, 293, 300, 322, 360, 367-9, 371, 377-85, 390

CHAPTER I

TOWARD AN AESTHETIC FOR THE RITUAL DRAMA

Studies of the drama have primarily been of two types: critical or contextual. Few practitioners of either type have been successful in approaching the drama as a dramatic and religious cultural performance. Over twenty years ago, Eleanor Prosser asserted one of the paradoxes attendant on appreciation and study of the medieval cycle plays: the dramas were popular over a long period of time; we have been unable to explain their popularity by conventional standards of dramatic criticism; as a result, most scholarship on the cycles has been extra-dramatic (ch. 1).¹ The paradox still holds. Extra-dramatic studies have been necessary and important. But what we have learned about the contexts of the medieval drama scarcely has begun to be used to support an understanding of the aesthetic governing the cycles, or the reasons for their long popularity.

One comprehensive study of an English cycle has been published in English. Attention to the cycles often has concentrated on individual pageants without relating the parts of a cycle to the whole. The fragmented approaches of the past inevitably have reflected fragmented cycles. We have often come to the cycles anticipating that

¹See also E. Catherine Dunn's call for a return to literary study ("Recent"), and Coffman, McNeir, and Collier. Most who write about the cycles conflate literature and drama, and the literary and dramatic methods of criticism.

they will seem fragmented, and our various approaches have not encouraged a unified perception or a perception of unity. The recourse of an aesthetic that is not comprehensive has been to the incomprehensibility of the work.

The unique aspects of these religious dramas demand an approach different from that we bring to secular drama. We have not yet developed such an approach--an aesthetic that encourages us to appreciate the cycles as the special kinds of religious drama that they are. Indeed, Prosser sustained the paradoxical tradition that she had sought to expose: she first lamented that "(t)he religious drama qua religious drama has been all but ignored" (7), but later judged that the cycles are "one vast sermon on repentance" (29). Such judgments offer scant encouragement to those interested in the drama as drama. Unfortunately, very little has been done to overturn Chambers's dictum that "on the whole the literary problem of the plays lies in tracing the evolution of a form rather than in appreciating individual work" (Medieval 2:145).² Although many have signalled a readiness to develop and adopt a method for study of the drama of the cycles, most have returned to more comfortable historical approaches, to a study of one of the "contexts" of

²See also Craig's judgment: "Indeed, the religious drama had no dramatic technique or dramatic purpose, and no artistic self-consciousness" (English 4).

the cycles, or to theoretical formulations that have had limited methodological utility.³

Critics often have judged that the cycles follow no recoverable aesthetic principles: they are an amalgam of subjects and styles, and no ideas or ideals about what makes a successful work of religious dramatic art seem consistently to have been followed. But surely the playwrights of the cycles had some notions of what would make "good drama." These notions seem to have begun with a judgment that the cycles should lead the audience to Christian faith, and that their religious teaching be balanced with delighting, thereby completing the Horatian formula.⁴

³ The most significant of the older historical studies concerned with the "evolution" of the cycles are those of Chambers (Medieval), Young and Craig; See also Downing, Gardiner, McCollom, Manly, Symonds, Wallace. On stagecraft and production, see Axton, Kahrl (Traditions), Meredith and Tailby, Nelson (Medieval), Southern (Round) with caution, and Schmitt, "Theatre." For connections with Mass and liturgy, Hardison; detailed comparison of episodes, Woolf (English); theories of selection, structure, play and game, Kolve. Of the works on individual cycles, Travis's is the most suggestive of a comprehensive and dramatic approach, and is the only full study of a cycle in English: "The dramatic design of an individual pageant . . . is revealed in its principles of structural unity, in its affective relationship with its viewers, and in those theoretical models which determine its shape" (Design xii-xiii).

⁴ For the most detailed study of the role of delighting and medieval attention to the Horatian formula, see Glending Olson (Recreation).

Drama, Religion and Life

Religious visual arts and religious music are more common and more accessible to a modern audience than a dramatization of Christian myth and legend, a genre we have likely encountered only in its vestigial successor, the Sunday School Christmas pageant. We rarely share with the medieval audience an unshakeable and responsive belief in the truth and historicity of Biblical events; more rarely do we share their desire for religious experience and manifestation: a desire to see, touch, feel, gain visible proof, learn and understand. Our apprehension is more often literary, aesthetic and individual than dramatic, religious and communal. We have been trained to distinguish aesthetic responses from emotional, religious or utilitarian ones, and aesthetic judgments from judgments about life. Literature and life are not to be confused: art is governed by necessities and principles different from those of life.

This distinction erects a barrier to our appreciation of the religious drama, which seeks to move its audience to a religious acceptance, experience, and understanding, and to inspire and inform a faith that will govern feeling, judgment and action in the day-to-day world. Both art and religion "work" by juxtaposing the known and the imagined; both present the imagined as if it were the governing reality--the way things are. In most art, that imagined reality is to be accepted for the duration of the appreciation of the art work; in religious art, however, the imagined is to be accepted as a higher reality that governs the known. The relation of the two worlds in

the cycles makes meaning of and in the world for the audience--gives an extrinsic symbol system that defines what is already known but cannot, without symbols, be expressed or thought about. Much more than "instruments for remembering the past" (Kolve, 107), the cycles model living in the present in the face of an unknown, imagined, but promised future. Such a functional or utilitarian view of the drama does not violate the aesthetic under which it was developed.⁵

Cultic expressions from a time when their entire potential audience was to comprise the cult, the cycles dramatize the Christian myth, communicate essential tenets of faith, and show in action the values attached to certain human choices in the world. The symbolic world of the drama is governed by the symbolic world of Christianity: the goal of the cycles is to move the audience to an understanding of the meaning, a symbolic and transcendent one, of their choices and actions in the physical world. All three worlds--the transcendent one, the world re-created in the drama, and the sensible world in which the audience lives--are to share one interpretive code, one symbolic structure. The cycles show that the values of the trans-

⁵ Much of this discussion is indebted to the work of Geertz, Pruyser and Maguire. Geertz's definition of Religion is helpful to our understanding: Religion is:

- (1) a system of symbols which acts to
- (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by
- (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that
- (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic" ("Religion as" 4; see 4-5).

Pruyser argues that "Religion is a work of the imagination" and that "like the aesthetic illusion, the religious illusion creates an ideational and practical world sui generis, which is irreducible" ("Lessons" 5-8). See also Pruyser (Dynamic 185); Maguire (Moral 111).

endent are, or must be, the values of the physical world and those who act in it. Each cycle, by communicating the interpretive code of the transcendent and juxtaposing it against the illusory codes of earthly life, mediates between the transcendent and the earthly. By giving an overarching meaning to life in the physical world, the cycles give a Deus dixit to certain choices and relationships within the culture. The audience learns what choices it must prefer in order successfully to take its place in the cosmic structure symbolically established. The literature of the religious drama is intimately bound up with the living of life.

The cycles are unapproachable if we treat them as artifacts and divorce them from their effects on audience. Their aesthetic success or failure has more to do with their ability to arouse responses appropriate to their religious subject matter and purpose, and less to do with considerations we would call "aesthetic." As Judson Allen has demonstrated, poetry and action, aesthetics and ethics, work of art and audience, were assimilated in what he has called the "ethical poetic" of the Middle Ages (Ethical).⁶ The dramas relate three sets of actions: the original acts of salvation history; the actions completed in the space and time of the presentation of the cycle on the stage; and the extension or fulfillment of these first two actions, the ethical action of the audience in the sensible world.

⁶Allen discusses an aesthetic of ethics and an ethical aesthetic based in great part on the responses a work is intended to elicit from an audience. Much of the impetus of this study was gained from Allen's work. See also Robertson (Preface 136) re audience.

In the Middle Ages, the aesthetic success of expression was very much dependent upon the affective and ethical success of the apprehension. Our appreciation of the cycles must begin by reconnecting this literature with religion and with life: "The spheres of religion and poetry coalesce . . . wherever an imaginative fusion of the elements of experience and a responsive faith in a reality transcending and potentially sanctifying the experience are both effectively present" (Wheelwright, "Religion" 688).⁷ The cycles are such a fusion of experience and faith. The analysis of symbolic structures, including those of literature and religion, shares an interpretive character with the moral or ethical analysis of culture.⁸ The symbolic structures of religion and culture coalesce in the experience of the audience. Our analysis of the cycles might best be an interpretive analysis of the "webs of significance" of the drama, the networks of meanings and their interrelations. These webs are not at every point attached within the work; many attach in the culture and community of which the audience is a part. The religious drama demands that we attend to the modes of thought that the audience may have shared, that we attend to the "responsive" and "potentially sanctifying" experience of the audience, and that we connect this experience to other strands of the web of medieval culture. Further, the study of the religious

⁷ See also Gunn ("Literature" 47-66); Ricoeur (Conflict); and Wheelwright (Burning).

⁸ This judgment is shared with Geertz, Pruyser and others.

drama demands that we carefully examine what modes of religious expression and religious response require of the student. We must ask in what ways religious expressions differ from more purely artistic ones.

Teaching, Conversion and the Didactic

All religious art is didactic: it attempts to teach a manner of feeling, and of understanding, symbolizing and living in the world and preparing for what is believed to lie beyond it. Clearly the audience of the cycles is intended to learn. Most students of medieval literature would agree that the dramas are didactic: they seek to convert members of the audience, or to strengthen the faith of the already converted. Horace notwithstanding, however, from Aristotle to Northrop Frye, art and the didactic have been uneasy bedfellows.⁹ We have not yet developed an understanding of the teaching power of the drama that is free of pejorative connotations. "Didactic" has been used to describe a static and expository rather than a narrative or dramatic mode, and has carried unfortunate connotations of the pedantic or doctrinaire. Didactic art too often is taken to address a passive rather than an active or responsive audience: it teaches, preaches or moralizes in declarative statement.

The designation "didactic" is useful to a study of the cycles inasmuch as it implies an audience, those who are to learn what the cycles teach, and inasmuch as it encourages us to address the communi-

⁹ Aristotle considered didactic verse to be a branch of natural philosophy rather than of poetry (Poetics 1 where Homer is designated a natural philosopher). For Frye, "If literature is didactic, it tends to injure its own integrity: if it ceases wholly to be didactic, it tends to injure its own seriousness." Allegory and irony are, for Frye, solutions to this paradox ("Road" 14). Central to criticism of the cycles has been a concern with their aesthetic integrity and the didactic, or with perceived injuries to didactic seriousness occasioned by comic or "realistic" elements.

cative aspects of the drama. But we are more likely to ask what a didactic drama teaches rather than how it teaches, in all of its communicative potentiality. Prescriptive statements do not convert or strengthen faith. A consideration of what constitutes the best teaching, and the process of religious conversion, however, may help us to propose an aesthetic that does not exclude the didactic. Both learning and active faith require a change in the ways we perceive and interpret the world, a new process for selecting significant details and establishing priorities--in effect, a conversion from one way of seeing to another.¹⁰ Both the conversion of learning and of faith require that some knowledge be gained, tested, and incorporated into an active process, that the will be put into motion. The best teaching demands of the student an imaginative participation, an active use of what is taught, just as faith requires practice. Knowing and understanding are activities.¹¹

Two centers of knowing were recognized in the Middle Ages: the ratio (taught by direct appeals to logic, definition, examination, abstraction) and the intellectus or simplex intuitus (taught by rendering a natural, effortless awareness, a contemplative vision, a revelation). Northrop Frye's reflections on teaching, which hark back to

¹⁰ Believing, or conversion to belief, is best perceived as a process of learning a new way of seeing and interpreting the world. See, for example, Schwartz (Forms 115-16).

¹¹ "The process of understanding involves the performance of certain acts. These acts constitute psychologically determined reactions to the perception of significant utterances." (Berke, "Generative" 53).

Plato's Meno, echo this medieval recognition: "The teacher . . . is not primarily someone who knows instructing someone who does not know. He is rather someone who attempts to re-create the subject in the student's mind, and his strategy in doing this is first of all to get the student to recognize what he already potentially knows, which includes breaking up the powers of repression in his mind that keep him from knowing what he knows" (Code xv). Later, Frye discusses the teaching of the Bible and designates its language as kerygma, a proclamation, or re-creation, or vehicle of revelation. Kerygmatic language is, for Frye, inseparable from myth, and the combination of myth and kerygma is didactic in its broadest and most revelatory sense (Code 29-30)¹² The cycles, composed of materials Biblical, apocryphal and legendary, are didactic in this kerygmatic way. They teach in many modes in order to reveal the Christian interpretation of the world and actions in it.

The process of learning and the process of conversion share an interpretive quality. If, say, we are teaching a short story to a class, we do not simply teach the facts of one particular short story, but attempt to encourage a habit of mind, a way of seeing and selecting pertinent detail, that will influence and alter the ways in which students approach all short stories. We teach a how, a process, not a what, a body of facts. Similarly, the teaching of the cycles is

¹²On kerygma and its relations to myth and revelation, see Bultmann & Five Critics, Kerygma, and H. R. Niebuhr, Meaning.

much more than simply communicating a set of stories or body of information, what is to be believed. Beyond the tenets of faith, dogma, theology and the events of salvation history, they teach how to live, how to apply what is learned from the dramatic events of the cycles to the practices of living. These are the contributions of story and drama to the Christian faith. Drama can communicate a practical ethics, how choices are to be made, how faith is to be made manifest, how redeemed behaviour may be distinguished from the behaviour of the damned. The cycles teach an ethic, which must be absorbed, learned intuitively from story. In order to convert the audience to a belief in a world revealed to be in God's image, not man's, the cycles illuminate, resymbolize, break up and resynthesize, arouse and redirect the emotions of the audience, attempt to effect a disintegration of earthly networks of association and a reintegration in the new cosmic network that symbolizes life in the Christian faith.¹³

Once we have understood that religious art, and most especially religious story and drama, is integrally didactic, we may seek the less explicit and more revelatory and intuitive ways in which the cycles, like the Bible, teach. All of the cycles stress the importance of acquiring wisdom, the ability to comprehend the transcendent meaning of earthly events, and all in some way attempt to teach or impart this wisdom. The audience is to learn and absorb knowledge and wisdom

¹³ For a summary of various understandings of the process of conversion, see Herve Carrier, S.J. (Sociology ch. 2).

and to carry what it has learned out into the world, demonstrating its new understanding in redeemed, ethical, action. A symbolic understanding of the structure of the cosmos and the relationships within it, what earthly action means in transcendent terms, makes such thinking and choice possible. In effect, the cycles teach the audience how to think, how to image the structures of its environment and the relationships within it.¹⁴

A broader understanding of the didactic opens the possibility of perceiving the religious drama as an artistic and ethical vehicle that is creative and re-creative as well as mimetic and verisimilar, that shapes action as well as reflects history, and that deepens religious faith and activity by giving the audience the terms, in language, image and action, by which it may express and confirm faith. In short, the cycles teach a Christian vocabulary and syntax for living.¹⁵ What the audience learns may include both the practical, utilitarian aspects of the actions of faith--akin to Kenneth Burke's "equipment for living" (Philosophy 262)--and the more mystical, emotional experiences of faith: both the dogmata rhetorica (revealed truths) and dogmata practica

¹⁴ The process of thought is described by Geertz as "neither more nor less than constructing an image of the environment, running the model faster than the environment, and predicting that the environment will behave as the model does" (Interpretation 77). See also Geertz, "Religion" 8, 19, 43; and "Ethos," espec. 422, 430.

¹⁵ On Wittgenstein's concept of religious "language-game" see Alston, "Language Game" 156. The entire volume of Autonomy, Crosson, ed., reassesses Wittgenstein's contributions in this regard.

(revealed ethics, morals). Beyond encouraging us to ask how the cycles teach, such an understanding of the didactic in religious art may help us to use many of the critical tools of the past in new and more revealing ways.

Images and Types

The practice of faith requires devotion and action. The devotional practice is most often encouraged through images of faith; active, ethical practice is encouraged through examples to be imitated, types. Two critical tools have been developed to encourage a more "medieval" apprehension of the religious dramas: studies in medieval iconography and in typology. Both studies have been useful in reconstructing a medieval way of seeing and understanding, but each has encouraged students to comb the cycles for correspondences with an external catalogue of figures and images.

Iconography, the study of pictorial illustrations and their symbolism, is the more integral to the apprehension of the drama, its visual patterns and meaning. Studies in medieval iconography have helped to suggest how certain episodes of the cycles might have been visually presented, and what the audience might have seen and expected, depending upon their recollected repertory of images.¹⁶ These correspondences are important to a dramatic study of the cycles; however, the search

¹⁶ Rosemary Woolf (English) gave impetus to the study of iconography in the cycles: "The conception of the plays as speaking pictures is therefore useful in enabling us to reconstruct the medieval understanding of biblical drama, and is helpful to us nowadays as is any definition of a genre to which a given work belongs." See also Axton, European 72-73, re prophets as icons; Davidson, Treatise, intro.; Coletti, Spirituality. Dunn, "Recent" 185-6 raises theoretical and historical problems of the "iconographic" approach which "challenges the definition of drama as the imitation of action," and supports a new theory of evolution of the cycles. See also Weisstein 251, L. J. Ross, and Sheinghorn "Using."

for iconographic correspondences too often has become an end in itself, rather than a discipline supporting dramatic study, a study of action.

Typology, the study of the connections among events, particularly Old Testament persons and events (types) which prefigure those in the New Testament (anti-types fulfilling the types), has revealed formal and thematic relationships that have been used to draw conclusions about the selection of episodes and relations among pageants in a given cycle. The difficulty has been that typology may impose formal relationships where they may or may not explicitly or implicitly exist in the text and action of the drama. The search for typological correspondences may reduce the selection process and the study of the dramatic movement of a cycle to one of filling slots in a predetermined grid. Each cycle has a core of episodes that it shares with others, but the selection of almost any Biblical event could in some way be justified on typological grounds. Typology cannot sufficiently explain why certain episodes are favored over others, equally resonant, nor does such a formal approach encourage inquiry into larger or different patterns of significance woven into each of the individual cycles, themselves.¹⁷

¹⁷ Erich Auerbach argued for a figural interpretation of the medieval drama based on the influence on the Middle Ages of Augustine ("Figura" in Scenes 11-76). See Hurrell, McNeir, Williams, Woolf, Taylor, Kolve, Lubac, Owst; those who raise questions concerning the typological approach to the drama include Williams, Robertson (whose own work had, in some respects, suggested it), Collins, and Berkeley. See also Stemmler, and Keenan, "Checklist."

Both typology and iconography encourage the student to discover correspondences outside of the work. Rather than using what we learn from these ancillary disciplines to support dramatic study, we are in danger of imposing their structures on the structures unique to each of the cycles. We may begin to judge the worth of the cycles by their use of these external structures, or how well they conform to a given pattern, instead of seeking the patterning of a cycle and assessing in what ways typology or iconography might have been used to highlight or enrich the pattern. Typology suggests a system of correspondences, and iconography encourages a perception of the drama as a series of static tableaux.¹⁸ The religious drama may manipulate typology and iconography, but they are in the service of a dramatic, religious and didactic work, not a strictly theological or pictorial one, and work together with words and actions to teach and delight the audience.

The impulse behind the encouragement of typological and iconographical study is sound, and these studies may encourage deeper understandings of medieval habits of mind than we have had to date. Iconography, for example, may instruct us in more than the reconstruction of hypothetical stage blocking, costuming and properties. The argu-

¹⁸ Martin Stevens has suggested that the pageants developed from the tableaux vivants of the Corpus Christi procession and, thus, that the origins of the dramas are in icons ("York" 44), as has Davidson (ed., Treatise, intro.), echoing Charles Davidson (Studies) and Merle Pierson ("Relationship").

ments in defense of images and, by analogy, the cycles, are interesting in that they suggest that the audience would have developed a habit of devotional contemplation, of worship, wonder and awe before an icon, and an ability to "read" ethical values into visual representations. Such a habitual skill would influence their apprehension of and response to similar images in the drama.¹⁹ Our knowledge of iconography, then, might suggest patterns of the use of well-known subjects from art in order to inform a study of the ways in which a playwright seems to have manipulated iconographical details, and so audience responses. The images on the stage are a potent part of the teaching revelation of the cycles. Beyond being Gregory's "quick book" for historical knowledge, the images may stir devotion, make ethical statements, and verify the connection of the cycles, through their symbolism, with the higher reality which they portray. The images, sanctified by official religious contexts and uses, no doubt spoke powerfully for the representation on the stage as an imago veritatis of what was represented, reinforced the truth and importance of the events portrayed, and likely aroused a habitual devotional response.

Similarly, typology encourages a habit of mind that perceives present events to be connected to a transcendent cosmic design. Each discrete event has cosmic resonance, and the audience of the cycles might have been encouraged to perceive their own everyday actions

¹⁹ On defenses of images and their relation to defenses of the cycle plays, see Davidson (Treatise), Jones, Coletti.

in the world as types or antitypes, with echoes in history past and events to come. J. B. Allen has reiterated at several points that "a medieval person who wishes (sic) to be ethically good could achieve that condition by acting as if he were in a story" (Ethical 292).²⁰ Indeed, a euhemeristic habit of mind, one that views myth as history, is likely to consider present history as a continuation of events in the Bible. This was a common medieval way of thinking, as Kolve and others have noted (Kolve ch.5), and it has not entirely died out in the more fundamentalistic and apocalyptic Christian sects of the present. The importance of typology to ethics is, to a great degree, dependent upon a typological understanding of the future: "typology cannot preserve its vitality indefinitely unless it keeps its anti-types in the future" (Frye, Creation 60). The medieval audience in the civitas terrena must expect and hope for the coming of the civitas Dei in order to connect their actions and the events of their time with salvation history. By a typological habit of mind they could see that the present fulfilled scriptural prophecies, repeated old errors, and looked forward to the end to come.

Auerbach has given the essential spirit of the typological or figural interpretation: ". . . every occurrence, in all its everyday

²⁰Frye discusses typology as a "mode of thought" (Code 80). J. Cazeneuve speaks in Jungian terms of the reintegration of the personality occasioned by a perception of behaviour as a "repetition of creation," a sacred and archetypal act (Les rites ch. 17); for discussion see Carrier 65. See also Frye (Creation 60-61); Brown, "Saint" 1-26; Travis, Design 76-77. Cf theatrum mundi topos in Curtius (138).

reality, is simultaneously a part in a world-historical context through which each part is related to every other, and thus is likewise to be regarded as being of all times or above all time" (Mimesis 156). Personal choices and events thus take on social and ethical significance, in addition to their eschatological significance to the individual before God. This moral and ethical aspect of the figural or typological approach supports the didactic power of the cycles, and what such a habit of mind requires of a modern audience is an attention to the ways in which the events staged may relate to real-world choices offered to medieval individuals. This goes some distance, too, in explaining the necessity and power of "anachronistic" elements in the cycles.

How typology and iconography support dramatic elements, and the ways in which they initiate and reinforce habits of response are important. Each has its role to play in the teaching of the cycles, and each confirms that the world may figure forth the eternal--illusions on earth may reveal the transcendent reality.

Illusion and Reality--Mimesis and Verisimilitude

Although by the fifteenth century there was a growing "hunger for reality in respect to the created world" (Oberman, "Notes" 61-62)--a hunger that perhaps had never left the common people, who likely continually thought in materialist and mortalist terms--people were taught to believe that the imagined transcendent was a reality higher than the sensible. The visible was to be considered "real" only insofar as it stood in for something else, an apprehension supported by the structures of typology, image theology, aesthetic theory, and the like. Popular themes and expressions confirm the medieval equation between the earthly and the illusory, at least in those who were to some degree literate: the world and life in it is as a shadow on the wall, a fantasy or phantom, a theatre, a book, a mirror; and vanitas vanitatum, et omnia vanitas.²¹ The transcendent was the real, but was knowable only through dim analogies and reflections in the sensible world. "All hyt is fantome that we withe fare" reflects this commonplace, as does the well-known late 14th-century lyric (Brown no. 106):

þe more we trace þe Trinite,
 þe more we fall in fantasye.
 . . . Whon al vr bokes ben forþ brouht,
 And al vr craft of clergye
 And al vr wittes ben þrow-out souzt,

²¹See Gray (Themes 47, 174, 178, 183, 204, 212).

3it we fareþ as a fantasye

. . . For þis world is but fantasye.²²

This lyric well expresses that the more we try to imagine and make images of the higher realities of the sacred, the more illusory is our knowledge, because the world is a "fantasye," illusory, unreal, in the face of the more real transcendent. "Fantasye," in the Middle Ages, described the false, the seeming, the imaginary, illusory, imitative or visionary, and was closer in meaning to our present use of "phantasy." With common wit, imagination, estimation and memory, "fantasye" was often included among the five wits, although it sometimes was considered to be a part of the imagination.²³ But only with the aid of fantasy or imagination could the known and the unknown, the perceived and the believed to be, the mirror and what it reflects,

²²Cf Brown no. 147; Danielou, From Shadows; Coleman, English cites this lyric and calls it "a key to what would become one of the dominant trends of much fifteenth-century literature" (270).

²³Chaucer's Wife of Bath uses "fantasye" in the sense of pleasure and imagination (ll. 190-92), and explicitly connects "fantasye" with "pleye:" "if that I speke after my fantasye, / As taketh not agrief of that I seye; / For myn entente nys but for to pleye;" and in l. 516, "quaynte fantasye" is most often glossed as "strange notion." The OED at 2: "In scholastic psychology: a. Mental apprehension of an object of perception; the faculty by which this is performed. . . b. The image impressed on the mind by an object of sense" (with 14th and 15th century quotations).

reflects, be connected: the imagination was perceived as a mediator.²⁴

Medieval concepts of illusion and reality have been important to our study of the cycles. Kolve's judgment that "fundamental to any idea of theater is a notion of precisely how the theater is to relate to reality" (11)²⁵ is a reliable one, but discussions of this question largely have been limited to the dramatic issue of mimesis and verisimilitude on the stage, without connecting that issue to medieval cultural understandings. Reductively put, what has concerned us most about "how the theater is to relate to reality" has been whether or not the audience could have believed that the events of the cycles were "really happening" on the stage. Taking mimesis and verisimilitude, or art (illusion) and life (reality), to be mutually exclusive has a long history that goes back to Chambers, Young and before, and which has been summarized by Stevens ("Illusion"). Their dichotomies are less relevant to our analysis of the cycles than the potential connections between them, how they might be mediated or assimilated. The dialectical tension between what we call illusion

²⁴On the imagination as a mediator in the Middle Ages, see Peters, ed. 221 (on Augustine, and imagination mediating between memory and understanding); MacGregor 115 (on Aquinas following Aristotle: without an image, the mind cannot think, and sense mediates between object and intellect, material and immaterial) and 27, 99, 136); Coletti citing Meditations 254. For modern conceptions of mediation of imagination, see Brauer 94; P. Brown, "Saint" 7); and Maguire 437: "All knowing is analogical and comparative . . . we relate the unknown to the known." See also the lyric "Art of Dieing" in Blake, Medieval Religious, 135. Edwards has noted: "The drama aims to resolve the dialectic of inner and outer lives and of the worldly and the divine by permitting a closure that sacralizes action and language in the world" ("Techniques" 164).

and what we call reality, a tension between two conflicting symbolic interpretations of the cosmos, helps to create the meanings of the cycles, and teaches a process of thought.²⁶

In the heated debate over mimesis and verisimilitude in the cycles, the essential link between them, imagination, has all but been ignored. As Rycroft has noted, imagination is necessary fully to appreciate both fantasy and reality, however we understand those terms, and is particularly important to the belief in and practice of religion (ch. 4). The typological view of reality requires that we imagine our actions fulfilled in anti-types in the future; Christian eschatology demands that we imagine the present as cause of a future effect at the end of time; ethics requires that we imagine a link between actions and their repercussions on earth and, perhaps, beyond. Imagining is necessary to "living a story," assimilating history into the present. The process is familiar to us in role-playing. The medieval belief in the results of sin illustrates the moral and ethical efficacy of imagining: to sin is to crucify Christ, again, and the

²⁶"Imagination is our means of interpreting the world, and it is also our means of forming images in the mind. The images themselves are not separate from our interpretations of the world; they are our way of thinking of the objects in the world . . . The two abilities are joined in our ability to understand that the forms have a certain meaning, that they are always significant of other things beyond themselves. We recognize a form as a form of something, as Wittgenstein said, by its relations with other things. It seems to me both plausible and convenient to give the name 'imagination' to what allows us to go beyond the barely sensory into the intellectual or thought-imbued territory of perception" (Warnock, Imagination 194ff). This modern conception is very close to the medieval ones of Bonaventure (on revelation and inspiration), Augustine, Aquinas. See also McFarland 35-37, and 39 for comparisons with the medieval concept of "intentionality."

sinner is as culpable as those who physically drove the nails into Christ's flesh. Such a belief can take hold only if what is imagined can seem so real as to govern the will. The cycles not only re-create such an imagined reality for the audience in terms that encourage them to assimilate history into daily living; they may, indeed, exist to challenge and bridge the "tidy distinction between the imagined and the present" (Cole, Theatrical 13).²⁷

It is simplistic to believe that the medieval audience believed that they actually were witnessing the events of salvation history. I could not agree with Righter that "it has always been possible for people watching a mystery play to recognize Christ on the Cross as the local cobbler and still believe that they are witnessing the actual Crucifixion of the Son of God" (18-19). But the audience would have recognized the image of Christ on the Cross and, by an act of imagination, belief and devotion, the audience would have felt the terror, the pity, and the victory of that event, as well as the palpable presence in the world of the God that the images represent. Something very "real" goes on during the playing of a cycle--the audience is present in the flesh, watching and responding. The "reality," I believe, is in the experience of the audience which attends and participates imaginatively in the drama's world. We may say that what is happening on the stage is not "real"--Christ is not really

²⁷ See McCune 170 re imagination and ethics.

being crucified again on earth any more than he is crucified again with every human sin. But the images, actions and words on the stage stir the believing audience to an acceptance of the reality and significance of the Crucifixion, and that stirring is made possible by the participation of the imagination, and may influence will and action.²⁸

The cycles are both real in the audience and not real on the stage: the imagination moves from interpreting the image on the stage to imagining the original act, to an emotional and cognitive understanding of the "real life" significance of the action. Christ's passion, as it is re-created and imagined, is of ethical and religious significance in the lives of the audience. Significance is made accessible by a mediating image, an actor tied to a cross, and by the mediating imaginations of the audience. This is an imaginative verisimilitude that is not meant to be what it represents, but to point to an ultimate reality, or the possibility of that reality. As Kolve has demonstrated in his application of Huizinga's theories of play and game to the drama, the cycles negate their own reality, reveal that they but feign. But that image, like the mask of God in the play of the Creation, presents "the false face in order to portray the possibility of a true face" (Turner, From Ritual 115).

²⁸ Kolve and Davidson have suggested the role of the audience and its imaginative responses in support of a judgment that the drama is mimetic: "The only real feelings present in a theater, or in a medieval marketplace on Corpus Christi day, are those induced in the audience; the rest is feigning" (Kolve 138); and the event of a cycle play is "an imaginative experience which brings together in a rather precise way (1) the audience's act of imagining itself present at the biblical happenings with (2) the imaginative presentation on the stage" (Davidson, "Review" 275).

We have noted that the audience of the cycles would have approached the plays as they approached "real life," and not as art or artifact, and that the cycles require such a "real life" or ethical approach in order to understand their poetic. In the theater, as in the living of a Christian life, the medieval audience could learn about the imagined holy and transcendent unknown by reference to the earthly known, and could learn to interpret the known by reference to the symbolic and imagined unknown. This circular process arises out of and supports a mimetic view of both drama and life that does not deny their seeming reality, but refers it to a higher one, the transcendent forma realis. The drama, like ritual and the living of the Christian life, bridges the gap between known and unknown and assimilates them.²⁹ Indeed, the terms of our discussions of illusion and reality, mimesis and verisimilitude, have governed to a great extent our conceptions of what ritual may, or must, be.

Such judgments have had a bearing on discussions of ritual and the medieval drama. For most scholars, ritual must be taken by the audience to be "real:" ". . . the reality created by ritual is Reality itself--orthodox and true" (Stevens, "Illusion" 464).³⁰ Drama, an

²⁹ "The relation between literature and life is not mimetic, but assimilative--reciprocal" (Allen, Ethical 270). Allen also discusses parallels among earthly history, heavenly organization, the structures of apprehension and philosophy, and of representation, poetry. These views are echoed in modern understandings that religion, literature, myth, culture are imaginative and symbolic constructs that govern how we interpret and live our lives.

³⁰ See also Travis 22.

"illusion," is thus distinct from and incompatible with ritual. Some have suggested that something approaching ritual is going on in the cycles, but few (since Chambers) have considered the cycles to be ritual. As a result, "hedge" terms have been developed that suggest ritual participation and action without committing the writer to an unfashionable opinion: Travis, for example, attempts to mediate the exclusive terms ritual and drama by creating confusing ones such as "metaphoric ritual," or "pretense to ritual magic" (Design 22-23).³¹ These phrases suggest that the cycles create an illusion of a ritual reality. That we have needed to develop these confusing terms reflects the rigidity and exclusivity of our definitions of illusion and reality, drama and ritual.

Most discussions of ritual and the medieval drama seek to connect the cycles with some established rite external to them. This connection has reinforced an assumption that all ritual, like the Mass, sets out to accomplish some magical transformation. Under the terms of this judgment, action on a stage must be taken by the audience to be "real" in a way that the ritual action of the Eucharist, transubstantiation, is "real." One result of this assessment of what ritual may be has been a distinction between "dramatic" action and "ritual" or "ritualistic" action.

A corollary of the sacramental or "magical" view of ritual is that ritual or "ritualistic" action is recognizable by its formal,

³¹See also Kolve on "theatrical illusion," 23-24.

formulaic and stylized qualities. The demand for the "really real" and the expectation of somewhat static and "non-realistic" action mix oddly. Travis illustrates this mix: although he comes very close to describing the Nativity and the Passion in the Chester cycle as ritual sequences, he sustains past conclusions by judging that "those rhythms suggestive or reminiscent of ritual action (either sacred or profane) are "extra-dramatic" and opposed to "those rhythms suggestive of the cadences of 'real life' " (Design 190-91). In this Travis follows the trend that distinguishes rite from drama based in some way on the distinction between illusion and reality, mimesis and verisimilitude. Such an approach fragments the elements of the cycles by opposing "dramatic" elements to "ritualistic" ones. Further, the terms of this distinction can be confusing: the audience is to accept what is happening on the stage as "real," somehow really happening, although the action taking place on that stage is not to be "realistic" if it is to be called ritual.

We have heard a good deal about the necessity, for believers, that every stage of a ritual action be done exactly in conformity with tradition in order for the transformation, or "magic," to occur. An expectation of formal and stylized action and speech arises, in part, from this limited early-twentieth century view of what ritual is and can be. The rite that seeks a magical transformation in front of an audience is one type of ritual. Kolve, Stevens, Hardison, Warning, Travis and others have hinted at a broader understanding when they use terms such as "cultic participation" or "unification of the cultic community," and attempt to show that the audience is "drawn

in" and becomes a collection of "participants" rather than merely "spectators." But the import of this observation is lost when "real" is pitted against "illusion," or "earnest" against "game."

Rituals do not make "magic" except in the hearts and minds of their participants; it is there that a transformation of spirit, rather than of matter, takes place. For the medieval audience, for whom the imagined was to be more potent and present than the seemingly concrete, the cycles are no more illusory than is life, itself. When Williams judges that "rite belongs to that class of things which are what they are perceived to be" ("Review" 540) he suggests the role of perception and imagination in ritual participation. The act of religious imagination arises out of an assent to a symbolized "reality", and the religious assent the dramas seek is directed to what can only be imagined, the original acts, believed to be historical, on which the Christian faith is based. The sense of the cycles, like the sense of ritual, "depends on an essential reference to the original ceremony" (de Sousa 288), and we can only make that sense by the act of imagining the original ceremony, as evoked by the reference.

Once we consider the power of the imagination to create from mere suggestion, we may resolve some difficulties of past criticism: for example, Stevens's difficulty in explaining that the audience "was a participant in the drama by virtue of the proximity of the action" in the face of the "illusory" nature of the performance and its "primitive staging devices" ("Illusion" 455, 458); or Kolve's ambivalence about the relations of revelation to game and "experience" to "dramatic reality" (25-26). The essence of the relation of drama

to reality has been well-expressed, though not supported, by Kolve:

"the medieval drama stages actions which, though unlike anything we encounter in ordinary human life, are nevertheless as 'real' as anything else in the play world. Thus the whole drama becomes charged with a mythic quality, where inner meaning is made as external ("real") as any other kind of outward appearance" (30).

Kolve's "mythic charge" is made possible by the imagination of the audience, whereby the power of the original ceremony is re-created from the allusions and illusions on the stage. By the participation of imagination, re-creation becomes revelation and game becomes very earnest, indeed.

Game and Earnest

perceived conflicts between the "illusion" of the theater and the "reality" of the audience's responses, or the "game" of the cycles and the "earnest" of their subject matter and message, have to some extent been softened by Kolve's application of Huizinga's theories of play and game to the drama. In distinguishing game from earnest, however, Kolve inherited Huizinga's explicit theories, and theoretical problems (many occasioned by the translation) with them. As Crossan has shown, Huizinga's theories were wider ranging and potentially more profound than the ways in which many have understood and applied them:

In the Foreword to his 1938 book, Homo Ludens, the Dutch scholar Johan Huizinga mentioned how his previous lectures on play and culture were usually understood to be concerned with play in culture whereas 'it was not my object to define the place of play among all the other manifestations of culture, but rather to ascertain how far culture itself bears the character of play.' Despite all this the English translation murmurs something about 'the more euphonious ablative' and subtitles the work, 'A Study of the Play-Element in Culture.' A more accurate description would have been: A Study of Culture as Play (Raid 25).

The medieval view of the world as illusory was extended to a perception of life as a game, expressed in the "dance of life" motif and elsewhere, and both medieval and modern conceptions suggest a broader application of Huizinga's theories to the cycles.

Huizinga's definition of play is:

a free activity standing quite consciously outside "ordinary" life as being "not serious," but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner. It promotes the formation of social groupings which tend to surround themselves with secrecy and to stress their difference from the common world by disguise or other means (Homo Ludens 13).

This definition could be interpreted as including the "free activity" of religious belief and exercise, although it could be argued that most participate in religious activities for the promise of heavenly profit. Huizinga's tentativeness, possibly a necessary hesitancy in the very earnest Europe of 1938, surfaces in this most frequently quoted passage. But as Crossan has noted:

The chapters of the book (Homo Ludens) argue that language, law, war, myth, poetry, philosophy, art, and indeed all cultural phenomena have unfolded sub specie ludi. It is a brilliant thesis but the argumentation suffers from a vacillation between the historical and the ontological, between proofs showing how culture came from play and is therefore successive to it, and how culture arose as play and is therefore absolutely simultaneous with it (Raid 25).

Huizinga's "vacillation" is Kolve's inheritance, and the problems that it raises for application of Huizinga's theories to the drama

have, perhaps, resulted in the very limited practical and analytical use made of Kolve's work on play and the cycles. Kolve chose one side of the two between which Huizinga vacillated; I would urge that we choose the other, what Huizinga's critics have perceived to be the "true" thesis of his work: culture "does not come from play like a babe detaching itself from the womb: it arises in and as play, and never leaves it" (Homo Ludens 173).

This more inclusive designation of the "play-element" is consonant with our earlier discussion of the tenuousness of "reality" and the illusory nature of culture and cultural institutions, both for Christians of the Middle Ages and for modern thinkers who perceive them as symbolic constructs. The "counterfet earnest" of the drama is play, but that play is neither more nor less than a contribution to the construction of culture, and reflection of the cultural construct. This assessment works to resolve some of the difficulties with Kolve's argument, in particular his insistence upon the "illusion" of the drama and its "play" (ergo non-earnest) nature, which seems to conflict with his use of terms elsewhere such as "revelation" and "dramatic reality" to describe the cycles.

We might more fruitfully connect the play of the cycles with the "carnivalized Catholicism" of St. Francis, a mimetic view of life in the face of the transcendent, a game that mirrors the game of life before the earnest and real: God. The sensible world, what we take to be concrete, is to be joyfully experienced and "played with": "to St. Francis, Nature is a sister, and even a younger sister: a little, dancing sister, to be laughed at as well as loved" (Chesterton in van der Leeuw, Religion 2.576). Rather than see the cycles as

a momentary interval in, and abstention from, the real concerns of life" (Kolve 21), it may be more revealing to view them as a "momentary interval in, and abstention from, the more illusory concerns of life," a time when the Real is revealed to believers as it is in the interval of the Mass. Play, indeed, is pitted against earnest in the cycles: the game elements are all of the matters of the world; the earnest is the transcendent. Life is the illusion, no less than the drama, and to "joke seriously and to play most studiously" as in the cycles is the most that a Christian can do.³² Both Huizinga and Kolve posit an earthly "reality" against which they define play, and only recently has the full import of play theory been explored and Huizinga's work re-examined. The result has been a rash of "theologies" of play and of comedy, works which grew out of and gave birth to work in many disciplines to assess the play character of language and culture. Neither Huizinga nor Kolve could surrender the assumption that the "really real" is independent of the symbolic constructs and interpretations that cultures develop, and neither clearly expressed the thesis that Huizinga's argument muffled, that "to define play is at the same

³²For discussion of what it meant to "feyn" in the Middle Ages, and the connection of feigning and the transcendent for Chaucer and other writers of the period, see Taylor, "Chaucer's Cosyn" 325.

movement to define reality and to define culture" (Ehrmann, "Homo Ludens" 55).³³

Medieval connections between the sensible world, culture, and play were firmer than Kolve's discussion would indicate. The theatrum mundi topos, or that of the world as book, would be more relevant to our understandings of the construction of reality in the play of language and thought than a view of the world as "earnest."³⁴ In the cycles, the distinctions between illusion and reality are revealed to be "play" distinctions that can no longer be held by the earnest Christian: the world is subject to and a part of a cosmic design initiated by God, the greatest magister ludi of them all. Actions in the sensible world, often referred to as game in the Middle Ages, are governed by transcendent, moral rules: "As in chivalric conduct, so too in just governance, there are specific moral rules of the game which structure man's behaviour in a potentially disorganized world; the game-like quality of so many aspects of medieval society, depicted in the elaborate rules for hunting and acting courteously, is extended

³³ See Ehrmann, "Homo," and Scott, Wild Prayer 5 for critique and extension of Huizinga. See also Hans, Play and Crossan, Raid 25-30. Crossan concurs with Ehrmann's critique that "Huizinga is still trapped in a dichotomized rationalistic world and cannot fully accept the radical implications of his brilliant intuition: reality is play, reality is make-believe, you make it to believe in and believe in what you have made." Play and earnest are not exclusive: "Play is terribly serious precisely because it absorbs the player intensely and utterly . . . has undermined and then absorbed reality (Crossan, Raid 26-27). This formulation, of course, raises the question of what "reality" it is that is absorbed by play if culture and play arise simultaneously.

³⁴ See Curtius 319-21; on history as a "play written by God," see Hanks 36.

. . . to government (Coleman 102). The cycles reveal the game of all life in speech, and speech is a heaven-sent game:

. . . a shoot of grace,

And God's gleeman . and a game of heaven.

Would never the faithful Father . (that) his fiddle were
untempered,

Nor his gleeman a gadabout . a goer to taverns.

(Langland B.ix; 100-03 Skeat)

All are "God's gleemen" who, through language, may play the game of heaven. The first player of the game, the Incarnate Word, is Christ, the Magistri Ludi (Crossan's term, Raid 50). Only with faith in the saving power of the Incarnation can man truly "play" before God and perceive the values of the world as "play" values in the face of transcendent ones.³⁵ This is a theologia ludens that derives from an understanding of the limits of man's capacity to contemplate or express the infinite given the bounds of language and the symbolic. Doctrine and play are no more contradictory than art and religion, and we need not defend the "world of play" against the earnestness of the religious doctrine that attempts to teach the game. The world of the cycles, a locus festivus, mirrors the ludic character of the entire earthly sphere before the Deus ludens, hence its ability to reveal truth and to transform its audience.

Kolve's work on play highlighted the celebratory and liberating functions of the cycles and has been a necessary corrective to critical

³⁵ See Rahner 35; Syrkin connects the play element in culture in the Middle Ages with the Franciscan movement (150-171, espec. 161ff).

concentration on doctrinal criticism and analysis of didactic statement. But the "play" aesthetic seems to conflict with the typological formal standards that Kolve established. If form and function were assimilated in the ethical poetic of the Middle Ages, as Allen has argued, then we might use the related aspects of game and ethics as a heuristic for discovering the formal necessities and organization of the cycles. We might extend Kolve's play theory beyond Huizinga's strictures and extend an aesthetic of play to an understanding of how it is assimilated in the religious aesthetic.

In more recent expositions of play theory, the main critique of Huizinga's work has been that his argument faltered before the implications of the comprehensiveness of this theory. As we now understand it, the "game" no longer stops before the "serious" aspects of culture: the worlds of fantasy and belief are one.³⁶ These works support and are supported by current understandings of the power of the imagination, the playful thinking mind, to create and govern reality. The comic, playful and symbolic conceptions of life and religion, too, are contiguous, and the comic structure of the Christian myth governs the structure of the Christian life, as we shall see. The satisfaction for the audience of the cycles might have been akin to what Pruyser, Crossan and others have found in religion, and it may be very similar to an aesthetic satisfaction as some have described it. The "primary

³⁶ Works that use a play theory span almost all disciplines. The work of Crossan, Rahner, D. L. Miller, Caillois, Hans and Todorov find most application here. See also Turner, Ritual 109-13; 176-91; Winnicott, Playing.

satisfaction" of religion "must be sought in an incomparable pleasure: the fun of taking a special, symbolic view of outer reality as well as the inner reality of the self, bringing both into an intriguing synthesis that has the formal status of an illusion" (Pruyser, "Lessons" 11). This synthesis of exterior and interior symbolic views, the transcendent and the earthly ways of interpreting the world, is part of what the cycles accomplish: it is a very medieval synthesis of the microcosm with the macrocosm, action with symbolic significance, devotion with desire. This view makes fine sense of the comic in the cycles, "the conscience of play" (Crossan, Raid 28), and reveals the role of the comic in the ethical aesthetic. The cycles, like the religion and culture they arise from and sustain, are a symbolic construct that "does not discover reality-out-there but instead creates, conserves, destroys and recreates reality-in-it" (Crossan, Raid 91). Such a feigning is the highest revelation: "what does not exist as a physical presence in the theater does not exist at all" (Hristic, "Interpretation" 353) for the audience of the cycles. What is present in the theatre points to what is beyond the theater and beyond the sensible world, reconciles the known with the unknown.

The proliferation of works that propose a theologia ludens have put very old wine in new skins. In 1463, roughly contemporary with the N-Town manuscript, for example, Nicholas of Cusa wrote De Ludo Globi ("The Ball Game"). Players of the game may learn to understand and participate in God's mysteries, symbolized in the game. Cusa is a part of a long and venerable tradition of play theology whose ranks include Plato, Augustine, Aquinas, and, more recently, Kierke-

gaard, Tillich and Rahner.³⁷ Such a theology perceives connections between the comic and the religious views of life: for Crossan, for example, comedy expresses the "whole truth": "The whole Truth which comedy whispers to our frightened or startled imaginations is that all is play" (Raid 22-3; 35). This is a great part of the message of the cycles to their audiences sub specie ludi: it is foolish to deny the playfulness and "made-up-ness" of the structures we develop to make sense of our world. We must "live a story," participate in life "as if" what we can only imagine is real, just as we do when we witness a cycle. Life, like the drama, is a sacer ludens, a ludens in orbe terrarum before God, who is imagined sitting on the high scaffold in the East.

Distinctions between play and earnest conceptually have been parallel to those between play and ritual. Stevens confirms this common distinction when he judges that "the audience, far from participating in ritual ceremony, was never allowed to forget the element of play" ("Illusion" 457). Ritual, revelation, play, reality--these terms may be less exclusive, less distinct, for the Middle Ages and for the present, than we have assumed. As we shall see, some medieval traditions perceived the play of language and the creation of images as the first link in the chain of knowing, the process of thought and feeling that brings the soul to know the Real, God.

³⁷ See Miller, Gods 162-65 on the game of Christ on the Cross; Cf Kolve 203-4; Rahner, Man, discusses Aquinas and other exegetes on play in the course of his development of a theologia ludens (2; 36 ff; 98-99; as does Crossan, Raid (see index). Pascal, Erasmus, Clement of Alexandria and, more recently, Neale, Moltmann, Hans Participate in this tradition.

Signs and Sacrilege

Much of the concern to distinguish the game of the cycles from the seriousness of "real life concerns" has stemmed from the judgment that the plays would be risking sacrilege if they purported to be in "earnest," rather than made up only of mediate words, images and actions. What we know of the Lollards and Wycliffites of the 14th and 15th centuries attests to their iconoclastic zeal, and the debate over the use of images extended to the cycles, which were criticized and defended.³⁸ The reformers opposed a long, strong tradition that supported the power of words and images to arouse and strengthen faith, to bring the soul to God, to offer a glimpse of the transcendent. The older tradition could distinguish the sin of Lucifer, the prideful imitation of God, from the imitatio Christi, a devout and necessary imitation. The distinction was made in part based on intent and reception--if images and words devoutly were crafted, and received with an active devotional contemplation, they were not sacrilegious. Clearly the cycles are most indebted to the longstanding tradition in which words and images

³⁸The Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge is the most extended criticism of the drama we have. See also "On the Minorite Friars," presented in Davidson (ed. Treatise 12-13). Davidson's introduction is useful to understanding the debate, as is Hanning ("Parlous Pleye"), with caution. See also Jones ("Lollards and Images"), Thomson (Later Lollards), Phillips (Reformation of Images). "Dives and Pauper" is the most often cited defense (Barnum, ed., 1.293 and reprinted Kolve 132-33). The most thorough discussion of defenses of image theology is Colleti's unpublished dissertation ("Spirituality") which relates 12th century theology with late-medieval beliefs. See also Ringbom ("Devotional Images") and Constable ("Popularity"). On signs, see Allen (Ethical 188-9; 250), Borquin, and Ratzinger (85).

may lead to, or even participate in, the reality they signify.

In this tradition, signs may have a referential or a constitutive power, a "sacramental dimension" (Allen, Ethical 305). Indeed, the connection between sign and signified was used as a model for mystical union, the joining of the soul with God (see Bourquin, "Dynamics").

To stress with Kolve and others that playing the character of God in the cycles threatens sacrilege because "the actor's human nature risks defiling the most awesome of Christian images; man is not God, and God will not be mocked" (9) is to highlight one medieval tradition and shadow the other. Both have coexisted, but accenting the potentially sacrilegious draws attention away from the potentially sacramental. Medieval image theology, affective piety, understandings of man's potential as imago Dei, of his creation in God's image, and of his connaturality with God support the appropriateness of imitating what we know of God in earthly signs. The idea that God, the creator, may be "defiled" by man, the created, rings false. The orthodox God of the Middle Ages seems beyond such a contamination; the image of God was intended to point to what is beyond the image, God Himself. The signs and symbols of the cycles encourage the audience to imagine the unimaginable, to give form to the invisible, to understand the unthinkable, and to know the otherwise unknowable.

The medieval traditions that stress the mediating capabilities of language and images, and that confer upon the material world

the ability to reveal the divine, seem most pertinent to the study of the cycles as cultic expressions. In these traditions, earthly signs may, through the power of the Incarnation, communicate Truth. Augustine, for example, was cited in 14th and 15th-century defenses of religious images, although his ambivalence about the arts, inherited in part from Plato, is well known. Augustine explores the marvelous capacity of language to communicate a whole, transcendent truth:

I am speaking a word of the Word. But what a word, of what a Word? a mortal word, of the Word Immortal; a changeable word, of the Word Unchangeable; a passing word, of the Word Eternal. Nevertheless, consider my word. For I have told you already, the Word of God is whole everywhere. See, I am speaking a word to you; what I say reaches to all . . . all receive. Nay, not only all receive, but all receive it whole. It comes whole to all, each of my word! What then is the Word of God?³⁹

Human words, despite their fragmentary and partial ability to describe, miraculously may communicate a whole. Augustine here suggests that words are parts of the wholes that they attempt to communicate, that words may bear a metonymic relationship to what they name. Just as the world is made up of fragments of God's poem,

³⁹ De Trinitate 15.20.xi (trans. Burnaby). On the necessity and impossibility of the expression of the sacred in art, see van der Leeuw (Religion in Essence 2.453). On the relations between God's creations and man's see Chenu (Man, Nature 40-41).

a sign may present a part of what it denotes. Elsewhere, Augustine argues that verbal signs can transcend the material to delight the soul, notes the role of the observer or listener in making meaning, and observes that eloquent rhetoric, the best human use of words, is close to God.⁴⁰

Following Augustine's concept of memory, in part, Aquinas developed the doctrine of analogy, suggesting that the transcendent and spiritual are in each individual to be awakened by what is in the sensible world. He extends this to stress the role of the senses in knowing: nihil est in intellectu nisi prius in sensu (Summa I.12. xii).⁴¹ The late-medieval popular tradition shared this understanding. For example, the Disce Mori, a 15th-century vernacular text of popular piety, defines sapience thus:

Sapience is called a sauoury science for whan a man hath this gifte and grace he tasteth and knoweth the swetnesse that is in god by the gifte of understanding. A man knoweth god like as a man knoweth goode wyne whan he seeth it faire and clerer in a verre. But by the gifte of sapience a man knoweth as he knoweth the wyne by the drinking . . . (Bodleian Library Ms. Laud. Misc. 99, fol.179^r cited in Glasscoe, 1982: 225).

The experience of the cycles is powerful to give just this "gifte and grace" of sapience, an experiential spiritual knowing, to its audience.

⁴⁰ See Frye (Code 15, 17, 21), Burke (Rhetoric of Religion 133), Jauss (1.205-6); for extended discussion of medieval sign theory, see Colish, Mirror.

⁴¹ See also Kenny ("Intellect and Imagination" 284-5).

From the Franciscan affirmation of the world as speculum naturale to the nominalist judgment that all we may know is what our sense experience teaches us, medieval understandings of the process of knowing combine to suggest a reverence for the things of earth as mirrors of and pointers to the divine.⁴² Bonaventure, to whom the 15th-century mystical tradition is heavily indebted, found the path to knowing God in individual, subjective experience, and averred that to attain certain knowledge, we must find ways to touch what is in the Eternal Art. Through temporal art, mutable as it is, we can know the eternal: the exemplifying and ordering arts were a poeta theologus second only to the ars divina, a common medieval topos (Curtius, European 216, 219).⁴³ Looking with active devotion on certain images, sacramentally repeating certain words, these were taken to offer a divine revelation, spiritual knowledge, in part because such words and images could contain a value, an aspect of the Truth to which they refer. As eiconam dei, the cycles, made up of signs and symbols of the transcendent, may confer upon the audience a revelation of the divine.

The cycles only "may" do this: whether a given individual in the audience perceives Truth depends upon his own spiritual state,

⁴² See Ratzinger (85), Jeffrey ("Franciscan Spirituality"), Craddock ("Franciscan Influences"); Carré (Realists). See Borquin for connections between sign and signified as the models for mystical union.

⁴³ See Cousins (123-4) and Harvey (inward wits 60). Spargo (Category) gives a full account of Bonaventurian aesthetics.

just as recognition of Christ as the Son of God in the Bible depended upon a willingness to believe in the Incarnation. When the cycles announce that they are "game," then, it is possible that they express the limits of their ability to reveal the forma realis. They can only mediate between the visible and the invisible, the known and the unknown, can only have an analogical or metonymic relationship with the transcendent (cf Frye, Code 78). The plays can lead to Truth only if the audience, through imagination, love, and belief, is willing to "play" along. Although mankind's creative production may participate in the original and originary act of Creation, it is still only a mediator. The cycles act as the second term of a syllogism, to use a Bonaventurian concept, as did Christ, and as does redeemed mankind. Deus artifex and homo artifex are linked in Christ; thus the arts of the mediate creature may reveal and may bring man closer to God. That mediate role is sanctified by the Incarnation of the Word, an earthly historical event charged with a spiritual and transcendent meaning for those who would understand it, that restored to language its Adamic referential power, lost in the Fall.⁴⁴

The responses of members of the audience, the ways in which the cycles are understood and received, to some extent determine whether the playing of a cycle might be sacrilegious. Nothing in

⁴⁴"In the Middle Ages the central tenet of Christian theology was also the greatest justification of Christian art. It was the Incarnation which made religious art legitimate" (Ladner, Ad Imaginem 1-2).

the cycles, of itself, would have been considered to be sacrilegious by orthodox standards. For Augustine, Aquinas, Bernard and others, the will and intent of the audience would have governed its perceptions. Words or objects alone do not make men evil: man's willed choices of meaning are evil if he refuses to seek and see the higher truths to which all earthly signs may point:

When the evil will abandons what is above itself, and turns to what is lower, it becomes evil--not because that is evil to which it turns but because the turning itself is wicked. Therefore it is not an inferior thing which has made the will evil, but it is itself (the will) which has become so by wickedly and inordinately desiring an inferior thing (Augustine, City 12.6, Dods ed. 386).

The conversion experience, for Augustine, is a "turning" toward God, an exercise of the will. If the members of the audience choose to worship the man-made visible rather than the invisible which the sensible but mirrors, the fault is not in the sign, but in the will of the interpreter. Any connections between man and God depend upon man's will, upon the exercise of which the fulfillment of man's potential as imago Dei depends. Just as man's limited animal nature is balanced by his potential transcendence, neither the limitations of images and words nor their potential to refer to higher truths may be ignored. For Bonaventure, by a process "natural to metaphor" words that rightly describe the transcendent may communicate such higher truths: "the deceptive words of men are rectified and redeemed when they are conformed to the authentic and originary word of God"

(Barney, Allegories 192). The critical thing is to remember the antitheses between which words and man are set, although the process of thought and contemplation is a synthetic one. For Augustine and Aquinas, man can "become" what he contemplates or desires: the distinction between subject and object blurs. Thus, signs and events properly contemplated may carry the soul to the spiritual and transcendent dimension--we become that to which we turn. The cycles, objects of contemplation, share in and interpret the "original word of God." They present what is to be accepted as the truth about God's relations with man and the soul's search for God--the historical, the metaphysical and the spiritual realities. In Artaud's terms, the cycles "imitate the soul's reality" in its violence and desire as well as in its potential transcendence, which is what he judges that good ritual theatre should do (Cetta 8-9).

Each member of the audience of the cycles, by an act of recognition, will and interpretation, may learn his own "soul's reality" and learn how to become what he desires, saved or damned. The 14th-century mystic Walter Hilton noted that the ignorant needed to be aroused by "sensual and carnal emotion" in order to come to spiritual knowledge.⁴⁵ For Augustine, even if one were to seek simply "sensual and carnal emotion," entertainment, if the will were being directed

⁴⁵ On Hilton's De Adoracione Imaginum, see Russell-Smith ("Hilton" 191), and cf Muscatine (French 77). Rossiter notes that the moralities were meant to stir "that certain carnal reverence" (88-89), and cf Owst (138). On Augustine, Burke (Rhetoric of Religion 134).

toward the right images, then one's seeking would be directed toward God. The cycles attempt to turn us toward the images of God, those that will bring the soul to know God, himself.

We must assume that medieval people attended the drama for a variety of reasons, including the reported ones of "curiosity, delight, devotion" (Young 2.539). Devotion would likely have been the most desirable reason for attending, but curiosity is the beginning of knowing, and the desire for delight, entertainment, was interpreted as a legitimate first step on the road to faith. Olson and Allen have stressed the Horatian connections between delight and teaching, affect and ethics, for the aesthetic of the Middle Ages. Religious and moral knowledge may arise from delight by the process of contemplating the object of delight, hence the efficacy of images. Delight implies a value judgment about what is contemplated, and is an indicator of the ethical character of the viewing consciousness. Delight may initiate a quasi-mystical process: "a heightened need for union with the object of delight seems to characterize delight at its most lively pitch . . . Thus do we become our delights" (Maguire, Moral Choice 292). The necessity for desire to the process of gaining knowledge of God was stressed by Bonaventure (Mind's Road 4,5,29) as mediating between subject and object. The religious and ethical transforming power of the cycles, their character as a "re-creation," stems in part from their ability to arouse delight and incite desire. In this way, they may bring the lives of the audience into conformity with God's plan.

The will of the witness to the cycles governs its effect. Similarly, perverse imitation and revelatory re-creation may be distinguished by the will of the imitator and the reception of the audience.

Aquinas stressed the receptivity of the hearer or of the communicant in a sacrament: universals, the truth to which signs, symbols and sacraments point, have no reality apart from individuals. If a person rightly contemplates the sources of knowledge, the Scriptures and the book of nature, true knowing results. The cycles couple Scripture with nature, the past with the medieval present. That contemplation of Scripture and of the temporal world may lead the soul to God is one classic defense of religious drama. By almost all orthodox medieval standards, the cycles are legitimate sources of religious participation and potential revelation.

The most basic revelation of the cycles is a merely palpable one, "ocular proof" (Hardison, Christian Rite 228) of the truth of the miraculous events portrayed. The cycles invite sense experience, or "reality testing." The common people, as the many pilgrimages, the veneration of relics, and the excitement occasioned by the elevation of the host attest, set great store by such a seeing: there was a need and a desire for sensory proof. No doubt sign and signified sometimes were conflated by the "lewde." Indeed, accustomed to being asked to believe that the bread actually becomes the body, that sign is signified, in the Mass, they may have had difficulty suspending this habit of mind in other religious contexts. Rather than perceive an image as a sign, they may have worshipped it as the thing, itself--hence some of the concerns of the reformers.

The prayers, commandments and creeds, and the images and actions of the cycles, may have been thought to carry a "magical" power and spiritual efficacy. In either event, the feelings and knowledge aroused in those who, in Bernard's judgment, can only love carnally (see Ringbom, Icon 16) were efficacious to set them on the right road, the itinerarium mentis ad deum.

Both the scriptural and extra-scriptural portions of the cycles are parts of the libri laicorum, and so may reveal spiritual truths. Bonaventure defined spiritual revelation, inspiratio, as a "penetration through the peripheral-sensible to the spiritual and the real" (Ratzinger 66). The "peripheral-sensible" that is fabulous, or grotesque, or violent, may reveal with the same power as, and perhaps an even greater power than, the strictly scriptural. All of the words, images and actions of a cycle are potentially kerygmatic: "For the early fathers, the kerygma, the revealed 'good news,' was understood to be communicated in its entirety in the Scripture, and 'tradition' was understood in the active sense as a handing down (trahere) of that scriptural revelation and of its authoritative interpretation within the community of the faithful" (Oakley, Western Church 150, 155). The legendary and anachronistic explain and reveal in the same manner as do Christ's parables. The intent of both Christ's fables and the fabulous in the cycles is to move the audience to belief.⁴⁶ Sacred and profane are not objectively distinguishable:

⁴⁶See Taylor ("Chaucer's Cosyn" 320 and note 12). On the poet as a moral guide, see Coleman (English Literature 124).

the sensible world is a speculum that has spiritual symbolic values that depend for interpretation upon the spiritual disposition of the sensor. Legends, fables, even the newly made, may be sources of interpretation and revelation second only to God.

At the most extended level of revelation, the cycles may be received as a sacrament. Aquinas judged a sacrament to be symbolic, and identifiable by its reception and result: a sacrament is "a symbol of something sacred inasmuch as it causes the sanctification of men" (emph. supp., Summa IIIa.qu.60.a.2, in corp., cited and discussed Chydenius 29). In order to be accepted as a sacrament or ritual, then, a cycle must successfully encourage the audience actively to participate in a devotional symbolic experience that will bring their souls closer to God. Such a participation requires a willed activity of the imagination in order to pierce the sensible. Some in the audience might have imaginatively participated in the drama in a manner akin to the imaginative activity of dreaming, fantasizing, or receiving a spiritual revelation, all aspects of the vis imaginativa. Such a receptive and imaginative participation may evoke a revelation that would surpass mere ocular proof in its mystical power and emotional intensity. The physical showing of the drama may stimulate the senses and spark the imagination, without which knowledge of the transcendent is not possible, as the late-14th-century mystic Walter Hilton attested:

For a man shall not come to ghostly delight in contemplation of Christ's Godhead, but he come first in imagination by bitterness and by compassion and by steadfast thinking of his manhood (Hilton, Scale 81).

Both the dramatic revelation of the cycles and mystical revelation require an act of the imagination, an emotional response to what is imagined (here, compassion), and a concentrated attention to Christ's humanity, his life in the temporal world. Both may be an accessus to God. The cycles, by the power of their signs and symbols, by an operation of grace, and by the skill of their creators in encouraging emotional and imaginative participation, make available to the willing and receptive in the audience a sacramental revelation of the mysteries of faith.

CHAPTER II

RESPONSE, PILGRIMAGE, RITUAL

Ighen of the soule there ben two, reson and love . . .

But evere when reson defailith, then list love live

and lerne for to play.

For bi love we may fele him, fynde him

and hit him even himself.¹

Signs and symbols were important in the orthodox tradition of the Middle Ages because they could arouse an emotion (love or pity, for example). Appropriate emotions could influence the will, and could effect a revelation of God and so lead to spiritual knowing. This coming to spiritual knowledge was thought of as a process, differently described in the works of each mystical writer, but often imaged as a pilgrimage of the soul. Love, a feeling, was understood to be one of the "ighen of the soule." The above selection suggests a process of learning to love, then learning to play, then feeling, finding and, finally, hitting the mark--knowing Christ himself. The cycles, too, teach in an affective and experiential way. The audience is brought through a process that may be a moving and transforming one, that may bring the soul to God.

¹From "Epistle of Discretion of Stirrings," Middle English Religious Prose, Blake, ed. 118-131; see 127. On this tradition see also Constable ("Popularity" 3-28).

The earnest game of the religious dramas attempts to bring the audience closer to God by teaching the reason and schooling the emotions. The expressly didactic appeals to reason are fairly simple to recognize and have been widely discussed. But the ways in which the cycles move the emotions, and the ends to which the audience is to be moved, are more difficult to access. Medieval and modern conceptions of the affective component of literature, and of the role of the audience in shaping meaning, suggest that an aesthetic for the religious drama take the moods and motivations aroused in the audience, and the sequence or process of affects, into account. The process of stirring the affections dictates the structure of the cycles, and it is helpful to image that structure as the structure of a pilgrimage, a controlling idea that has been applied to other medieval literature, but not to the mysteries.

The ritual of pilgrimage and the ritual of the cycles have a good deal in common. The most appropriate way for the modern reader to approach the cycles is to think of them as ritual dramas that seek to transform the willing in the audience and to bring them closer to God. The audience is moved through a re-creative process that is to issue in a re-created view of self and community. As rituals, the cycles mediate between man and God, individual and community, feeling and action, soul and salvation, desire and fulfillment, earth and heaven. They accomplish this mediating function, and make meaning for the audience, by stirring the emotions and the imagination.

Affect and Meaning

The Bull of Urban IV instituting the feast of Corpus Christi, the feast at which the cycles were played in many English towns, indicates that the celebration, an act of remembrance, was to stir the emotions:

. . . on this occasion we both rejoice amid pious weeping and weep amid reverent rejoicing, joyful in our lamentation and woeful in our jubilation (cited, trans. in Kolve 46).

The expression of feeling that the Bull describes conforms with more modern understandings of what the religious experience is. Regardless of their divergent opinions on other matters, scholars and theoreticians in many fields agree that religion and morality have their origins in the affections: "Not intellectual assent but faith, deep emotional acceptance, makes a Catholic or a Voodooist" (Goodenough, Psychology 12). What "deep emotional acceptance" is comprised of is not so clear. No one emotion, or even one definable complex of emotions, may be said objectively to constitute the "religious experience," although it clearly is made up of patterns of feeling that include awe, fear, longing, desire, wonder, joy, pity and terror. One aspect of the difficulty in defining the religious response stems from our modern experience of it as subjective and internal; another is that religious feeling frequently comprises conflicting moods and emotions--ambivalence.²

²The seminal study of religious responses was that of Rudolph Otto, and it has not been overturned. Otto discusses particularly those moods of awe and wonder before the tremendum and the fascinans, and avers that the religious experience derives from a paradoxical complex of heightened emotions (Idea). Much later, van der Leeuw judged that the religious sensation is not unique, but a combination of all other sensations (Sacred and Profane 17).

Urban's Bull is a fine indicator of the ambivalence of the religious feelings that were important to the celebration: "joyful lamentation" and "woeful jubilation " require that two intense and contradictory moods be simultaneously sustained. This gives us a beginning of an answer to the question Arnold Williams raised in connection with the cycles: how may we characterize the "properly devotional state of mind. Is it calm? or intensely emotional?" (Drama 57). Perhaps we could hypothesize that the religious experience of the cycles is not only intensely emotional, but that it actively seeks to bring conflicting emotions into play, dialectically to relate them, thereby augmenting their intensity and creating new feelings and responses.

We know that late-medieval spirituality encouraged emotionalism, and that people generally expressed feelings more violently in the Middle Ages than is now acceptable. Religious feelings, in particular, are expressed with more restraint in most post-Reformation Christian celebrations. The cycles, themselves, contradict any "churchly" conception of the properly religious response. Public manifestations of religious emotion were not uncommon in the Middle Ages, and external demonstrations of feeling to some extent were taken to confirm the strength of a person's faith or devotion. "Pious weeping" and "reverent rejoicing" were not carried on in the privacy of one's home, and the reverence of the rejoicing was not tarnished by celebratory practices that might today be considered sacrilegious or pagan (except in those countries where Mardi Gras, for instance, is still a communal celebration). In his lyrical Office for the feast of Corpus Christi

(Selected, Rhys, ed. 30-50), Aquinas emphasized the sensory, and faith over reason. Clearly, celebrating Christ's humanity was to be a sensory and emotional experience, an observation that may assist our aesthetic understanding of the form that the celebration took in much of Western Europe: the cycle dramas, "ordeined to styre mannys affection and his herte to devocion" (Dives et Pauper, Pynson, ed. 293).

The importance of such a stirring was that, for the Middle Ages, the experiential and emotional were a great part of both religious understanding and aesthetic apprehension (Boas, Mind's Road, intro xvi). In sermons and other vernacular literature of the period, the eye of reason, the door to rational knowing, is juxtaposed against the eye of love, the door to a more experiential and existential knowing, opened by an operation of the affections.³ In the affective tradition, the emotions may bring the soul to God, and images and the rhetorical arts were considered useful because they stirred the emotions. Allen and Olson have shown that all medieval literature sought in some way to move the audience to a specific, usually ethical end, and have urged that the responses of the audience be addressed as a "part of the work itself" (Olson 162; cf Allen, Ethical 92-3). That moving the audience through stages of responsive experience, a process of feeling, was a conscious intention of the playwrights

³ On this tradition, see Constable ("Popularity"), Coletti ("Spirituality 30, et seq."), Gray (Chapt. 2, "Medieval Devotion"), Sticca ("Drama and Spirituality"), Glasscoe, ed. (entire), and Cousins (Coincidence 125 et seq.).

of the cycles is an idea that we have not sufficiently explored in our critical approaches to the cycles.⁴

Few students of the drama have used observations about affect or audience response in any extended or systematic way, or used these observations in connection with aesthetic or formal considerations. Kolve has said that the drama teaches to the end that "these events might be felt and understood" and has linked this observation with Franciscan piety, whereby:

men were taught that by feeling--by the experience of pity, grief, and love . . . they could best come to an understanding of the Godhead, to a true awareness of the price of their salvation, and to an adequate sorrow for their own sin" (4; cf Sticca 78-79).

Clifford Davidson has judged that the "later plays utilize the imagination and involve spectators in an emotional experience which is at its base religious and devotional" (Review of Wickham 87). We have assumed that we know what "religious and devotional" "emotional experience" is, without assessing the connections between the text and emotions, and without expecting that the text would reveal a

⁴Of the four stages of a literary work--creation, production, diffusion, and reception (see P. Clark, "Sociology," Barricelli and Gibaldi, eds. 113)--the last, reception, has been least studied in connection with the mystery plays. Affect may be a gauge of intent in the cycles, and vice versa, because rhetoric aimed to move audience: ". . . a gap scarcely arose between production and reception, between the intention of the . . . authors and the expectation of their public, the primary social and communicative functions of literary genres is also immediately to be assumed . . ." (Jauss, "Alterity" 209).

conscious attempt to manipulate audience response. For example, Hardin Craig noted that the drama's "life-blood was religion and its success depended on its awakening and releasing a pent-up body of religious knowledge and religious feeling," although he goes on to say that these effects were "produced more or less unconsciously" and gives us no criteria for evaluating success (Craig 4, 3).

Kolve has asserted that the plays are "guiding audience feeling" and that "the dramatist thus seeks to lead the spectators, detail by detail, into a more deeply felt response" (5). But students of the drama have not rewarded the dramatist's efforts at detailed guidance with a similarly detailed analysis of his affective art. Such an analysis is warranted by what we know of the intimate connections drawn in the Middle Ages between images, emotions, the will, knowing, salvation and ethical action. Feeling and faith are connected in medieval thought, and feeling issues in moral knowledge, right judgment.⁵ This understanding parallels our contemporary notions of the role of the emotions in cognition, and of the cognitive, or judging, aspects of feelings, which may be described as "estimates of the harmful and beneficial effects of stimuli in

⁵ For Bonaventure, reformation of the soul occurs "in affective experience rather than in rational consideration," and "one is not disposed to contemplation which leads to mental elevation unless one be with Daniel a man of desires" (on Daniel 9:23 in Mind's Road, Boas, trans, 4-5, 29).

the(ir) social and cultural environments" (Scheff/Williams 499).⁶

Medieval and modern approaches to the affective component of religion, literature, and ethics combine to suggest that we approach the cycles as affective processes, with the audience at the core of their significance. We need not confuse a cycle with its effect on the audience; we need only agree that how a poem or play moves its audience, and to what experience and end the audience is moved, is a legitimate and necessary dramatic consideration.⁷

Such an approach would analyze the ways in which the drama, by its language, images and action, seeks to arouse, bring into tension, or harmonize the emotions, and would assume a rhetorical aesthetic intent to perfect the will and the faith of the audience per affectionem. For the dramas to accomplish their intent, the audience must imaginatively participate: imagination mediates the affections and the reason, and well being arises from the balance and restraint

⁶Generally, the feelings were thought to move the will to right action, to participate in the ethical process of judgment. John of Salisbury, for example, noted that sensation is a primitive power of judgment, as did other medieval writers. This idea is consonant with our contemporary notions that feelings contain objective knowledge, that they are to some extent propositions. On emotions expressing judgments, see de Sousa, Rey and E. Schwartz (35).

⁷Connections between literature and the emotions go back to Aristotle (Politics 1341b, and Poetics 1449b) and Plato (Republic 606). More recently, Langer and Richards linked art and affectivity. Richards discussed the "emotion-seeking" and "knowledge-seeking" occasion of drama. Recent reader-response criticism, or rezeptionsasthetik extends these theories. For a summary and bibliography, see Holub.

of both the imagination and the affections, bringing them into harmony with the divine plan. The inner, spiritual self may be re-created and brought into harmony by a stirring of the affections from without, and the cycles are such a stirring.

If we use the intent of the cycles to move the audience to faith as a critical principle, and investigate how they were moved, we may have some basis for aesthetic judgment of the success of a given cycle. The ability to arouse a response is necessary to any literature, and whether we call it an aesthetic response or argue that literature arouses real feelings, the fact is that the audience is moved. In religious literature, the response is of a more primary importance since it is only by experiencing real and significant feelings that the soul may come to faith. The feelings that may be aroused by the drama are potentially very strong, combining as they do the moving power of literature, religion and myth--a story that represents the most extreme tensions of life lived on earth in hope of heaven, of fear and desire.

One critical error of past criticism in discussing audience response has been to confuse the feelings asserted by characters on the stage with the responses of the audience. Kolve's study clearly distinguished these:

In drama there are always two areas of emotional response to an action, the response made within the world of play and game, and the response that the audience makes to the entire play world of which the action is a constituent part. The comic in the drama is that which makes the audience laugh; it has

nothing to do with the laughter of personae in the play itself (137-8).

But confusion of the two is common. Travis, for example, supports inquiry into the "affective and psychological" in the cycles, but then more often assesses the psychological motivations of characters in the action (an exercise more appropriate to criticism of the novel), rather than audience responses (4-5 and see discussion on 95).

Perhaps the most sustained inquiry into audience response has been in connection with those sequences that seem irreverent or grotesque to some modern sensibilities. Critics often have attempted to divide the audience into the "saved" and the "damned," and to show that individual members of the audience, by their laughter or failure to laugh, demonstrate the category into which they fall. Although it may be helpful sometimes to distinguish possible responses in this way, such an approach may erode the tensions and ambivalences that the cycles evoke. Dividing the audience discourages us from exploring whether the cycles may, indeed, move the audience to "joyful lamentation" or "woeful jubilation," or from exploring the potential spiritual or ethical benefits of feeling the conflicting urges to laugh and to cry. All in the audience are both condemned and offered salvation. The tension between these two facts of salvation history is mirrored in the dialectical tension between the two impulses to respond. How these tension are built and resolved in the process of a given cycle deserves our attention.

The complexes of feeling that the cycles arouse, and the movement from one response to the next, contribute to the meanings drawn from the signs and symbols on the stage: "Symbols must interact with the feelings before we have a meaning" (Gendlin in Brauer 43, note 17). Without an emotional connection with what is being played the audience cannot be moved to sorrow for sin, desire for repentance, or delight in the promise of salvation. Meaning will escape them and they will not experience Augustine's "turning" from lower images to higher ones, the process of conversion. The emotions of the audience must be moved in order for their wills to effect the ethical result that active faith requires: "Strengthening the will is, essentially, a matter of cultivating feeling," hence the power of an "affective educational method" (Berggren 53-4).

What the "affective method" of the cycles demands of the critic is not a subjective discussion of his or her personal feelings aroused by the cycles, nor does it exclude a discussion of the contexts which would have influenced the audience's reception. It does demand that we address the historical events of the cycles in personal, social and ethical terms, and that we use the observation that external historical events mirror the interior process of the individual Christian. That Scriptural history is also the moral and spiritual history of the individual soul is a medieval and current critical commonplace, but few have discussed how the cycles present personal spiritual history--the process of coming to faith. This approach would require that we develop the "ability to imaginatively picture the world in terms of the powers and feelings of man's inner life,"

a sort of "Myth-thinking," an ability to grasp the "mysticism of historical event," in Bonaventure's conception (Emmet, Metaphysical Thinking 100; and Cousins, Kalamazoo 1983 "Mysticism of Historical Events"). By the process of "contuition," historical events and personal, psychological and social events may reveal each other.

Our critical response to the cycles must suspend intellectual detachment and imaginatively participate in the meaning of the primary events of Christian myth, as they are interpreted in the cycles. "Myth involves one as a total person--a thinking, willing and feeling being" (Ayers, "Religious Discourse" 78). The personal, affective and ethical approach to Christian history of the cycles transforms the audience and the critic into participants, pilgrims if you will, and we must be available for that imaginative transformation.

In the past, we have studied the dogmata rhetorica but ignored the dogmata practica, have favored the scientia over the sapientia, attended to the ratio more than to the intellectus. Our dramatic study should begin to investigate how the cycles attempted to move the audience, what emotions were aroused, to what end they were aroused, and how the experience of a series of pageants might make religious and ethical meaning. The process of critical reception must attempt imaginatively to recreate the original reception, the process of witnessing the cycles with desire for entertainment and with personal and social concern. We, the students of the cycles, might play a new game, might imagine ourselves about to embark on a medieval pilgrimage from which we expect to gain spiritual rewards

and recreation. As critics playing pilgrim, we may make greater headway along the "critical path."⁸

⁸ Taken from the book of that name, "The Critical Path," by N. Frye.

Pilgrimage and Critical Process

"Curiosity, delight and devotion" were among the reasons for setting out on a pilgrimage as well as for attending the cycles. One critical path to the cycles is imaginatively to recreate a part of the spirit and spirituality of the event by imaging the text as the path or process of spiritual pilgrimage. The celebrations of Corpus Christi day and Whitsuntide share a holy-day and holiday dimension and may be characterized by a sense of adventure, a receptivity to new sensual and spiritual experiences, and by an attention to a process that may confer benefits on the soul. Detached as we are from the desires and beliefs of the Middle Ages, we must imagine what it is to anticipate that the cycles will answer our first and final questions about life on earth and the possibility of heaven. We might begin by asking the question many in the audience of the cycles might have asked: "What does this playing of these stories tell me about how I must live my life in the world in order to be assured of heaven?" An imaginative re-creation of an attitude of personal spiritual concern, coupled with a sense of holiday and adventure, would better connect us with the meanings of the plays. Beginning with primary concern is particularly important to the study of religious and didactic literature and, arguably, would deepen our understanding of any literature:

Like all authentic (maximally human) acts, our reading is directed by a concern not only for a detached or objective knowing, but for the establishing of a relational connection with that object (here a text) out of which we mine our own reality.

To live or to read in some less motivated way is to risk falling into triviality and irrelevance (Oxenhandler 94).⁹

The audience of the cycles surely "mined its own reality" in the symbolic structures of the cycles. To re-create such a primary concern, we might set out on the critical path as pilgrims who seek the heavenly city, or as "Mankind" characters in a morality play.

That the progress of salvation history may be understood as the history of the individual soul's pilgrimage towards heaven was known in the Middle Ages to learned and lewde alike:

I ended thys worldes pylgramage . . .

And tooke my jorneye hense to heven (Gray 201, 212).

A physical pilgrimage to Jerusalem, Rome, or some more proximate holy place was to offer spiritual benefits to the pilgrim, and was interpreted as a microcosm of the pilgrim's life on earth, a symbolic expression of the trials and strivings of the soul towards its final union with God. The progress of a pilgrim is rarely easy, along a straight road without twistings, turnings, setbacks, or discouragement.

⁹ Cf. Zumthor: "the foundation of all true reading resides in the feeling of being personally affected by the text. The critic, if he meets this condition, places himself in what was the situation of a medieval reader or listener . . . involved in the reception of the text in a much more complete way than by the visual or auditory functions alone" (369).

ments. The pilgrim pauses and resumes; temptations present themselves; the pilgrim succumbs or overcomes. All roads do not make straight for Rome. No broad highway was thought to lead directly to earthly or heavenly cities in the Middle Ages. The progress of the spiritual life was one of ups and downs, turnings toward and away, cycles of discouragement and encouragement, as the soul-struggling writings of the devout attest. The pilgrim must keep the goal in his or her spiritual sight, and imagine a straight line of progress toward that goal in order to sustain the will to reach it. The straight line of desire keeps the pilgrim moving forward, although the more realistic pattern of a pilgrimage is circuitous, zig-zagged, cyclical.

What often is said to distinguish Christian scripture from other religious writings is that it is historical, linear and teleological rather than mythical and cyclical. Because the cycles recreate events from scripture in a fairly chronological sequence, we most often characterize their narrative as linear. The tendency to analyze in linear, horizontal, or diachronic ways, rather than cyclical, vertical, or synchronic ones, seems to be a relatively recent development. Frye would suggest that we think in these ways because the primary myth on which our culture is based takes a linear form; Marshall McLuhan has posited that this habit of mind is more recent, and stems from reading print. Whatever the cause, we are accustomed to addressing the progress of the cycles as linear, because they are based on a narrative judged to be linear.

The cycles select from scripture and, although their meanings are consonant with the Bible in many places, the stories are not

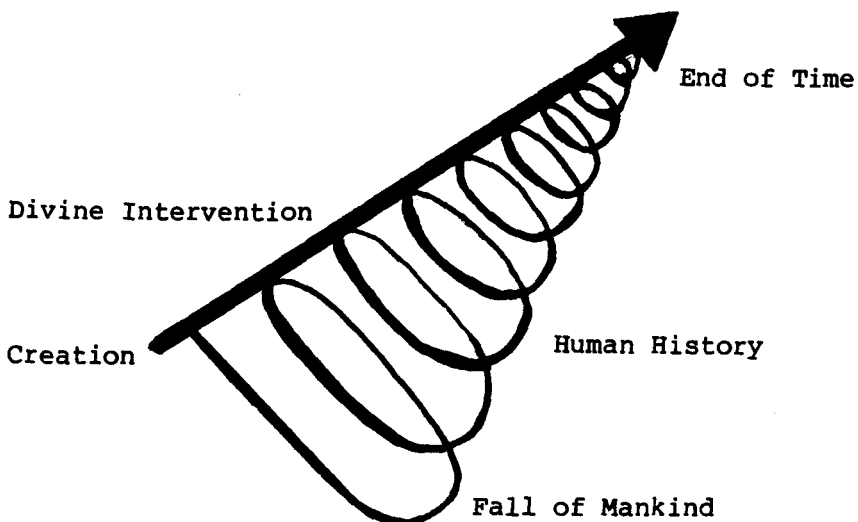
told in the same way or in the same genre. The progression of meanings, and the complexes of meaning, are very different. Of the differences, two seem most pertinent to considerations of form. First, the experience of chronological time is suspended in the cycles; the present, the moment of witnessing a cycle, becomes all time. Second, and to some extent flowing from the first, the history of the cycles is shaped to mirror the soul's progress towards God. This places the significance of the events in the audience, each of whom is a pilgrim in the process of the cycle. Each individual repeats the significance of the cycle of history in his or her own spiritual quest. The experiences of omnitemporality and cyclical repetition may introduce us to a more vertical, synchronic and radically typological approach to the cycles and assist us in our task of recovering their meanings.

The typological approach gives symbolic meaning to actions by relating them to the past and to the future, just as, in a moment of ethical choice, knowledge and memory of the past, and belief or expectation for the future, combine in the moment of choosing. The present renders past and future relevant, and past and future shape the present.¹⁰ The typological pattern is a dialectical one, and

¹⁰ See W. Stevenson (revising and extending Bultmann) 144; cf Allen (Ethical 254) on prudence, a moral faculty, being comprised of memory (past), intelligence (present) and foresight (future). The understanding that the story--memory and forecast--of the Bible is important to Christianity because it, itself, creates and re-creates a meaning for all time, has been accented since the reactions against "remythologizing," urged by Bultmann and others. For Augustine, "the past and future may be apprehended only in and through that present" (Vance in Lyons and Nichols 20).

each discrete event calls up oppositions, repetitions and correspondences. Frye has discussed the relations of typological thinking, causal thinking and diachronicity at some length, and argues that the unique repeatability of Christian myth is what makes its structure diachronic, linear (Code espec. 81-84). I would argue, for the cycles, at least, that the typological habit of mind encourages a cyclical view of history--events forever repeat themselves in human experience and human time. I would reverse two of Frye's observations in approaching the cycles: for Frye, human time is diachronic and the Messianic quest--Christ's life on earth--is cyclical. In the cycle dramas, human experience seems to follow a cyclical pattern of turnings and reversals; God's interventions in human time travel along a diagonal line, ever moving towards salvation and the union of God and man at the end of time. Human experience in the cycles is characterized by repeated turnings towards hope and then despair; the spiral of that experience meets and is contrasted with the diagonal line of God's meetings with humankind.

The general structure of the cycles may be diagrammed like this:



Mankind's progress is toward union with God and so keeps returning to the line of God's interventions in human history. But neither the race of mankind nor the individual soul takes a straight route toward that union. The upward swing that completes each cycle of repetition brings man closer to God and represents a higher stage in the process, or a "dialectical expansion from one 'level' of understanding to another" (Frye, Code 225). The ensuing downswing, however, seems inevitable in the cycles. The swings toward and away from God illustrate man's mediate nature, set between antitheses: spiritual and animal, saved and damned. The structure that reflects and shapes the meaning of the plays juxtaposes the linear or teleological conception of human history, a God's-eye view of the world, against the most characteristic medieval symbol of man's life on earth as an individual and as a species: the cycle or wheel of fate or fortune.

An approach to the cycles that reads them as if they were pilgrimage narratives allows for both the linear and the cyclical, and encourages us to seek the significance of the historical events. Each member of the audience may be thought of as a pilgrim, a Mankind or Everyman figure. Some of the critical understandings we bring to the morality plays might well be applied to the cycles. Critical comments in the past have suggested that we might approach the cycles

in this way,¹¹ but practice has not followed. We have distinguished moralities from the cycles based in part on a distinction between ethics and history:

Unlike the morality plays, which chiefly focus on human ethical choices, the Corpus Christi drama was most significantly concerned with the ways God has allowed himself to be known in time" (Kolve 3).

To segregate ethics from history in this way is to ignore the medieval assimilatio of the literal and the figurative, the historical and the allegorical, the typological and the tropological, the poem and the world. The four-fold method of interpretation stressed that all four senses could be carried simultaneously in the literal meaning, and Frye and others have noted that moving from one level to the next is a dialectical process of knowing that gives "the sense of a continuous movement going into itself" (Code 222-3). Understanding begins at the literal level, sense experience, moves to the allegorical level, the world as a symbol (typological), then to the moral or tropological level, and finally to the anagogic

¹¹See, for example, Medwall's Nature, where the character of Man is the audience. See Schmitt 29. Others who have noted that the audience of the cycles may allegorically be understood as "Mankind" in the moralities include Warning: "the congregation . . . acts the role of Mankind" (267); Sutton: "Even in the secular moralities the structural similarity to the mystery cycles is not hard to find" (111) and "The main character in the cycle as a whole is a collective persona, the people of God, the Mystical Body of Christ" (81); Righter: "those excitable spectators in the streets who, as audience, were entrusted in each play with the central role of Mankind" (19); Davenport: the cycles show "conflict within the mind between contrary impulses" (8).

or spiritual level--"the center of the beatific vision that fulfills faith" (Frye, Code 223). To structure the four levels of interpretation of Scripture as a process of spiritual knowing, each level expanding and building upon the last, is, I believe, to picture a cycle of knowing that spirals ever upward, an inverted conical helix of widening circles. This is a cyclical and teleological conception of human existence and knowing.

The "Mankind" of the morality experiences a progressive revelation, and passes in his pilgrimage of life certain significant milestones of human moral and spiritual experience, points on the line of movement toward God. Certain characters in the morality are aspects of the Mankind figure himself, and their relations are emblematic of ethical relations within the individual. If we take the audience, the object of significance of the action of the cycles, as the protagonist or focus of the plays, those for whom the original actions of salvation history were performed, and for whom that history is re-created, a wholly new conception of the structure, unity and affect of the cycles emerges. Instead of seeing the characters on the stage in terms of the saved and the damned, for example, we may begin to see that one-dimensional characters who demonstrate pride, or rebelliousness, or doubt are emblematic of ethical relationships within and between individuals, as well as emblematic of rungs on the ladder of spiritual understanding. The difficulties that beset characters in the cycles are problems that beset "Everyman," too, and they must be experienced and overcome if the soul is to regain the road of its pilgrimage towards God.

The affect, meaning and structure of each of the cycles may be expected to differ, even when they re-create the same sequence of events. Each may be conceived as a perturbation or variation of the dialectical structure, which mirrors the process of a spiritual pilgrimage. Rather than study the action of the cycles in a linear fashion--what follows what and the inevitability or appropriateness of each ensuing action--we might adopt the approach that Bernard Beckerman has urged for all drama, a vertical rather than a horizontal method of analysis (36). Such a method studies units of actions and complexes of affect and meaning rather than discrete events or isolated responses, and gives more weight to the tension and interplay among activities than to their order in time. It seeks "underthoughts," echoes and resonances that create meaning from images and metaphors. These echoes may be inside or outside of the text, and the pasts, presents and futures of members of the audience are as much a part of the drama as the events staged.

As Allen has stressed for the literature of the Middle Ages:

the activity of assimilatio of which the text is composed does not exhaust itself within the borders of the text, but demands, as a part of one's proper attention to it, a simultaneous attention to an extrinsic meaning and to a tropologically defined audience" (Ethical 248).

The "vertical" method relates the text with a multiplicity of meanings, much as typology relates events, pulling them off of the "time-line," out of the present and future, and adding layers of meaning on a vertical axis. The assimilative and euhemeristic habit of mind

of the Middle Ages suggests that we should bring to the cycles a readiness to relate salvation history to the history of the growth of the individual soul, and to the personal and social histories, insofar as we can imagine them, of members of the medieval audience. Although the events of the cycles are believed to have happened once in time, those events have an omnitemporal afterlife. Every act is repeatable, and every act has resonance in the future. Just as the crucifixion is both a temporal event and "not a temporal event at all, but simply an unchanging moment in the logic of the Christian nomenclature . . . It 'goes on constantly'" (Burke, Rhetoric 251), so the sins and strivings of mankind, their cyclical movements toward and away from God, go on constantly. Seen in this way, the actions of the cycles include all of the similar actions of the audience, and their anachronism is typologically appropriate and ethically necessary.

In production, the plays often arouse in an audience the sense that experience is being made present in an unmediated and very "real" way--they create a "virtual Present," in Langer's terms.¹² At other times, the images, language and action distance the audience from participating, and arouse responses such as awe, wonder, fear or desire that most often result from a perception of being separate from what is re-created on the stage. What we have called "anachronism"

¹² Langer has argued that "the drama is not strictly literature at all. It has a different origin, and uses words only as utterances." She judges that drama uses a different mode of producing illusion, a semblance of experienced events: "instead of creating a virtual Past it creates a virtual Present" ("Primary Illusions" 233).

in the cycles is in part a dialectical relationship that is necessary in order to make meaning for the audience. Like the viewer of a Breughel painting, the audience of the cycles is often "suspended between realistic and emblematic modes of perception" (Snow, "Meaning" 43, 47, 51). Negotiating these two modes requires that we begin to perceive the realistic in terms of the emblematic and the emblematic as what governs the realistic--to adopt a symbolic view of temporal life, to learn to "live a story." God is to be the author of that story, just as he is the spectator in the theatrum mundi in which man acts (cf Allen, Ethical 291). Significantly, God is on the high scaffold during much of the action in the cycles. Man plays the play before God, the supreme audience who judges the play of the cycles and of the lives of his creatures. The cycles take place in the theatrum vitae humanae,

Built with starre galleries of hye ascent,

In which Jehove doth as spectator sit (in Burns 302).

The realistic mode, that which says to the audience: de te fabula (as Frye has noted in connection with romance, Secular 186), seen from the values of the emblematic mode, evokes a self-consciousness in the face of the Other, God. The audience begins to see its own actions, re-created in the realistic portions of the cycles that distance the audience very little, from God's perspective. This process re-creates the meaning of habitual responses and the audience becomes conscious of them and learns to revise expression or will suppression. The didactic method of the cycles teaches new ways of thinking about actions and acting: "Teaching, like persuasion,

employs a dissociative rhetoric aimed at breaking down habitual response" (Frye, Anatomy 329). In the case of the cycles, the dissociation is between the emblematic and the realistic, much as it is in the Bible: "Traditionally, the Bible speaks with the voice of God and through the voice of man. Its rhetoric is thus polarized between the oracular, the authoritative, and the repetitive on the one hand, and the more immediate and familiar on the other" (Frye, Code 214).

This conception of the dialectical relations of immediacy and distance, realistic and emblematic, oracular and familiar, goes some length in resolving difficulties some critics have expressed with gauging the aesthetic distance the cycles encourage. "Distance," a psychological concept, may be manipulated to varying affective ends. Just because a pageant or sequence of action seems to place itself at a remove from the audience's experience does not mean that it is less likely to evoke a strong response. God's emblematic language and actions say to the audience "you can never be Who I am," but that distance is powerful to evoke those feelings that arise from the rift between man and God: terror, anxiety, wonder, awe, and so forth. As psychology has taught us, a certain distance from potentially overwhelming feelings is necessary before constructive change may begin. Looking objectively on the past distances us from the present, but may help us to stop self-destructive patterns of behaviour in the present that, if directly addressed, might terrify us. In the experiential process of the cycles, as in the psychological process, distancing is a necessary component of change (see Scheff

502). Without "psychic distance," the audience might feel too great a distress, and "distress which is unbearable is repressed" (Scheff 486). In order to freely "play" with what may cause distress, one must move between participation and observation. In the case of the play of the cycles, the audience moves among a variety of perspectives, from the closeness of feeling as if they participate in events to the distance of observing God's actions, to observing earthly actions in which they have participated or might participate from God's distanced perspective. These are not the only reasons for manipulating distance in the drama, but they are sufficient to suggest that we analyze shifts in distance as an aspect of the process of the cycles, and assess in what ways distance affects meaning.

The emblematic mode generally subordinates action to extraordinarily powerful words and images, whereas a more realistic mode renders actions more important. Critics have noted the stasis or formality of some of the action in the cycles, and the one-dimensional quality of many of the characters, often with negative aesthetic judgments. Stasis and one-dimensionality do not necessarily discourage the audience from identifying with what is happening on the stage. Indeed, the less detail and characterization that is presented, the less there is for the audience to deny--it becomes less possible to say "this is not me." Mythic stories, fables, parables present characters in this one-dimensional and static way: "Characterization, for example, interferes with the simplicity of myth narration; detailed settings are an intrusion on its universality" (McCune 72). Both closeness and distance are needed in order fully to experience the

spiritual and ethical process of the cycles. Part of the playmakers' art is to manipulate words, images and actions in order to control the affective and cognitive experience that will be most likely to result in a personally accepted meaning. Universals in the omnitemporality of the cycles must be applied to the present lives of the audience, and a fine control of distance is a part of communicating universals.

The dialectical relations of universals and particulars, the emblematic and the realistic, gives a shape to the cycles that, like the casuistical method of moral theology, selects specific, concrete ethical problems of incremental difficulty. Each new situation presents a potential conflict or dissonance, and each builds upon and extends what was learned from the last, just as the process of four-fold interpretation builds and extends meaning. This is an affective and ethical method rather than an intellectual and doctrinal one. The importance of this process and of reconciling what we have separated in the cycles into a dialectical relationship is that we may begin to organize the parts that we have noted into a whole. Further, such an approach urges us to attend to the most obvious features of a cycle, instead of saturating more oblique images with extrinsic layers of meaning. With Snow, who has expressed concern about the state of Breughel criticism, which is much like the state of criticism of the cycles, I would urge that we take Blake's instruction: "He who wishes to see a perfect Whole, / Must see it in its Minute Particulars, Organiz'd" (Jerusalem 91: 21-22). The problem has been to see the "Minute Particulars" and

to find a way to organize them in what often seems to be a vast and disjunctive amalgam of stories, sense impressions, doctrinal teaching and humor.

Two questions and their possible answers might help us to raise pertinent "Minute Particulars" and to organize them in a whole. First we might ask what it is that the cycles re-create, of what are they mimetic? An answer that could spur renewed inquiry would be that the cycles imitate the pilgrimage of the soul. Indeed, for many in the present, all poetry is mimetic in this way: "The poet imitates plot, character, or human speech as a means of imitating the movement of the soul, which is his ultimate object (E. Schwartz 5; cf Langer, Vivas, Fergusson). To imitate the "movement of the soul," in Christian terms, is to imitate the progress of the soul's search for God. Such an imitation becomes, in the process of the cycles, "a process of 're-creation' or 're-constitution' of 'reality'" (Berke 49) by the dialectical relationship between the cycles and the Real and between the realistic and the emblematic in the cycles. These relations are metonymic--the cycles take place in the material world and so can only represent a part of the whole--and metaphoric--they come as close as is possible in the material world to referring to all that is unknown, both what is outside in the cosmos and inside of human beings.

A second question the answer to which might assist a critical method is: "what is the purpose or intent of the cycles?" Most would give an answer something like: "to delight and to bring the audience to a deeper experience of the Christian faith." This response would help us to raise the particulars significant to this purpose and relate

them to the process of the whole. For example, one could assess the affective ways in which a cycle seeks to bring the audience to salvation, and the stages of the soul's journey toward God. Bringing an individual to faith requires more than a movement of the intellect: it necessitates bringing that individual to a feeling of repentance, and arousing a sense of hope, some expectation of forgiveness, and moving to action. We might, then, assess how an audience is moved to repentance and hope of forgiveness in a given series of pageants. This requires that we consider what complexes of moods and motivations repentance and acceptance of forgiveness may require. Of the many models available for such an inquiry, we might choose Moravcsik's description:

Both forgiving and repenting involve complexes of judgments and attitudes. The relevant judgments, however, can be made only when the agent is in a certain emotional state or (has) adopted a certain attitude . . . (repentance) involves both the judgment that I have done harm, and the attitude of regret. For those incapable of being in the emotional state of regret, repentance is impossible ("Understanding" 222).

Our assumption that a cycle seeks the salvation of its audience might issue in an assessment of the ways in which the audience is brought to a feeling of regret, the nuances of that feeling, its inversions and permutations, as well as its resonances and repetitions, and its relations to other feelings, moods or motivations aroused in the sequence. Such a critical exercise requires more than the intellectual participation of the critic: it requires an imaginative

and conscious emotional participation, as well--that we do what the "affective fallacy" would prohibit, and let our feelings influence our critical approach and judgments (See Wimsatt and Beardsley; cf Maguire, "Intellectualistic Fallacy"). This is not an easy task, and it requires that we attend most to responses that can be objectively linked with aspects of the work. The assessment of the ways in which the cycles bring the audience through an experiential process, a process of coming to salvation, might encourage us to attend to how feelings are aroused, dissipated, translated, allowed to be expressed, or repressed. We might note "turnings" from one image or response to another, moments of aporia, vertigo, cognitive dissonance, harmony (see M. Brown, "On Turning Points"). Manipulation of distance, genre expectations raised and satisfied or broken, emotive/cognitive balancing, all of these are pertinent to our inquiry into the affective and didactic process of the cycles. We might discuss what responses and emotions characterize God, what the effect of God's emotions might be on audience, and what sorts of responses arise in the presence of God, from terror to gaudia Christi. We might assess in what ways feelings may contribute to knowledge, the sapientia that comes from sapio, to taste, savor (Burke, Rhetoric 54). The connection between emotions and ethics in a given cycle might be discussed, or how a given feeling might be activated to issue in an ethical trait--for example, how love expressed produces caritas. Medieval ladders of spiritual knowing, modern formulations of the cognitive, educational or psychological processes, or contemporary works in the psychology of religion or ethics might help us to draw conclusions

about the process of a given cycle and its potential success. The possibilities are endless, but they all arise out of a de-emphasis on chronological history and a re-emphasis on the meaning of the history to the internal spiritual quest.

The cycles re-create the scriptural narrative in order to re-create their audiences, and the plays reveal specific religious, ethical and cultural goals, as do all myths. That they purport to be historical made little difference to people in the Middle Ages, when legends were as well accepted as history, and makes little difference to us, now. They are powerfully affecting stories that may change the ways in which people conceptualize and act in their world. The understanding that "biography is fiction vulnerable to the rules of verification" (Hislop "Interrogative" TLS 7/1/83 710) could be rephrased to read: "History is myth vulnerable to the rules of verification." Both history and myth comprise narratives whose meaning is governed by a selection process, first, then by the symbolic treatment it is given. The result is the meaning re-created by an intended audience of feeling and thinking social beings.

We must put ourselves in the place of the intended audience and approach the cycles in an attitude of engaged interest and emotional receptivity, imaginatively believing and desiring to know. Such an approach is likely to result in a new understanding of the therapeutic and re-creative art of the cycles. The cycles encourage the audience to accept a whole symbolic universe and to take its place in it, and bring the audience through an experience of joy and pain--"joyful lamentation"--that restores individual and communal equilibrium.

The audience, as a community, is demonstrated to have worth, it is worth Christ's dying for, and the audience may leave the cycles recreated in God's image and feeling renewed hope. Despite the twistings and turnings, the repeated cycles and stumblings, the audience of the cycles learns that: "Thou mayest triumph over sin. Thou mayest, Thou mayest! What glory!" (Steinbeck, East of Eden). The process of the cycles teaches them how to triumph by schooling thoughts and feelings that will govern actions. This is the ethical end of an affective poetic that is concerned with religious process--a ritual poetic.

Ritual Re-creation

We have been attempting to resolve some of the dichotomies raised in our study of the drama in order to suggest that the works are unified in experiential and symbolic ways that our more conventional and "literary" approaches are not likely to reveal. We have noted that the success or failure of the cycles has more to do with their ability to transform the audience's perceptions of the world than with conventional judgments about their dramatic art. We have also stressed the relations of the cycles to life, relations highlighted in their mimesis of the soul's pilgrimage towards union with God, a process and a "real-life" spiritual experience. We have also considered the sacramental significance of their symbolism and iconography, the ethical resonance of the typological mode, and the cycles' qualities of game and play. Some practical methods have been suggested by which we might approach the cycles with an attitude of active and participatory concern, as if we sought to assimilate what the cycles re-create into our own personal present.

But we still have not suggested an overarching concept under which we may organize our observations and we have overstepped the limits of studying the cycles as "drama qua drama" (Prosser). We cannot have recourse to any traditional approach to dramatic literature to explain some of the qualities of symbolism, sacramentalism, and religious belief that constitute the cycles. The designation "drama" encourages us to bring limited and, in this case, false, expectations to these

medieval texts. Their literary qualities are subordinate to their didactic, religious and ethical purposes. We are still likely to surface from the text with little more than a mass of interesting observations, lacking an organization that might render the particulars significant in their relations to the whole.

We are at a distance from the significance of the events staged, and from the audience to whom those events were to be made relevant. Further, we are not likely, except in ritual, to "live the past as a real presence, as a force with which to reckon for good or ill" (Mazis 296), to hold up the mirrors of our lives to what the cycles represent. The re-creation of the cycles, a significant form of play, is a special form of representation, a "'representation' (that) is really identification, the mystic repetition or re-presentation of the event" (Huizinga, Homo 15). The medieval audience is to live the story of all time in and for all time. No class of experience but "ritual" begins to account for or describe the relations of such a significant and symbolic drama to the daily lives of individuals and communities. The designation "ritual drama" offers us a more meaningful array of models to shape our discussion of the religious, individual and cultural significance of the cycles, and the ways in which that significance comes about--the text and its reception.¹³ The

¹³In the Middle Ages, cultural concerns were not distinguished from religious ones. If we were to approach the cycles only as "religious" drama, we would no doubt limit their sphere of significance: "Those who want to distinguish religious from secular life forget that, through most of the past and in the great majority of civilizations today, man never has had the first inkling that the laws of his society were anything but sacred" (Goodenough 91).

cycles are of the genus mixtus "ritual drama," an heuristic to appropriate criticism of them, and a descriptive generic term.

For those of us who have lost the sense of "living a story" that Allen has urged that we bring to all medieval literature, ritual is the most descriptive designation of an experience that may assimilate history and prophecy into a lived present. We still have some familiarity with commemorative rituals, those that re-create the past in the present and urge us to "partake of the past in a way that plays with or plays out the past in the present" (Mazis 297). In the course of such a ritual play, we gain knowledge of the present from the process of the past, redefine ourselves and our relationships to others, and may be transformed by assimilating the new images we have defined. This interpenetration of past and present, as Mazis has noted, is not simply a remembering--it is an integration: "the rite only has meaning as a carrying forward what is commemorated in the past event" (300). Translating the medieval sense of "living a story" into the modern terms that seem experientially closest to it, ritual terms, enables us more clearly to understand what the cycles attempt and how they accomplish it.¹⁴

We are in an age when both "ritual" and "myth" are just beginning to be redeemed from pejorative connotations, resonances of the false:

¹⁴Hardin summarizes various approaches to ritual that have significance for the scholar of the cycles. His summary shapes the direction of this discussion, although the level of abstraction of his essay is inconsistent, as seem some of his conclusions.

"empty ritual," and "only a myth." We have begun to recognize the fictional and communally negotiated nature of reality and the persistence, perhaps the necessity, of thinking in myths to govern our everyday living. Our myths often are not religious, they may no longer be shared with the entire community of which we are a part, and they may no longer confer a "divine right" on certain earthly structures, powers and potentates, but we live by these myths just the same. Each represents an ideal, and we have images and stories that suggest how these ideals may be attained in the "real world." The relationship between the mythic and the real cultivates and nurtures our desires, strengthens our resolves, and affects the choices we make. The myth both judges the reality and allows it peaceably to continue its uninterrupted existence: since we are striving to attain the ideal, to live the myth, the real is only a temporary stage, to be transcended in the process of attaining the ideal--economic security, power and prestige, heaven, whatever it might be. In the present, however, our myths often work to deny the reality of the "unideal."¹⁵ In the Middle Ages, they served to highlight the fallen nature of man, as well as his potential for transcendence. Our present commemorative rituals are less likely to be communal than theirs, and more likely to be explained away in social, economic or psychoanalytic terms than interpreted in religious ones. We continue to have cultural and personal

¹⁵ "Thus the ideal of every state bureaucracy is moral rectitude, and the more corrupt and corrupting it is, the more it will stress this ideal" (Lefebvre 71). This dynamic is often said not to be the case in medieval England, a more "transparent" culture than ours. Such a conclusion is due for a re-evaluation.

ideals, myths to support them, and rituals to link them to the possibilities and processes of our own lives.

The nature, forms and functions of ritual are not among those concepts which we have defined to everyone's satisfaction, or of which we may now be certain. Indeed, "the nature of ritual has evaded even social scientists and theologians during the past decade" (Hardin 850), and no doubt has evaded even classicists and literary scholars, as well. We may agree, however, that rituals are communal, practiced by and in communities, and to a large extent defined by them, whether they are considered to be "official," or not:

Symbols and religions are passed from the officiating figures to their followers; but the beliefs which render them authentic, and the truth itself, are passed back from the people to the officiant (Burns 89).

We are not a part of the medieval community: we cannot say whether or not the audience of the cycles perceived them to be ritual experiences. Consciousness that a community observance is a ritual is not necessary in order for it to be a ritual. Indeed, such a perception might distract the audience and detract from the efficacy of the ritual. We must discuss the cycles as rituals in order better to account for their salient features and their potential religious, ethical and cultural impact. We can assess the ways in which the process of the cycles conforms to generally held understandings of the ritual process, and our conceptions of ritual, in turn, may inform our study and experience of the cycles.

what we have been discussing as the experience and process of the cycles is consonant with the most widely held conceptions of what rituals may be. They are cultic expressions that treat the audience as a community of believers, the Church or mystical body of Christ, and that encourage a feeling of communitas. The occasion of the playing of the cycles was a holiday, Corpus Christi day or Whitsuntide, and they were played at regular intervals, usually yearly. The plays effect a revelation; they communicate a mythic history directly known only to God by re-creating what is found in God's word, scripture. The audience of the cycles is connected with the transcendent, senses the proximity of God, and learns how to transcend its temporal limitations in order to be redeemed, united with God. The audience crosses the threshold of time and place in order to identify itself with its own history and prophecy. Just as in the Mass "ritual action occurs in the context of the timeless present and unlocalized space" (Hardison), in the cycles, action is made symbolic in the omnitemporal and omni-spatial present. As Travis has noted in connection with the Chester cycle, a cycle achieves its "desired therapeutic effects" by blurring opposites, including rite and drama, by the "power of ritual to transubstantiate the past into the present" (Travis). Outside of time and space, and outside of normal social interactions, the world of the cycles offers the distance from the culture, and the closeness to the cultural ideal, that is needed to address directly the most pressing questions of mankind's life on earth, including the relations of individuals to community and to God.

The commemorative ritual of the cycles brings the present into collision with the past and future to effect a resymbolization of the present--a conversion to a new way of imaging the self and its relations:

Christian identity is the result of a 'collision' between an individual's personal identity narrative . . . and the Christian narrative . . . collision results in confession (Stroup, drawing on K. Barth and H. R. Niebuhr).

This "collision" of narratives is effected in the cycles by the dialectical relations of the emblematic and the realistic, the transcendent and the very mediievally temporal, ritual and drama. All literature may offer a new story that collides with the reader's "personal identity narrative" and so effect a readjustment of values, at least for the time span of one's contact with the literature. But the cosmic dimension and the absolute significance of the Christian myth in a devoutly Christian culture renders the dramatic re-creation of the stories of the cycles more lasting, more powerful, and more frequently reinforced in the culture. The cycles retell the myth that

provides a source of authority for rituals . . . The ritual is, so to speak, the epiphany of the myth, the manifestation or showing forth of it in action (Frye, Secular 155).

The story of salvation history establishes the typology of all other myths, stories and the Christian life--it assimilates all of these and is assimilated by them. Similarly, the experience of the commemorative ritual of the cycles draws power from and gives meaning

to all other Christian rituals in the audience's experience. The Eucharist, for example, is meaningless without an understanding of the Incarnation and Crucifixion, at the same time as a familiarity with the ritual of the Mass deepens response to the events of the Incarnation and Crucifixion. Without the story, there could be no doctrine or sacrament, and without the doctrine and sacrament, the story would not be held significant. The cycles re-create the origins of official ritual events and of the ethical code that informs the Christian life. All religious symbols gain meaning from the story, and all earthly actions become symbolic when interpreted by it.

By placing "proximate acts in ultimate contexts" (Geertz 37-38) the ritual drama effects a turning from one way of seeing to another; it invests the world with meaning by rendering its objects and actions transcendently symbolic. This ethical dimension of the cycles, the symbolic nature of action, has not been well understood, and has resulted in some confusion as to whether the plays may be taken as ritual drama. Most recently, Hardin has stated:

We now see that although there was a shared belief in the transcendent meaning of the events enacted, the principal effect of, say, the grisly realism of the York Crucifixion is to draw the audience closer to the event not through symbols but through representation of recognizable human experiences, familiar human types" (853).

In the cycles, the "recognizable" and the "human" is shown to have the highest symbolic meaning: "like symbol, spectacle and action dis-

solve into meaning" (Edwards, "Techniques" 69; cf Ricoeur, "Model"). Human actions may be emblematic, hence the inclusion of "grisly realism" in many of the icons of the Middle Ages. The human responses, it could be argued, were a part of the symbol of, say, the Crucifixion. The interpenetration of symbol and action, the emblematic and the realistic, the past and the present and future, is what gives the Crucifixion of Christ its saving power and its awful immediacy as a symbol. And the Incarnation and Crucifixion render human action significant. The power of the icon and the healing power of the commemorative ritual arises in part of this manipulation of the symbolic and the sensual, the unknown and the known:

Real life, in short, heals itself by becoming a character in the allegory. The world of truth can be reached at any point from the world of fact, simply by naming it properly, and by telling the story (Allen, Ethical 312).

We have discussed the audience as "a character in the allegory," and suggested that the critic most appropriately would attempt to participate in the text in this way. The subject matter of the cycles is their effect--they bring the audience through a process that is the pilgrimage of the soul. The audience assimilates and is assimilated into the text and so may be transformed (Allen, Ethical 296). Thus the cycles re-create in their audience what they represent--the salvation of mankind. The cycles are both an anamnesis, a commemorative ritual, and a transformative ritual.

It is well known that "rituals are believed to be efficacious; they never exist for their own sake" (Hardin 848). We have no way of knowing whether the medieval audience considered the cycles to effect a change, although indulgences were granted for attendance at the Chester cycle (Chester, Deimling, ed. 1.1). The drama was defended because it could transform the audience (Davidson, ed. Treatise, intro. 2). From what we know of the cycles and of their reception, we may judge that they were thought to be efficacious for stirring the audience to faith, as well as efficacious as celebrations, "presented for the service and worship of God" (Davidson, ed. Treatise, intro. 1).

As celebrations, the cycles were developed to honor a specific day, Corpus Christi day in some places, Whitsuntide in others. Corpus Christi day focuses on the body of Christ, the mystical body of whom is the community, the Church. The Whitsuntide celebration centers on the bringing of knowledge from heaven to earth--Pentecost, the descent of the Holy Spirit and a figure of the second coming of Christ. Pentecost commemorates the full knowledge of new life in Christ and the end of Christ's visible life and the beginning of his mystical life in the Church (Sullivan cited in P. E. Johnson 41). Whitsuntide ends the Easter season and the scriptural sequence of the year. After Pentecost, a new cycle begins, returning to the Old Testament. Both celebrations were occasions for "the commemoration of all of God's mysteries . . . and the unification of mankind into one society under the rule of God" (J. Taylor, "Dramatic Structure"). Commemoration

and communitas are two important ritual goals. Only a descriptive term that allows us to explore the ritual dimensions of the celebration may do justice to the cycles, "a paraliturgical form of spirituality" (Dunn, "Popular Devotion"). The cycles celebrate the participation of the audience in Christ's mystical body, the union of earth and heaven, and communicate the knowledge with which Christ endows us-- knowledge of how we may attain our salvation, union with God, by our actions on earth. Far from "existing for their own sakes," the cycles existed as commemorative, transformative and celebratory rituals.

Whether a ritual is efficacious is dependent upon the will and participation of the audience: no ritual can be said to be efficacious except as it is believed to be efficacious. The cycle dramas have the power to transform and to integrate: to integrate the self--align and harmonize feelings; to integrate the individual into the community; and to integrate the community into the mystical body of Christ and so into the cosmic plan. Just as the original actions that the cycles re-create saved mankind, the re-creation of the cycles may save mankind. The playing of a cycle, a ritual playing, may be "effective in its repetitions as it was in its origins" (Cope, Theater 171). Salvation history is re-created and commemorated in the cycles for the same reasons as the original acts were taken: for the glory of God and the redemption of mankind. The subject matter of the cycles is their potential effect.

In his detailed account of the Mass as "theatrical," Hardison notes that early interpretations present the Mass as an "elaborate

drama with definite roles assigned to the participants and a plot whose ultimate significance is nothing less than a 'renewal of the whole plan of redemption' through the re-creation of the 'life, death and resurrection' of Christ" (Christian Rite 39). These words aptly could describe the cycles. Their drama is less "elaborate" and far more accessible to believers than that of the Mass, and the cycles were played at a time when people witnessed the Mass and did not take the Eucharist, did not actively participate in the commemoration of the redemptive plan. The ritual power of the cycles is enhanced by their drama and their action. The plan of redemption is more likely to be assimilated into the minds, hearts, wills and lives of believers. Dramatic ritual re-creates not only what has happened and its significance, but how it has happened and how it must, in the spiritual progress of each believer, happen again and again. They represent cycles of belief as well as a cycle of history, and offer models for imitation and a process of experiential knowing that few official church rituals could accomplish. The audience, "while achieving a sense of revelation . . . stabilizes a sense of direction" (Geertz, "Religion as" 9; cf 11-12). Revelation and direction, a knowledge of the past and a program for the future, are two of the components necessary to the experience of salvation and to living a life whose choices are willed in conformity with a religious code.

The cycles, commemorative, celebratory and transformative rituals, re-create their significance in the present, encourage lasting changes in patterns of thought and action, and promote a sense of communitas.

They explain and contain the original significance of all Christian rituals and mediate between earth and heaven--make accessible to fallen mankind a way of emulating Christ and achieving salvation. Only an approach to the dramas that addresses their ritual dimensions can fully account for all of their features. The cycles grew out of and were sustained by the needs of their communities, as do all rituals, and their "webs of significance" (Geertz) are attached in the culture and society which gave them birth, and to which the cycles offered a rebirth, a re-creation, in return.

CHAPTER III

FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE: THE N-TOWN CYCLE

Each of the four surviving English cycles is both unique in its selection process and dramatic technique, and remarkably similar to the others. Every cycle has its origins in Scripture: "Of holy wrytte þis game xal bene / and of no fablys be no way" (N-Town Fo. 9v, ll. 520-21). Although they share a configuration of the stories and interpretations essential to medieval Christian faith (see Kolve chs. 3, 4) the ritual process of a specific cycle is shaped by its particulars. I have selected the N-Town cycle to demonstrate some of the ways in which this new aesthetic might govern critical practice. N-Town is mimetic of a process of transformation that parallels the significance of the events re-created in the plays, and it offers that transformative process to the audience by the responses it evokes from them. In addition to the doctrinal, typological and thematic ways in which the cycle may be unified, N-Town coheres as a mimesis of a pilgrimage, a ritual and spiritually regenerative journey towards death and towards union with Christ, everlasting life. In order to trace the progress of the pilgrimage, we will attempt to see the cycle whole--to stand back and contemplate the entire cathedral, accretions and all, whole.

The construction of a cycle is often compared to the construction of a medieval cathedral. The analogy need not suggest a disunified

structure, but as it is often made, the analogy draws attention to the layers of accretion of the plays, to their composite nature, and hence draws attention away from their unity of design. The analogy facilitates discussion of paleographical information, details concerning interpolated folios, varying papers and scribal hands, and these matters often support a critical judgment that a work is not dramatically unified. Rather than assess the dramatic success of a cycle as we have it, scholars often attempt to create an "Ur-text" for study. Peter Travis, for example, one of the most recent to extend the cathedral analogy to the cycles, attempted to peel away the layers of accretion, to recover the design of the Chester cycle as it may have been before alterations and additions. Guided by external and internal evidence, Travis performed "minor textual surgery" on the extant versions, and studied a Chester cycle that exists in no one of the five surviving manuscripts. This reconstruction is to be a 'preferred' text of the cycle (68): Travis deems it "appropriate (when possible) to recover the plays' designs before their decline" (68). The audiences of the cycles presumably had no sense of the rise or decline of this ritual art form; so long as the playing of the cycles was entertaining and in some way addressed their spiritual and cultural concerns, they attended. We have no reason to believe that a fifteenth-century audience judged that the cycle plays were in decline. Travis's practice seems to arise out of the common assumption that we "know better" what the plays should have been than the people who compiled, supported and witnessed them. In the case of the Chester cycle, the cathedral analogy was used to support the

contention that "a few of the cycle's accretions had to be removed not as a desecration of any of its integral parts but as an act of reverence for the unity of the whole" (69). Our study of N-Town will take a different tack: out of reverence for the unity of the N-Town cycle, we will leave it whole.

Reconstructive surgery is, perhaps, more defensible in the case of the Chester cycle, about the playing of which we know a good deal, than it is in that of the N-Town cycle, whose provenance is unknown and debated. Five manuscripts survive of Chester; only one of N-Town. The process of peeling away the layers of accretion to reach an "Ur-cycle" would, in this case, risk a "desecration" of the cycle's "integral parts." Because no records directly shed light on the playing of the cycle, and because we have only internal evidence for its development, the operation of reconstructing a "preferred text" seems less responsible than taking the manuscript we have and studying its possible relations to the fifteenth-century audience for which it was intended. The N-Town manuscript (British Library Cotton Vespasian D. viii) is in different papers and hands, and interpolated folios attest to its composite nature. The manuscript is described in detail in the edition of K. S. Block (Ludus Coventriae) and elsewhere; a facsimile of the manuscript is available (Meredith and Kahrl, N-Town Plays) and the cycle is soon to be available in a new edition (Spector, N-Town) with a new descriptive apparatus. These ample and readily

available descriptions obviate the need for a description of the manuscript in a study of the scope and intention of this one.¹

It has not always been accepted practice to discuss a cycle as a dramatic and playable whole, with minimal concern for the layers of accretion of, or interpolations and intercalations in, the manuscript. (On the critical violence done to the cycles, and in support of their unity, see Woolf 303-4.) We have denied to the cycles an understanding that changes in a popular text relate dialectically with changing cultural values, an assumption we might bring to myth, for example. When we discuss myth, we assume that stories and interpretations will shift from age to age--that they will change to reflect changing cultural needs. It is helpful to perceive the Christian mythic drama of the Middle Ages as analogous to its sources in Scripture, not only in subject matter, but in compilation and function. Based as they are on the Bible, given their comprehensive scope, and assuming the limited literacy of many in their audiences, the cycles

¹N-Town was designated Ludus Coventriae in the editions of J. O. Halliwell (1841) and K. S. Block (1922). This has resulted in some confusion with the Coventry cycle (of which a few plays survive). In a desire to avoid this confusion, some began to call the plays the "Hegge cycle" after an owner of the manuscript, Robert Hegge (pronounced as "hedge"). Both the facsimile of the manuscript (Meredith and Kahrl) and Stephen Spector's forthcoming edition use the designation "N-Town cycle," the practice we shall follow. This name has the advantage of clearly connecting with the Banns or Proclamation of the text: "we gynne oure play / In N.town" (Fo. 9v, ll. 526-27). "N" stands in for the Latin "nomen," a common practice in marriage documents and the like where the names of the parties were to be inserted. Although some have attempted to connect the cycle with a specific locale (Norwich, Norfolk), that the space is to be filled with the town name to which the plays travelled is well accepted. This study uses the Block edition. Folio and line numbers in parentheses will follow references to the N-Town cycle.

have the status of primary mythic works.

Both the Bible and the cycles are composite works developed over time by many writers and scribes. In both, commentary on the stories attempts to demonstrate their significance to a specific audience. Recent literary approaches to Scripture have defended the study of the Bible as a unified work, in part because it is the whole as it has come down to us that has had cultural and spiritual impact. We could, for example, plead Northrop Frye's case for the unity of the Bible for the unity of the cycle plays:

What matters is that "the Bible" has traditionally been read as a unity . . . It begins where time begins, with the creation of the world; it ends where time ends, with the Apocalypse, and it surveys human history in between, or the aspect of history it is interested in (Code xiii).

The cycle manuscripts we have were intended to be received as unities, to "influence the imagination" as unities. Each is substantially complete in its dramatization of the sacred events most significant to one audience at one medieval time. The compilation, emendation and reinterpretation of the Bible over time is as clearly analogous to the form and development of the cycles as is the construction of a medieval cathedral, as that analogy, accompanied by an assumption of disunity, has been used.

Formal similarities further support the analogy. Past studies of the dramas paradoxically have argued both for their unity of theme or purpose, and for their lack of unity, their composite and purely

episodic character. Like the Bible, whose "disregard of unity is quite as impressive as its exhibition of it . . ." (Frye, Code xvi), the cycles are both unified and not unified, coherent and not coherent. The unity and coherence of the Bible and of the cycle plays are most readily revealed by relating them to the spiritual life of individuals and societies. The Bible and the cycles are analogous in development, form and spiritual function, although aspects of their significance may differ. Both may be treated as unified and coherent wholes.

Dramatic and paleographic evidence also encourages us to read the N-Town cycle whole. Craig, who has dubbed it the "most intelligent" of the cycles (60), lauded its uniformity of tone. Hurrell, Kolve and others have noted its artistic sophistication; Woolf has rendered a positive appraisal of its thematic unity (309). The thematic coherence and dramatic consistency of the cycle support Spector's judgment that N-Town was compiled in transcription from other sources, and that one scribe organized, amended and expanded materials for performance ("Provenance" 76-78). Spector's work has confirmed the earlier opinion of Meredith and Kahrl that the manuscript was intended for use as a production text rather than as a reading manuscript (Facsimile vii). For some years it was mistakenly assumed that certain notations were a reader's marginalia (see, for example, Woolf 309) rather than stage directions. But we now know that the manuscript reflects what most likely was intended to be performed at least once, compiled and organized by one hand in the third quarter of the 15th century (Spector supports the date the manuscript bears, 1468, as the date of its transcription),

and likely played somewhere in East Anglia, the area to which its dialect points.²

Despite the support of N-Town's unity of conception, two issues, both arising out of internal evidence, confront the study of the cycle as a continuous process. The first is whether the cycle was played at one time, indeed, perhaps even in one year. The second is the question of how the cycle was staged. Both of these concerns bear on how the cycle was played and received.

As to the first, N-Town is unique in that it appears to have two "Passion" sequences, which are designated "The Passion Play . I" and "The Passion Play . II" in Block's edition. Although there is no repetition of events, the chronology of the cycle is unbroken, and the Proclamation, or "Banns," suggests that the cycle was played whole "Sunday next," the text, itself, suggests that Passion I and Passion II were played in alternate years: "The last yere we shewyd here Now wold we procede . . ." (Fo. 165, ll. 9, 17).

Passion Play I ends with a lament of the Virgin after Christ's betrayal and capture. A blank folio and the speeches of two "doctors" follows. Although Passion I does not seem to come to an "end," to

²Gail McMurray Gibson's work ("Bury") summarizes the pertinent history of and issues surrounding the debates over provenance and authorship. Because no extant town records reflect a cycle that conforms to N-Town's configuration, unless new documents surface, it is impossible to know the provenance with certainty. Lincoln, Norfolk, King's Lynn and Bury have been the most popular of the "homes" put forward, and Lincoln long has been the favorite. See also Anna J. Mill, "Miracle Plays," Wells Manual, 5th ed. 1339; and Stephen Spector ("Provenance").

close off the dramatic experience of a day, Passion II does open as if it were a beginning. The doctors offer a prayer to God for the healing and salvation of the audience, and then describe a procession of apostles and John the Baptist. At Fo. 165, where Block has designated the beginning of Passion II, the stage directions indicate that the procession should enter and that the players should take their scaffolds. Whether the Banns are earlier or later than this part of the manuscript is not clear, and we do not know whether the cycle was first played whole and then split into alternate parts, or vice versa. Alan Nelson has expressed the dilemma of the modern interpreter:

It is true that the two parts of the Passion Play were once produced in two successive years (Block, p. 271, ll. 5-20). But this is an observation based on a local stage direction and cannot preclude the possibility that the extant manuscript was assembled to expedite an unbroken performance which spanned several successive days. This is certainly the import of the Banns, which even if written for a somewhat different play, are still retained in the text ("Some Configurations" 146).

What suggests alternate playing, however, is more than "a local stage direction." Eight lines describe what was played "last yere," and that description conforms to what we have in Passion I. Before the eight-line description come four lines of intention and exhortation to remember what follows:

Be þe leue and soferauns of all-mythty god
 We intendyn to procede þe matere þat we lefte þe last zere
 where fore we be-seche zow þat zour wyllys be good
 to kepe þe passyon in zour mende þat xal be shewyd here.
 (165, 5-8).

Although the care of the compiler seems to diminish as the cycle wears on, perhaps an indication of haste in anticipation of a production, an oversight of nearly twelve lines is not characteristic of the careful compilation of the plays that have come before. Scholarly opinion is divided (see Swenson, Enquiry 35-6; Craig 243-9; Woolf 417, note 20, for example) and Rose has summed up the matter: "We have no certain knowledge how much of the Hegge cycle was performed continuously in any one year ("Staging" 211). In the face of this uncertainty, some studies have ignored the possible division of the cycle into two Passion sequences played separately (Coletti, "Spirituality," for example). To my knowledge, no study takes seriously the possibility that an audience did not see the entire cycle in one year, or has assessed the impact on the audience of ending a performance with Passion Play I, which closes with the betrayal and the Virgin's lament. Rose's certainty about the effect has, perhaps, discouraged further inquiry: "What we can be sure of, however, is that, if the performance ended with the completion of Passion Play I . . . the audience would have been left with a sharp sense of anticlimax" (Rose, "Staging" 211).

This study will give detailed attention to the process of the cycle and the analysis of the Passion sequences will consider the effect on audience of playing them in alternate years. Passion I will be discussed as a dramatically feasible ending to a dramatic ritual experience. Most studies give greater weight to the Passion sequences as the fulfillment of all that has come before. The emphasis of this study will be on the before--the ways in which the cycle prepares the audience to receive the events of each of the Passion sequences.

A second issue that confronts an approach to N-Town as a unified work is one of staging. The stage directions shift from Latin to a mix of Latin and English, to English. The Old Testament sequence has Latin directions; the Marian and Ministry plays Latin and English; Passion Plays I and II have English directions. Although it is possible to interpret this shift from Latin to English as, in itself, a process (arising, perhaps, out of a transcriber's desire to mesh the sections together while translating as few directions as possible), that shift has been used to conclude that each part of N-Town was staged differently. Kenneth Cameron and Stanley Kahrl have argued that N-Town would have been produced as a whole only with difficulty, since the Old Testament sequence seems to require staging on processional wagons, the Marian group a combination of processional wagons and a platea or unlocalized space, and the Passion Plays fixed scaffolds, or "mansions," around a platea--place-and-scaffold staging.

Cameron and Kahrl's reconstruction of N-Town's staging has been countered with some success by the argument that the entire cycle

was place-and-scaffold staged (Nelson, "Configurations," Gay, "The 'Stage'," and Rose, "Staging," for example). Much of the impetus for Cameron and Kahrl's reconstruction arose out of a desire to link the production of the cycle with what is revealed by production records from Lincoln, which they have accepted as N-Town's "home." Although it is possible that pageant wagons could have entered in procession and then gradually have been fixed to make the scaffolds of the Passion sequences, such a process would have been time-consuming and cumbersome. Given the continuity and simultaneity of much of the action in the Old Testament sequence (Lucifer's fall from Heaven to Hell, or Adam and Eve's leaving the garden and immediately encountering Cain and Abel, for instance), it is preferable to picture the entire cycle performed on scaffolds around a platea.³

The staging of a cycle shapes its meaning and reception. If N-Town used only place-and-scaffold staging, then each scaffold would have been used for a number of different actions, thereby spatially and visually connecting events and their meanings. If, for example, the sacrifice of Isaac were threatened on the hill later used for the Crucifixion, the connections between these two pageants would be made more explicit (see Nelson, "Configurations"). Beyond this, the audience would continuously be located inside the world of the play. It would not have needed to wait between pageants for the next wagon. A higher level of involvement in the experiential process of

³ On staging, see Southern (Medieval Theatre), Nelson ("Configurations," "Early Pictorial," and Medieval), Wickham (Early English), Rose ("Staging of Hegge"), Gay ("The 'Stage'"), and Cameron and "Staging," "N-Town," and Facsimile). Revels, Cawley, ed., 22-23 sums up the argument for stationary playing in the platea surrounded by scaffolds.

the cycle could be sustained. The actions of the play surround the audience, not the audience the action: they are in the midst of the play world rather than the play world being in their midst. This result of the staging, along with the much-discussed anachronism of the cycle and its continuous action, would contribute to a sense of omnitemporality, of being in a world that contains past, present and future.

In terms of the audience's response, place-and-scaffold staging also demands of the audience a more active, sustained and concentrated attention to the world of the play. By moving to see the action rather than waiting for the action to come to it, the audience must demonstrate its interest and may more closely share in the movement, meaning and effect of the action. The "realism" of the N-Town cycle, what makes it seem alive, real and present to a medieval audience, is in the service of an ahistorical and omnitemporal result: the past is re-created in the present, just as its significance potentially is re-created in the minds and hearts of those who witness it played.

Arnold Williams has discussed the "realistic" sense of the passage of time in the cycle that results from its continuous action (106-7). But by relating continuous action, place-and-scaffold staging, realism, and omnitemporality, we may draw some conclusions about the cycle's effect on audience. Because the audience is "in" a play world, its perception that the past and future are in the present is heightened. Such an interpenetration of present and not present might encourage the audience to perceive actions in the world from a new perspective,

a God's-eye, omnitemporal and omnispatial view rather than a temporal or realistic one. Indeed, processional staging on pageant wagons, as in the other cycles, might encourage the more historical or chronological perception of the progress of earthly events--they seem more time-bound and discrete. Continuous and simultaneous action, as in N-Town, may seem more "realistic," but that realism merges past and future with present. Events of salvation history seem to have happened both then and now; a specific pageant takes on deeper meanings because of its relations to and resonances in events already past and those to come. Such a realism serves a powerfully ethical and Christian understanding: that events in salvation history did happen both then and now; they are timeless actions that have meaning in and for all time.

That linking past, present, and future suggests a God's-eye view is a concept that would have been familiar to the lettered in the Middle Ages. In Augustine's expression, "in the Eternal nothing passeth, but the whole is present" (Confessions 11.13). Boethius's Lady Philosophy states that God sees both past and future as if they were present (Consolation 5.6). Aquinas extended the concept in the Summa: "the present glance of God extends over all time, and to all things which exist in time, as to subjects present to Him" (I, ques. 14.9). In the N-Town cycle, in particular, the "present glance" of the audience "extends over all time." Thus, they are offered a God's-eye view temporally and spatially, with potentially far-reaching spiritual and ethical results.

Although the ritual effect of N-Town may be greater as a result of its place-and-scaffold staging, continuity and simultaneity of action, the likelihood that it was presented by a travelling company of itinerant actors rather than by guild members before their own community works both to erode and to enhance communitas in the audience. No references in the cycle suggest that guilds participated in its playing. This lack of guild participation may have diminished the community's identification with the production of the cycle: it may not have been perceived as a community effort with a history, a period of preparation and anticipation behind it. The effects of guild production are broad and complex. In Newcastle, for example, the town mounted plays in part to promote peace among guildsmen, "to induce love charity peace and right" (Newcastle Enrollment Book cited in Nelson, Medieval 13. The Newcastle plays have not survived).

In the case of N-Town, however, the primary roles of the cycle most likely were acted by members of a small travelling company (John Wasson's research suggests that such companies had no more than five members; comment at Kalamazoo, 1983). Lesser roles may have been filled by local townspeople. In such a case, guild identification would be unlikely. What would have been lost in communal preparation, however, might have been offset by a gain in dramatic continuity, quality, and potential audience involvement. The actor playing Christ, for example, might have been the same in all of the pageants, rather than a different guildsman playing the role in each pageant, as is thought to have been the case in other cycles. This continuity, aug-

mented by a predictably higher quality of performance, and the greater sense of distance one would have from a little-known itinerant player, a man not of the town, might have eroded the distinction between player and character played, contributing to a perception of the cycle as a unified and coherent ritual process.

Even though N-Town differs from other cycles in its probable staging, its mode of production, dramatic technique, and resultant effect on audience, it also bears remarkable similarities with other extant cycles in selection, dramatic technique, and potential ritual result. It would be rash to judge that N-Town is "a cuckoo in the nest" (Davenport, Fifteenth-Century 3). Differences among cycles are important, but in noting them we may ignore remarkable similarities, similarities which allow us to group them as a "genre" to the same extent that we may group romances, lyrics or epics. Indeed, it is the similarities among the cycles that enable us to raise and comment upon their differences.

For purposes of this study, then, we will approach the N-Town cycle as a unified work, possibly played on two separate occasions (one playing ending with Passion I, the next with Passion II), compiled and transcribed in 1468 by an East Anglian scribe, played entirely on place-and-scaffold staging, probably in East Anglia, and generally representative of the English cycle plays, as they have been generically defined. Our goal will be to study the ways in which the cycle moves its audience, and to relate the process of witnessing and responding to the plays to the experience of salvation, for the individual and for the community that was the audience, a type of the Church. To

discuss a cycle in such a way as to reveal its unity and coherence without sacrificing the richness of its detail is a methodological challenge that has been faced, with varying success, by all who have written on these complex works.⁴

Generally, books on the cycles discuss either one theme or aspect as it is revealed in all pageants, or select a few plays for more detailed and comprehensive analysis. To give a detailed analysis of every play in a given cycle is a lengthy and tedious task for both the writer and the reader; but without detail, the discussion hazily proceeds in a theoretical stratosphere. Peter Travis explored the difficulty of offering both a theoretical analysis and a 'close reading' of an entire cycle (xii), a problem with which Woolf, Kolve, Prosser, and others have grappled in their general studies of English cycles, as well. Travis's solution was to draw the details of each section of the Chester cycle around a different thematic nucleus, the assumption

⁴ Perhaps the dearth of published works on a single cycle reflects the implausibility of attempting a truly comprehensive study. The N-Town cycle, comprising forty-two pageants and over 12,000 lines, has been exclusively studied in only two books. Esther L. Swenson sought to explain the composition of the cycle by discussing variations between the Banns and the episodes as they appear in the play (An Enquiry); cf. M. H. Dodds who independently undertook a similar study, published in the same year, 1914: "The Problem". Claude Gauvain's more recent full-length work (Un cycle) describes each pageant and discusses questions of dating, provenance, staging and the like. Gauvain's descriptive work offers a summary of pageants and criticism that would be most helpful to those whose French is superior to their Middle English. On other cycles, see Gardner, Construction, which has evoked scant response; Walter E. Meyers, A Figure Given, concerned with typology and Wakefield; Richard J. Collier, Poetry; Travis, Design, the most comprehensive study of a cycle to date; and Martin Stevens on Wakefield (forthcoming).

being that the reader could extend to the entire cycle each of the themes explored in one section. This method renders organization of ideas easier, and gave Travis the freedom to couple themes with the sections that best illustrate them. Dividing the thematic significance of sections of a cycle in this way, however, fractures our sense of the thematic continuity of a cycle. We are in danger of forever perceiving one section as, say, the "ritual" section, another as the more "comic" one. Such a method does not successfully communicate the "design" or structure of the whole.

Because N-Town's structure is best discussed as a process, this study will proceed sequentially and will discuss nearly every pageant of the Old Testament, Marian and Ministry sequences. Two pageants will draw the most detailed study: Noah and the Death of Lamech, and The Woman Taken in Adultery. Each of the pageants will be connected to the others in its section, and I will then suggest the ways in which each section contributes to the structure and process of the whole cycle. The conventional division of the cycle into Old Testament, Marian and Passion sections will be expanded to discuss the possible division between Passions I and II. Further, the structural, thematic and spiritual significance of the plays from Christ's earthly life will be stressed by designating it the "Ministry sequence." Work organized in this way promises both a detailed analysis of individual plays, suggestive of approaches to reading every play, as well as a discussion of larger parts and the whole. It is my hope that this method will reveal the richness and resonance of the individual pageants,

and the interconnectedness, unity and coherence, of all forty-two. Certainly the method promises to resolve some difficulties in manipulating multiple levels of abstraction, of moving from detail to overview, or from dramatic action and meaning to theory.

Although each play of the cycle will not be discussed at length, and the pageants of the Passion sequences will be discussed in the context of "ending," this study is comprehensive insofar as it discusses the structure of the entire cycle, and the connections between the plays and the experience of the audience. No other study of the N-Town cycle has sought to relate individual pageants to the unique design of the whole. Indeed, no other study of any cycle has attempted to develop an aesthetic as comprehensive, yet rich and open, as we will attempt to develop here. Peter Travis's work addressed "primarily formal interests" (4). I will stress what Travis relegated to secondary status--will assume that attention to how a pageant and series of pageants might have "manipulated its viewers" (Design 5) will reveal the form and structure that flow from and govern the experience and reception of the audience.

This new approach to the cycles stresses the affective and symbolic character of medieval piety and the ethical and ritual character of the dramatic experience of the cycles. Others have described and analyzed the milieu in which the cycles grew and were performed and witnessed. Because we can be certain neither of the specific place where N-Town was conceived and performed, nor of the specific festival the dramatic celebration honored, we can establish little connection

between the cycle and specific social and political events that might have been known to an audience, or between N-Town and a given feast or festival. Whether the cycle was performed on the feast of Corpus Christi, during Whitsuntide, after Palm Sunday or Holy Week processions, or on a randomly selected warm Sunday, we may conclude that the dramatic celebration, alone, would have been sufficient to arouse the emotions and behaviour characteristic of liturgical celebrations. The specific occasion of the cycle is less important than that its players sought "þe pepyl to plese with plays ful glad" (Fo. 1, l. 6), invoked God to "socour and saue all þo þat sytt and sese / and lystenyth to oure talkyng with sylens styлле and sad" (Fo. 1, ll. 3-4), and that it was played "for mede of 3our soulys" (Fo. 165, l. 20). Gladness and sadness, mirth and sorrow, rejoicing and weeping are responses appropriate to the feast of Corpus Christi, as they are to almost any medieval Christian festival. Indeed, they are the responses appropriate to a medieval Christian because they are those summoned by the story of God's judgment and salvation of mankind. Discussions of the Corpus Christi celebration and its significance to the cycles are as plentiful and accessible as those of other backgrounds of and contexts for the drama;⁵ they are the bountiful fruit of academic

⁵For contexts and backgrounds in addition to those already mentioned, see: on music, Dutka; art and iconography, Collins (N-Town) and Davidson (Drama); the Mass, Hardison (Christian Rite), Hughes (Medieval Manuscripts), Dunn ("Popular Devotion"), Mills ("Approaches"); Corpus Christi feast, Taylor ("Dramatic Structure"), Wickham (Shakespeare's), Sinanoglou ("Christ Child"); Origin and form, McNeir ("Corpus Christi"), Craig ("Origin"), Wellwarth ("From Ritual"), Leigh ("Doomsday"); acting, Robinson ("Late Medieval," "Three Notes," and "Medieval English"). For records, see the EDAM and REED series. On the mass, Jungmann remains the authority (Mass). For other references, see the bibliography of this work.

labor on the cycles. This study will introduce the potential meaning of the experience of the cycle. The next stage is to relate meaning with contexts. We will draw on these resources only when a full appreciation of the ritually re-creative potential of the drama seems to demand it.

N-Town portrays the stories that are the foundation of the Christian faith, and from which theology, doctrine and belief arise. The process of the cycle parallels the process of coming to faith, an ethical, emotional and therapeutic process through which the audience is urged to come. Our discussion will address the ways in which N-Town is a "teachyng inwardly" (129), the ways in which it invites the audience to participate in a revelatory, re-creative and ritual event.

To connect the stories of the cycle with the spiritual pattern it suggests, and with the series of responses through which the audience is led, requires that we link together the three interpretive models most frequently brought to the cycles. Peter Travis summarized the three "major historiological models that are central to understanding the individual designs of the English Corpus Christi cycles" (76):

1) Heilsgeschichte, the salvation history of the world--its progress towards salvation, union with God, at the end of time; 2) the summa, a compilation of doctrine and history that the audience must know in order to practice Christian faith; and 3) the spiritual biography of the individual soul. Without Heilsgeschichte, there would be no Christian doctrine, theology or history to compile and teach; without these, there would be no individual spiritual biography. But the

first two models gain meaning only in the context of the progress of the individual soul toward faith. We might correlate Heilsgeschichte with story, summa with the meaning or interpretation (spiritual, practical, ethical), the spiritual biography with the purpose for telling the story, as its meaning is only important in the context of the possibility of salvation, the pilgrimage of the soul to God. Together, story and interpretation make faith possible, and these reflect and constitute the process of development that the dramas both represent and seek to evoke in the audience. The "design" of a cycle play is the configuration of its ritual process, of the ways in which it uses story and meaning to move the audience along the road to faith.

To say that the design of a cycle is its process is to shift our ways of looking at the action of the cycles. We must suspend judgments that the cycles have a "one-character-at-a-time organization" (Williams, "Characterization" 16), and seek the place of each character on a spiritual continuum. We cannot judge that a cycle is merely a "chronicle in speech form" (Davenport 128); rather, we seek the spiritual and ethical meaning of each event in the chronicle of a given cycle. The cycles share a plot, "a system of acts of a certain moral quality" in the Aristotelian definition (E. Olson 48). Plot elements govern the essential configuration of the audience's responses, although that configuration is embellished, has perturbations, in each individual cycle. In other words, the plot of a cycle has both a fixed order, one that it shares with other examples of the genre, and an order, system, or manner of expression uniquely its own. Just as the ritual of the Mass is "a fixed order or framework of prayers

and ceremonies into which certain variable prayers and ceremonies are fitted" (Catholic Encyclopedic Dictionary s.v. "Mass"), the cycles share a warp and woof of traditional episodes and interpretations, although the finished fabric of each may have a unique texture and pattern.

Conventional patterns of pathos, peripety and renewal (Hardison 289, for example), of a structure based on the three advents of God (Kolve 59), or of a specific doctrinal pattern (Wickham 62 and T. Fry, for example), are helpful, but do not sufficiently address the communal, spiritual or ethical process of a cycle as it is experienced by the audience. Thematic or doctrinal unity, types and anti-types, rising and falling action, help to bind a work of ritual dramatic art. But the action and meaning may be perceived in a more comprehensive framework, one that subsumes these other patterns, the structure of the spiritual pilgrimage. N-Town seeks to move its audience toward the goal of faith and salvation. Like the Scriptures, the N-Town cycle does more than teach a story, its Christian meaning, and the moral necessities it expresses. The cycle is a process of salvation, just as the process of salvation is a drama. As Rosemary Haughton has stressed:

The talk of the drama of salvation, or salvation history as a play, is not mere metaphor; it is about as accurate a description as it is possible to give of the way in which the real availability of salvation is made known, and its character explained to human minds (48).

The analogy between the drama of salvation and the cycles is an apt one. Those who choose to "act" in the drama, to practice Christian faith, are recognizable by their responses to the action:

The line of salvation is not drawn at the footlights; it is drawn (but only God can see it) in a wavering and ever-changing contour between those who respond . . . and those who watch unmoved.

. . . The drama of salvation is played not only to all men and women but, if only they will respond, by them.

Just as the audience of the cycle witnesses the Christian myth of the history of the world in short space and time, they witness their entire personal spiritual histories "in little." From the drama, they may gain a sense of being "players," of living a story that will have an outcome. Only this sense of playing out the drama of salvation before a divine audience gives to Christian faith its ethical and spiritual efficacy.

The N-Town cycle functions incrementally, as does the pilgrimage of life. The most obvious model for the cycle's progress is that of the development of the individual from childhood, through adolescence, adulthood, and death. Augustine's expression of the spiritual attributes of each stage, for example, a movement from infantile physicality, compulsion, rage and jealousy to adolescent curiosity, disobedience, love of play, is helpful to understanding the spiritual process of the cycle. Similarly, the progress from original sin through Baptism, recognition of sin, contrition, penance, amendment and salvation illuminates N-Town's pattern.

These and other models of process and pilgrimage will be related to the N-Town cycle in the following five chapters, which explore the general experiential design of the cycle. In addition, the more detailed discussion of the design of two pageants will reveal certain of N-Town's specific strategies to manipulate audience response.

Noah and the Death of Lameth and the pageant of The Woman Taken in Adultery were selected because they have been considered problematic in the context of the whole, because they are in some way unique to N-Town, or because they constitute a turning from one image or way of thinking to another, a pivotal point from one theme or response to the next. The conventional division of the cycle into Old Testament, Marian and Passion sections⁶ will be expanded in order to emphasize the important role of the pageants from Christ's life and to assess the dramatic feasibility of playing Passions I and II in alternate years. The five parts of the cycle and their designations for purposes of this work are as follows:

Part I	Old Testament (Creation to Moses)
Part II	Marian Sequence (Jesse Play to Nativity)
Part III	Ministry Sequence (Adoration of Shepherds to Lazarus)
Part IV	Passion Play I
Part V	Passion Play II

⁶Cameron and Kahrl, "Staging" 122-38; Coletti, "Spirituality" 19; Rose 199 and Gauvin from 4 discuss divisions of the cycle.

We will begin at the beginning and progress through the history of the world, of which the progress of the individual soul is to be a mirror and a mimesis, to Doomsday, the Last Judgment.

CHAPTER IV

CREATION TO MOSES: THE "FOUNDATIONAL MORAL EXPERIENCE"

Surviving English and Continental cycles and playlists suggest that mystery cycles almost invariably dramatized six Old Testament episodes:

Creation
Fall of Lucifer
Fall of Man
Cain and Abel
Noah
Abraham and Isaac

The importance of dramatizing Christ's birth, ministry, Passion and Resurrection seems clear: these are the miraculous events on which Christian faith is based. But the medieval reasons for selecting the same core of Old Testament episodes in nearly every case have not been so clear. Explanations for the selection of the first three, the Creation, Fall of Lucifer and Fall of Man have been doctrinal: these events necessitated Christ's Incarnation and Passion.¹ The most widely accepted explanation for the common selection of the last three, Cain and Abel, Noah, and Abraham and Isaac, has been typological: these pageants prefigure Christ's salvation of mankind. Abel's death

¹Prosser relates doctrinal matters and the theme of repentance to N-Town, 111 et seq.; Woolf discusses theological and iconographical traditions, ch. 6 and 7; Kahrl and Cameron have judged the Old Testament pageants to be "sequential dramas of a rather simple kind" ("Staging" 154).

at Cain's hand prefigures the crucifixion of Christ by the Jews; Noah's ark is a type of the Church, the saved of mankind, and the flood a type of Baptism; Abraham's near sacrifice of Isaac prefigures God the Father's sacrifice of his son, Jesus.²

An approach that relates these pageants to ethical and spiritual models rather than theological or doctrinal ones suggests new reasons for the selection of these episodes, and helps us to recognize the coherence of the dramatic experience that initiates the cycle. This discussion will be limited to general observations about the ethical and spiritual design of part I as it relates to "the serial experience of the text," including the "progress of emotion" and the Bernardian "devotional processes which are the allegorical meaning of the text" (Allen in reference to the lyric, "Grammar" 211, 233). The Lameth episode of the Noah pageant is unique to N-Town, and so will be discussed in detail. The dramatization of Moses and the Burning Bush, followed by the giving of the Ten Commandments, is not common to all of the cycles. Otherwise, the stories selected for dramatic treatment

²See, for example, Kolve ch. 4; Travis summarizes the common reservations about the typological approach, 104. Travis's division of the Chester Old Testament sequence into two ages, that of natural law and that of the written law, would generally be applicable to all cycles. Although Travis argues that "of all the English cycles only Chester has adapted systematically into its Old Testament plays a coherent and identifiable scheme of salvation history" (75), he reflects an understanding of the possibility of approaching the cycles as dramatizing the education of Mankind: "Mankind must educate himself in the primary precepts of his faith before he can move into a New Testament world of more nearly deserved salvation" (107 and see n. 63, 276). Travis does not link an ethical or spiritual process in the drama with the audience's responses.

are the same in N-Town as in the others. Although each of the mysteries dramatizes Scripture differently, many of the observations about N-Town will point to characteristics of other cycles, as well. In each, this opening sequence is a microcosm of the entire play: it begins in despair and isolation and ends in hope and community, creates spiritual longing and satisfies it, puts moral teachings into conflict, and then resolves that conflict.

Like the N-Town cycle as a whole, the first pageants are patterned by an incremental process of spiritual and ethical understanding, and a complementary process of spiritual and devotional response. They raise the questions and problems essential to human existence and relations, in the family, the community and the cosmology, that the ensuing New Testament episodes will address. From questions concerning the relation of the individual and God (Adam and Eve), the cycle moves to those of relations with the family (Adam with Eve, Cain with Adam, Cain with Abel), then to the problems of societies (Cain, Lameth, Noah), and the difficulties that arise when laws governing relations with God and relations with fellow man contradict each other (Abraham and Isaac). The sequence ends by giving to the audience the laws by which mankind, in the absence of God's active intervention in history, may govern itself with justice. The dramatic process of raising questions and of exploring the chaos of human relations in a world without salvation may arouse in the audience a perception of the need to be saved from a tragic situation, the need for a surety about what is expected of them, and a desire for spiritual and social maturity.

The Old Testament is the age of God the Father, and of His relations to and distance from the soul in its infancy. These pageants explore the worldly diversions that inhibit the growth of the soul to spiritual and social maturity. Rage, jealousy, envy, selfishness, rebellion, a preoccupation with the physical realm characterize the spiritually immature. The pilgrimage along the path toward maturity begins in awe and fear of a wrathful and judging God, a recognition of sin, and a desire for mercy, love, spiritual union and communion--fellowship--with God. The first part of the cycle ends in the promise of that fellowship. These pageants lay the ethical ground for the spiritual exploration that will follow; they introduce the understandings necessary for individuals to live in right relations with God and with others. The longing for these "right relations" is shown in the pageants to compete with the very human desires for autonomy, self-mastery and sensual gratification. The divided self, its search for ways to manipulate and understand a confusing sensible world, the struggles between body and spirit, the competing attractions of evil and good are explored. These struggles often are dramatized by actions between persons, which signify the conflicts in persons, as well as between the individual soul and God. From its spiritual infancy, the states of Lucifer, Adam, and Eve, the soul progresses through adolescence (Cain, Lameth) to the physical, social and spiritual maturity of Noah and his family, the first community and type of the saved, the Church. Abraham models the love, fear, wisdom and will of the adult Christian, and, in effect, passes the test of spiritual maturity; next, Moses gains the reward of adulthood, receives a knowledge of the

laws that govern the relationships of autonomous human beings, a promise of rewards to come, friendship and fellowship with the Father.

The spiritual challenges to the infant soul in the age of God the Father are enumerated in numerous devotional and doctrinal works familiar to the late middle ages. The ethical dimension of relations to God the Father is well-expressed in commentaries on the Pater Noster. The explication of the Lord's prayer in a very characteristic fourteenth-century English Septenarium (BM Ms. Royal 14. B. ix), most likely used as a teaching device, sets out the relations of man to God, as well as the communal relations implicit in the expression "Our Father":

Through this utterance, 'Our Father,' we are urged away from two things: from pride, lest we say 'My father,' taking as our own personal thing something which is communal; and from unworthiness, lest we give ourselves back unworthily to such a father. It urges us to three things: to preserving the grace of adoption; the union of fraternity; and the promise of accomplishment, from whence He is not called a lord who is served as a father, but a father who is served in love (trans. in Krochalis and Peters, 177).

Although the ensuing discussion of the implications of the petitions of the Pater Noster suggests parallels with the ethical pattern of the Old Testament pageants, which begin with Deus in Heaven--"Our Father, which art in Heaven"--a detailed exploration of the relations of the Pater Noster with the dramatizations of the age of God the

father is inappropriate here.³ Rather, this passage is quoted in order to illuminate medieval conceptions of the individual, fraternal and communal dimensions of relations of man to God. Pride and its social and cosmic repercussions are stressed in the opening pageants: because of pride, Adam and Eve lost the "grace of adoption," as Cain and Abel lost the "union of fraternity," and Lameth the "promise of accomplishment."

The Old Testament pageants exhort the audience to "Know thyself; know others; know God," and give an emotional urgency to this message: "Know thyself, love God, and dread." The ethical design of the Old Testament sequence is reinforced by the emotions that the pageants may arouse. The events dramatized zig-zag from Heaven to Hell, Paradise to Fall, harmony to disharmony, order to chaos. The dialectical relations of the utopic and dystopic visions encourage a similar pattern of responses in the audience: it is pulled between fear of God and love of God, dread of damnation and hope of salvation, desire for justice and longing for mercy. The ambivalence of these paired emotions is characteristic of the Christian religious experience. The feelings appropriate to the first stage of religious experience, awe, fear,

³ That the Old Testament sequences in all cycles might arise out of an attempt to dramatize the meaning of the Pater Noster is a suggestion at least as fruitful as Travis's connecting the Chester design with the order of the Creed. Both the Creed and the cycles are based on a scriptural pattern--they share a source and thus a design. The ethical and spiritual meanings of the pageants Kolve has designated the "protocycle" almost diagrammatically correspond to the retrograde explications of the Pater Noster. See El Itreby, "The Pater Noster and the Age of God the Father in the Cycles," forthcoming.

hope, pity, love, are those without which active Christian faith is impossible.⁴

N-Town's strategy of juxtaposing the comic and tragic, or utopic and dystopic visions, and the potential effects of that juxtaposition, is made clear in the pageant of Noah and Lameth. The audience is encouraged to express interest in temporal, fallen language and images and then urged to refocus its attention, to sublimate the physical, to transfer its interest and energy to images of the divine. The Lameth episode makes clear the way in which a "conversion," a change in perceptions, a shift to a new way of seeing, a turning, in Augustine's formulation, may occur. A detailed analysis of this pageant will introduce N-Town's dramatic and emblematic methods of recapitulating and echoing themes, moral teachings, situations, and spiritual responses. The Lameth episode gives the audience a practicum in converting its desires from the earthly to the heavenly, in making appropriate judgments, and in making those judgments known by appropriate responses. Like the other Old Testament pageants, the Noah/Lameth play elicits emotions that confirm the presence of God and the continued need for that presence. Such emotions, the proper

⁴We recall Alexander of Hales's understanding that by fear and love the soul is perfected 'per affectionem,' the aim of theology (see Glasscoe 205); and Bernard on the Canticles: "We first taste God when he makes us fear him, not when he instructs us . . ." and "knowledge of God is one thing and fear of God another. What confers wisdom is not knowledge, but fear that touches the heart" (trans. Glasscoe 205). That anxiety and fear initiate the Christian experience was a medieval commonplace. See Hiltner and Menninger, eds., Constructive; Pfister, Christianity; Reik, Dogma; May, Meaning; Niebuhr, Nature and Destiny v. 1, ch. 7; Niebuhr, Self; Berthold, Fear; Outler, "Anxiety;" Otto, Idea. On the "Foundational Moral Experience" see Maguire, "Ratio."

affectus of religious experience and of the experience of the cycle dramas, may move the audience to belief, spiritual understanding, ethical action, and social and individual re-creation--the highest results of ritual.

Three potentially tragic visions build to the Noah and Lameth pageant: those of Lucifer, Adam and Eve, and Cain. We will discuss the ethical meaning of these pageants and the responses they may evoke from the audience in the context of three emblems: Lucifer's fall (a response to his fall unique to N-Town), Eve's desire for death, and Cain's literal interpretation of God and God's commands.

The first Rebellator Dei, Lucifer falls because of boastful speech and prideful action:⁵

A wurthyer lord forsothe am I
 and wurthyer than he . Euyr wyl I be
 In evydens þat I am more wurthy
 I wyl go syttyn in goddys se (10v-11; 53-56).

⁵On the angels and their fall, see Pollack, "Angelic." For theological and legendary origins of the Lucifer story, see Woolf 105-13, and Bevington 258. Bevington appropriately notes that "we are compellingly fascinated by his (Lucifer's) audacity, even though we recognize it as sinful pride." See also Helterman, Symbolic 40-41. For the tradition of the Devil's complaint and "the satirizing of evil in terms of lavatorial humour," see Woolf 109-11; Curtius, European 428, 435-6; Hanning 32; Rudwin 57. Medieval analogues include the Summoner's Prologue, Canterbury Tales 3, 1665-1708, and Wakefield's Mactacio Abel, ll. 63, 266. On the Te Deum that precedes Lucifer's rant, see Woolf 108, and Hughes 246, s. 902. Hughes notes that the Te Deum was excluded from Lenten services in order to show the alienation of man from heaven. See also J. Moore, "Tradition of Angelic Singing."

His fall is immediate. No identification with Lucifer is encouraged: his action caricatures human pride, false ambition, ignorance, childish vaunt. He does not here seem threatening or evil. Wimperingly descending from Heaven's tower, the proud angel becomes fawning and grotesque:

Now to helle þe wey I take

in endeles peyn þer to be pyht

Ffor fere of fyre a fart I crake

In helle donjoon . myn dene is dyth (11; 79-82).

Lucifer's "fere of fyre" is manifested in the most elemental and bestial of human responses--he breaks wind. The music of the devil's body contrasts with the heavenly music of the angel's song during the preceding Creation pageant (cf Stevens re Wakefield, "Language" 103). The fart comments on Lucifer's speeches, mere sound, and "soun ys noght but eyr yrbroken" (Chaucer, Hous of Fame). The emblem of the fart initiates mankind's life on earth, his birth in the physical and bestial, and delineates one of the poles between which man, the "ange bête," is set. The fall of Lucifer dramatically is a "pratfall," a sudden and unintended discovery of the force of gravity, a reminder that man is earthbound (cf Fussell "Pratfall" 245).

Like Auden's newborn infant, Lucifer has two ways of communicating with God, his wailing voice and his bowels. The fart makes Lucifer's loss of dignity and status final. The audience no doubt laughed at Lucifer's scatological words and actions, signals that the danger is past, that awe or fear in the face of God's power and wrath may be suspended, that pity is not the appropriate response to Lucifer's

"tragic" fall. But the obscene joke is important not only because it elicits laughter and derision: the fart suggests the identity between the human bodies of the audience and the demonic. The audience is brought together in a recognition of their connection to the physical, to sin. Wylie Sypher has discussed the value of the obscene joke. When an audience responds,

. . . a code of 'decency' breaks apart and allows the human being to fall steeply down to the recognition of his inalienable flesh. . . . One of the deepest paradoxes in comedy thus reveals itself in obscenity, which is a threshold over which man enters into the human condition; it is a comic equivalent to the religious state of original sin or of tragic 'error,' and man may as justly be thought human because of his sense of what is 'dirty' as because of his sense of what is 'evil,' 'sinful,' or fearful (Comedy 208).

By its laughter, the audience acknowledges its own 'state of original sin,' its "inalienable flesh," and so mounts the first rung of the spiritual ladder constructed by the cycle. After acknowledging its demonic potential, the audience may begin to recognize its transcendent possibilities.

Before God, Lucifer is powerless and laughable, and the audience shares the God's-eye view. As Serpens the invader of the fertile plenitude of paradise, however, Lucifer demonstrates the hidden power of the demonic over mankind. The devil disguises his obscene body to appear as a "ffayr Aungell," a "werm with An Aungelys face," who speaks to Eve in a new dialect of "eyr ybroken," courtly and flattering

language.⁶ Eve's fall and her similarly courtly and flattering temptation of Adam initiate the suspense and the human tragedy of the Old Testament sequence. The audience knows Lucifer's true status before God, recognizes him for the hollow beguiler that he is. The audience's knowledge of what should and might have happened, that Eve, indeed, has choice, heightens emotional tension, audience involvement, regret, pathos. Lucifer's earlier obscenities and the audience's laughter, help to create the array of significant responses to Eve's fall.

Adam and Eve's excuses to Deus following the Fall are as sordidly equivocal as a child's to a father in the face of irrevocably damning evidence. Adam blames Eve; Eve blames the Serpent. Unlike other cycles, N-Town heightens the pathos of the pageant rather than showing the result of the Fall in raillery and discord between man and woman. The barren realities of the physical world drive Eve to madness and despair:

Now stamble we on stalk and ston
 my wyt a-vey is fro me gon
 wrythe on to my necke bon
 with hardnesse of pin honde (16v; 387-90).

⁶On the tradition of a woman's disguise for the tempter, and others of showing Satan in Paradise, see Davidson and Mason, "Staging;" Woolf 115-17; Travis 90. The tradition was reflected in Comestor's Historia Scholastica. Lucifer's "Heyl Ffayr Wyff and comely dame" (13; 169) surely sounded as an ironic parody of the Angel's Annunciation to Mary, the recapitulation of Eve's Fall. In Langland's Piers Plowman, Satan is "ylyke a lusarde with a lady visage" (18.335). That is an icon of Error, as well, as in Spenser's Faerie Queene.

Eve begs Adam to kill her, to wring her neck.⁷ In the Middle Ages, the reason, located in the head, was understood to exercise control over the lower appetites by an action of the will, given a locus in the neck, connecting head and trunk. Further, the neck bone, which holds up the head, was used to signify pride and self-will (see Reichardt, "Gawain" 156-57 for discussion). Eve's request for death by strangling thus emblemizes her rational incapacity, the separation between her reason and her lower faculties. Eve seeks to punish the part of her body that led her to pride, self-will, disobedience of God. She asks to be made a sacrifice, introducing the motif of personal victimage in the cycle, demonstrates her mortification by seeking the death of self. The iconographic representation of the sin of despair is a figure attacking itself (see Snyder 55). In the Middle Ages, the sins of pride, delectation, gluttony, sloth, despair were connected in various ways (see Wimsatt 149). Eve's despair is far from an appropriate act of humility; it is, itself, a type of willful rebellion against God.

The appropriate response to judgment and separation from God would be humility, the opposite of pride. Eve's request for death arises out of the same narcissistic and prideful impulses that occasioned her fall. The physical realm still matters more to her than

⁷ Eve's desire for death is a common story. See "The Life of Adam and Eve" in Blake, Prose 109. For analogues and interpretation, see Sachs, "Despair;" Snyder 54-5 for romance analogies; Aquin, "Vulgate." On the Fall, see Trapp, "Iconography;" Evans, Paradise Lost; for tropology see Robertson, Preface 72-75.

obedience to God's will. Eve's accidie, or wanhope, is the greatest of sins against God and demonstrates that she is still caught up in personal physical concerns rather than spiritual and communal ones. Her emblematic action demonstrates Bernard's observation that sapor mortis, a taste for death, is at the heart of original sin (Sermons 81 and 82 in Cantica). In Bernard's schema, pride arises out of ignorance of self; despair out of ignorance of God (Snyder 47). Eve's first sin is the innate sin of Lucifer: she believes that by eating the apple she can become "Goddys pere." Her second sin is the original sin of misjudging God's power and the necessity of her obedience; she eats the apple. Eve then attempts to subvert God's justice by seeking her own death, a crime against herself, Adam, society, God, and justice, itself (Snyder re Judas 51).

Adam's gentle refusal to kill Eve establishes the natural law, thou shalt not kill, and the reason that law should be obeyed, fear of one's own death, damnation:

I wyl not sle fflescly of my fflesch
 Ffor of my flesch . pi fflesch was wrought
 . . . Ffor yf I xulde sle my wyff
 I sclow my self with-owtyn knyff
 in helle logge to lede my lyff
 with woo in wepyng dale (17; 399-402).

To kill another is, in effect, to kill oneself; Adam identifies with Eve and models the responses of the audience. At Lucifer's Fall, the audience recognized its physical existence. At the Fall of Adam and Eve, the audience is taught the value of self, the value of others,

and the necessity of placing the commands of God and the interests and needs of society over personal desires. We learn that physical existence, our earthly life, is sacred, and this is the beginning of moral and spiritual growth: "The foundation of morality is the experience of the value of persons and their environment" (Maguire 72). Eve's passive and narcissistic desire for death is a response to dread, threat, guilt, mortification. Eve profanes human life by profaning her own life, thereby arousing in the audience a response that affirms the value of human life (cf Maguire 35). The horror and pain of the Fall is thus brought into the audience:

. . . what really gives us the shivers is to confront the process of dying or to anticipate it imaginatively in ourselves. Its horror is the horror of pain and what it feels like to fall apart (Pruyser, "Anxiety" 138).

Eve "falls apart" in response to God's judgment--goes mad; her emblematic action encourages the audience imaginatively to experience the results of original sin, the horror and tragedy of personal death. In Eve's action and Adam's response, the anxiety that accompanies the inevitability of sin is dramatized and balanced by a hope--a hope in mankind and in God's grace. Eve, like other characters in N-Town who threaten social harmony, community, is described as mad and out of her wits; the cycle thus explicitly supports the values of communitas.

Eve's emblematic expression of despair recalls Dido and heroines of romance who attempt to escape self-knowledge and physical fate through death (see Snyder 54-55). Two roughly contemporaneous dramatic treatments illuminate the ethical meaning of Eve's actions. In

the Norwich Creation, Dolor and Myserye assault Man; in N-Town, the emblem of seeking death makes the same statement without necessitating personified abstractions. In the play of Mankynd, the character of Mankynd, beguiled by Titivillus, the devil, despairs and seeks to hang himself; he is saved by Mercy. In N-Town, Eve, too, is beguiled. She is saved by a germinal form of mercy, Adam's own self-interest and fear of God's judgment, a natural connection of self with others and God. This is the natural understanding that Cain lacks and expresses in a deficiency of love and fear in the next pageant.

The pageant of Adam and Eve, the least misogynistic and most demonstrative of sharing and affection of the cycles, has encouraged the recognition that, by nature, mankind lives in relationships with others and with God, the creator. The pageant of Cain and Abel explores the responsibilities of social man, the third stage of what Maguire has called the "foundational moral experience." Once physical humanity is recognized, one's morality evolves from one to the next of three stages: "1) a respect for one's self; 2) a respect for others; and 3) a recognition of the link between the two" (Maguire, Moral 98). Eve fails to respect herself; Cain fails to respect others and denies the link that Adam explicitly described between self, others and God.

In each of the cycles, the figure of Cain is developed in such a way as to draw the identification of the audience.⁸ He is the most

⁸On the Cain pageants in the cycles, see Prosser, ch. 4. Probably the severest critic of this play, Prosser has declared: "The play is very bad drama because it is a very bad sermon, and vice versa." "Crude and didactic," it is a "closet sermon" with no conflict and no despair. See also Matthews, Primal; Brockman, "Cain;" Mellinkoff, Mark; and the oldest and very complete study of the legends, Emerson, "Legends."

fully developed character yet to appear in the cycle, is full of the wit of a verbal iconoclast, is human, realistic, humorous, an individual with a history and with opinions. N-Town's Cain is less comic than in other cycles, but his rebelliousness and erring earthly "wisdom" evoke laughter, are funnier than critics have given them credit for being. Like the character Life in Piers Plowman, Cain is one of the mundi mariones, the world's fools:

Loud laughed Life . . .

And armed him with haste . with words of harlotry

And held Holiness for a jest . and Courtesy for a waster,

And Loyalty a churl . and Liar a gentleman,

Conscience and Counsel . he counted it a folly (C, pass. 23).

Cain complains about the necessity of tithing, grumbles against God, protests his condition, claims personal autonomy and independence of God, blasphemes. He is a "metaphysical rebel," to borrow Camus's phrase. Because he is a successful farmer, Cain believes he has mastered himself and his environment. He thinks himself competent, rational, successful, and judges Abel to be mad, illogical, stupid and literal-minded about the whole question of sacrifice. Cain recognizes two incentives--fear and gain--is conscious of his free will, but misinterprets it as absolute. Unlike Eve, Cain uses his reason, but to earthly rather than heavenly ends. Words and symbols are subordinate to material things. Although he sacrifices, he only observes the outer form of the ritual, the letter and not the spirit of the law, and even then gives the worst. To Cain, sacrifice is a form of barter. The symbolic and transcendent seem as empty and

meaningless to him as his father's admonitions.

Cain has charted a universe and its requirements in material and economic terms and has refused to forge a relationship with the transcendent, denying the existence of what he cannot see. As a result, he challenges God, kills his kin, denies responsibility, and calls down God's curse. His offense is his limited and earth-bound knowledge, his blindness to the possibility of the spiritual dimension, and ignorance of the necessity of forging fraternal relationships. He hybristically affirms self and denies all others. God's curse is not a penalty as much as it is an inevitable social effect of his actions against the cosmic and social orders.

In Augustine's scheme, Cain may be understood to represent the adolescence of the soul, a time of disobedience, curiosity, love of play and parody, trifling, "business," complicated by "fear-laden compulsion" (Burke, Rhetoric 67). The metaphor of the abyssus describes for Augustine mankind's state in adolescence. Primal anxiety is the emotional response to confronting the abyss of meaning, the inability to understand or gain mastery over the physical and symbolic world. Disequilibrium, stumbling, falling, fleeing, fear motivate Cain's actions. The pageant of Cain and Abel offers to the audience an image of man's condition, caught between two interpretations of the world and unable to reconcile the seen and the unseen without a mediator, Christ. Cain suppresses his instincts toward obedience, belief, reverence and awe, just as he kills Abel, the reminder of what has been suppressed. He negates his status as creature and pretends to a status as creator, and actively wills his first sin, shoddy sacrifice

to God. The second, killing Abel, arises out of the social sin of envy and his own uncontrollable wrath; the third, denying his murder, flows out of fear, despair and a negation of caritas. He fails to know himself, God, or his brother.

The dissension between Cain and Abel on the subject of sacrifice may represent a bellum intestinum, a war within the soul. The pageant echoes the debates between the soul and body, and the announcement in the play of Mankynde:

My name is Mankynde . I have my composycyon

Of a body and of a soull, of condycyon contrarye (194-95).

The divided will, the war within the self, are explored in many medieval texts, and at length in Augustine's Confessions (Book 8, chaps. v, vii, xi). The soul and the body respond to fear in differing ways, occasioning a "schism of the self," which is the birth of consciousness and conscience, synonymous terms in the Middle Ages, reflection, and the recognition of guilt. Cain, life, the body, suppresses the promptings of the soul, kills it, but then learns that the body that does not accept the soul's guidance will be damned, will die. If the soul and body cannot cooperate, both must perish. Both Cain and Abel experience fear: Abel's Christian fear seeks to obey God to gain favor; Cain's un-Christian and compulsive fear seeks to deceive and to subvert and deny consequences. Although the death of Abel may be interpreted as a type of the Crucifixion of the innocent Christ, Abel's death is, in itself, a result of pointless evil. Cain's sin, like Abel's blood, "Askyht vengeauns." For Cain, we desire a Hell; for Abel, a Heaven.

Cain has broken the two absolute laws to which the audience has been introduced: obey God and do not kill kin. Despite God's curse of Cain, Cain is alive--indeed protected from being killed by another by God's promise of "vij folde more payn" to Cain's killer. Cain killed the most sinless person in the world, Abel, buried him, and denied his responsibility, a morally shocking act. Abel's virtue was rewarded by death; Cain's evil was rewarded only by social ostracism. There is the possibility that the audience would feel that virtue has gone unrewarded and vice insufficiently has been punished. Condemnation to death, revenge against Cain, seems to be an appropriate act of justice. The community is stayed by God's mark from taking justice into its own hands. The pageant confronts the audience with the injustice of the world, the impossibility of reparation, and it arouses an "animal" or non-rational desire for vengeance. Abel's blood "Askyht vengeauns," cries out for a justice that damns Cain to Hell and offers grace, heaven, to Abel.

A recognition of the demands of justice by the audience helps it to harmonize and augment the three necessities of the foundational moral experience: an appreciation of the value of self, of the value of others, and of the connections between these values:

. . . justice is the minimal manifestation of the foundational moral experience and the minimal manifestation of other-love. Justice is the least that we can do in response to the value of persons. It is love in embryonic form. When love matures, justice, with its concerns for rights and obligations, is transformed in the superior dynamism of love . . . Justice . . . is the first fruit of the foundational moral experience or of the 'sanctity of life' (Maguire, Moral 95-96).

Because human life, created by God, is sacred, justice is necessary, in each of its three manifestations, each of which has to do with "how we should react to persons in view of what they are" (Maguire 96): commutative, distributive and legal. Having established the value of life, the cycle begins to develop the ability of the audience to distinguish the value of persons, to discriminate.

Cain's refusal to give an appropriate sacrifice, a legal requirement of the Old Testament law, breaches legal justice. Expressed as tithing rather than sacrifice, as it is in N-Town, Cain's refusal to give a fit offering indicates his refusal to fulfill his debt to the community, the Church. Similarly, by denying responsibility for his brother, and then for his own actions, Cain refused to acknowledge his debt and responsibility to "the social whole or the common good" (Maguire 97). God's response to Cain's sins exemplifies commutative justice, which flows between individuals. By marking Cain and sending him out into the society of men, God set into motion a form of distributive justice, which flows from society to the individual.⁹ Although Abel's death was understood to be a type of Christ's sacrifice, the ethical dimension of the story is oddly unsatisfying. Commutative justice on earth has not been done--the good have not been rewarded; the evil seem to have been insufficiently punished. Such a response

⁹Cain ignores his "creatureliness," his subjection to God. An interesting analogy in English law comments on this action: "Until 1846 . . . the law remained in force in England that a thing that had caused death to any one should, as a deodand, become the property of the King as the representative of God" (van der Leeuw citing Westermarck 455). Cain becomes "God's property," whole, because he would not surrender to Him His due.

would prepare the audience for the experience of the next pageant, Noah and Lameth, in which Cain is killed by Lameth, and the Flood destroys Cain's line--commutative justice is done on a grand scale.

Noah and the Death of Lameth

The three urgings implicit in the designation "Our Father" of the Pater Noster are violated by Lameth and fulfilled by Noah: Noah preserves the "grace of adoption; the union of fraternity; and the promise of accomplishment" (Krochalis and Peters 177) by building the ark with his family in order that they, and the race of mankind, might be saved. By its accomplishment, the Noah family preserves the promise implicit in the petitions: "Hallowed be Thy name" and "Thy kingdom come" as they were commonly explicated in the Middle Ages. The spirit of wisdom and the spirit of understanding underly these petitions, and these spirits oppose the sins of gluttony (including "fornication, wine, and drunkenness") and lust:

'Hallowed by (sic) thy name &c.' That is, give us the spirit of wisdom, as it is said; that is, pleasure coming from understanding of the law; that is, peace in our generation; that is, interior quiet of movement. And thus shall Your name be hallowed, that is, Father, in this life we cannot be separated from You easily; in the future we cannot be separated at all, for we are undoubtedly Your sons. This obviously opposes lust, by which he who labors in the Lord is not delighted, nor does he have peace of mind when he drags himself about with bestial movements, nor is he the son of God, but is assimilated to the lowest sort of beast (Krochalis and Peters 179).

Cain "drags himself about with bestial movements" because he has lost his status as a son of God. As a result, he is mistaken for a beast and killed by his own kin.

The historical character Lameth (elsewhere most often "Lamech") was understood to have committed spiritual and social sins: murder, lechery, bigamy, spouse-breach.⁹ Although connections between N-Town's Lameth and lechery have not been explored in past scholarship, I believe that his sin, arising out of lack of wisdom, understanding, and justice, is made very clear in the N-Town cycle by emblem and metaphor. The contrast between the characters of Lameth and Adolescents and those of the Noah family echoes those of the commentary on the Pater Noster. Metaphoric action tests the wisdom and intelligence of the audience, its ability to read the visible as signs of the invisible, to distinguish what is said from what is meant, the sign from what it represents, and, finally, to discriminate between earthly and spiritual meanings, deferring the temporal for the heavenly:

⁹In Higden's Polychronicon, Lameth is the first bigamist and first "twin-manslagt," having killed two men: "Lamech, þe seueneþe from Adam and most shrewe, was þe firste þat brouzte yn bygamy, and so spouse-breche azenst þew lawe of God and of kynde" (Higden's Polychronicon, Trevisa, 2.227). For medieval views of sexual sins see Bailey, Man-Woman. On Lameth see also Emerson, "Legends;" Mellinkoff, Mark; Kelly, "Ludus." Analogues include Historia Scholastica, Glossa Ordinaria and the Mystère du viel testament. Cursor Mundi connects Lamech's killing of Cain with his being lost in the flood (l.1513-15; see Vance "Unifying," 105). See also Poteet, "Symbolic;" and Reiss, "Story."

wisdom is the pleasure arising from the intelligence of God, or the intelligence concerning God arising out of pleasure. Intelligence concerns invisible things under God. Learning concerns human or earthly things, which can be known from human sense and, through the power of the natural intellect, can be led to the effect (Krochalis and Peters 179).

The Noah pageant as a whole is about the conflicting claims of physical and spiritual wisdom and pleasure. The Lameth episode of the pageant is an extended metaphor for the most seductive of earthly pleasures--a carnal knowledge, sex.

The mystery of the extended metaphor is akin to the mystery of the Incarnation: understanding penetrates the mind and meaning grows without violating the hymen of conscious thought.¹⁰ The audience of a sexual metaphor, for example, is shielded from shame, guilt or fear of censure by the literal surface, the vehicle, and so can more freely demonstrate its interest in sex. Because the audience actively creates the meaning of the metaphor by shifting its mind from one source of meaning to another, it participates in and takes responsibility for creating the tenor, the meaning of the action and statement that result from the fusion. Fifteenth-century writers exploited the uncanny capabilities of the sustained sexual metaphor. They seem to have recognized that it gave to the audience both a freedom and a responsibility, and that it could sexually titillate both by and

¹⁰ For medieval understandings of the Fall as the "trespass of signs" and the Incarnation of the Logos as a redemption of language, see Allen, Ethical 44-50.

without violating the sex taboo. Short farcical dramas that rely on extended sexual metaphor for action or plot were popular, as Barbara Bowen's research in the French drama attests. Bowen has found over fifteen French examples: few are brutal or misogynistic; some metaphorically depict sexual intercourse on the stage ("Metaphorical Obscenity"). The Lameth episode, part of the Noah pageant in the N-Town cycle, is a fine English example of metaphorical obscenity: the extended metaphor creates the meaning of the action. The audience must creatively participate in making meaning by using what it sees, feels and knows, and is responsible for the meaning it creates, just as mankind on earth is answerable to God for its interpretations of the meaning of signs in the physical world. Without understanding and exploring the metaphoric meaning of the Lameth episode, we miss the significance of the action. The process of the pageant is dictated by the audience's construction of meaning and its responses. These taken together make the statements of the Noah pageant, statements about creation and destruction of life, about sex and generation, death and regeneration.

In the N-Town cycle, Noah, Uxor Noah, and Shem, Ham, Japheth and their wives constitute the first nuclear family. They are loving toward God and each other, ordered, obedient, unified. Uxor Noah in N-Town is a mother and mediatrix, type of Mary and the Church, not the intractable shrew of other cycles. Lameth, kin of Cain, and his son, Adolescens, come onto the platea as noe cum familia sua

obediently file off to build the ark.¹¹ Lameth makes "Gret mornyng" for his blindness, and brags about his former skill at archery, which he has Adolescens confirm. Lameth is a type of the miles gloriosus, the braggart warrior. He wagers his life that, although he is blind, he can still kill an animal if Adolescens will aim the bow. Adolescens spies a beast in a bush and points the bow; Lameth draws and shoots. The "beast" is Cain, hiding in shame after having been cursed by God.¹² Realizing that he has committed a murder that will bring upon him seven times Cain's curse, in anger and despair Lameth blames Adolescens. He visits his sin on his son--avenges himself by beating Adolescens to death with his bow. Lameth leaves the stage with loud laments, and seeks a place to hide from God's vengeance. The ark, bearing Noah and his family, looms onto the platea. The family describes the Flood's destruction and is saved from harm. The pageant ends in a psalm of thanksgiving to God.

We have literally understood the Lameth scene and, indeed, its literal and tragic meaning is powerful. Lameth is blind, mad, and doomed to sin. He cannot master himself, take responsibility for his own actions, control his anger and desire for retribution. He

¹¹The rubricated "Introitus Noe" opposite the third line from the bottom of Fo. 20v is thought to be a late interpolation and incorrect. However, it makes good sense to me that Noah would enter as Cain finishes his last speech, motivating his searching for a place to hide, and presenting a contrast to the audience. See Cameron and Kahrl, "Staging" 152.

¹²Cain likely looked bestial, like a wild man or devil, on the stage. See Bernheimer 59ff.; Emerson 836-7, 867-72; Melinkoff 63-5. French representations often show Cain with horns or antlers, the mark by which God set him apart from mankind.

is unconscious of the meaning of earthly signs and acts, and thus unconsciously disobeys God's laws. Lameth's actions demonstrate the faulty justice and retribution of mankind: only God can administer true justice, hence the Flood. Intention and action, word and deed, means and end are not harmonized in Lameth. His murders make statements about the sources and results of sin, and the need for earthly justice.

The vaunting speeches and violent action of the Lameth episode fracture the iconographic stillness¹³ and liturgical recitals of the Noah family, but its intrusiveness has received more attention than has the action itself. Our interpretations barely have progressed beyond the judgment that this drama is a "staging device" to give Noah time to build the ark off-stage, or that Lameth's disorder, madness and aggressive violation of kinship fitly contrast with the familial order, sanity and unity of the Noah family.¹⁴ The story was a popular one in the Middle Ages, and few of the details are new

¹³ Poteet discusses iconographic dramatic conventions in "Symbolic," notes that the Lameth episode effects a contrast of good and evil, and suggests that it is included to offer an exemplum of the sin that necessitated the Flood.

¹⁴ On the episode as a staging device, see Woolf (135), who notes the "cool and muted" drama of the action and regrets that it breaks the chronological order of the cycle. Reiss discusses Lameth's bow as an inversion of the rainbow that in many accounts appears after the Flood in "Story." Unfortunately for this argument, no rainbow is mentioned in N-Town. See Poteet for contrast of spiritual states of Lameth and Noah, and for review of earlier apologetic criticism. Poteet argues for the integrity of the pageant and declares that the Lameth scene no longer should be designated an "interlude," an attempt to overturn the trend of referring to the "out-of-place scene of the blind archer" (Williams 67).

to N-Town. Beyond having killed Cain, Lamech was noted for his lechery: he was a bigamist, and so was understood to have sinned against God and mankind. What has puzzled many modern readers is that the medieval tradition associating Lamech with lechery is strong, but N-Town's Lameth scene seems not to mention his sexuality. Only later in the pageant, while the Flood waters are rising, do Noah, Shem and Japhet attribute the cause of the Flood to lechery, the "synne of mannys wylde mood." Lameth's actions clearly arise out of a "wylde mood," but no one, to my knowledge, has noted that N-Town very clearly develops and demonstrates his sexual sin: metaphor and action make the statement.

An extended metaphor may gradually arouse delight in the interpreter, in part by demanding that its audience work energetically to create the meaning--the tenor of the vehicle. This creative effort is rewarded with a jolt of recognition and the sport of pursuing interpenetrating lines of thought, an endless play of creating new meanings and discarding the old. The extended metaphor manipulates the symbolic by shifting common meanings to a determinate "other" meaning--thus the extended metaphor reveals and conceals, makes vivid and mystifies. For this reason, extended metaphor is often a vehicle for describing sexual body parts and acts. Sex, one of the most vivid and mystifying experiences of being human, is the most "vital principle of life," as metaphor is a most "vital principle of language" (Langer, Philosophy 123). Metaphor and sex: the genesis of language and the genesis of life.

Three common medieval metaphors for sex, the bow, the archer, and the hunt, are extended in the Lameth episode of N-Town's Noah pageant. Most likely dressed as a yeoman or forester, Lameth carries a bow, brags about his former skill at archery (he always killed his quarry), and hunts for a hart. Lameth is blind, an emblem of perceptive, spiritual and sexual impotence. Adolescents most likely carries the arrows, and must "set the hand" of his father before Lameth draws his bow. He is an assistant and mediator of Lameth's blind lust (and blind justice): he finds the mark, aims, and Lameth shoots.¹⁵ Lameth's boasts about his death-dealing marksmanship describe metaphorically his sexual prowess, and Adolescents dutifully confirms his father's ability:

ADOLESCENS: Ffor pat tyme ze had zoure bowe bent in honde
 If pat your prycke had be half a myle in brede
 ze wold be pryk han hitte if ze ny had stonde.

(23v; 155-57)

¹⁵From Oedipus, the Bacchae and Plato's Phaedrus through Andreas Capellanus and to the present, blindness has been associated with passion, castration, impotence, the inability to love. Cupid, the blind archer, often accompanied by his bow-carrier, Sweet Looking, was popular in medieval literature. The necessity of "spiritual sight" frequently is stressed: eyes mirror the soul; delectation, a pleasure of the eyes, is a first step to temptation or love. Aquinas uses the image in a way that suggests meanings of the pageant: "Now, whatever lacks the power of knowledge cannot tend to an end unless it be directed by a being with knowledge and intelligence. The arrow must be directed by the archer. Therefore, there is an intelligent being by which all natural things are directed towards their purpose. This Being we call God." See also Gregory's Moralium on spiritual blindness (27.5.25). Conventional contrasts of cupiditas (Lameth) with caritas (Noah) are, of course, suggested. For an interesting comparison see Kern (Absolute 74) for a discussion of Pentheus, killed as a scapegoat by his mother, who was blinded by passion. The mother mistakes her son for the wild animal she seeks to kill. The figure of Mors often is depicted as ". . . An archer drawing in his bowe" ("Mors" in Gray 39); illicit sex explicitly is related to death in the pageant, as well.

The bent bow may refer to Lameth's penis. "pryk" or "prycke" is definable as a mark, target or bull's eye (OED), but also may be glossed as a sharp point, arrow, or pricking instrument, as is a common slang usage today. For example, in the play of the Fall of Man, Deus questions Diabolus:

DEUS: why hast þou put dethis pryk

 in Adam and his wyff (15v; 311-12)

Taken literally, Adolescens "agrees that in his prime Lameth could have hit any mark--if it were half a mile broad and if he stood close to it" (Craik, "Violence" 194). Sexually to "hit the mark" Lameth would, of course, have to stand "ny" before he "bent his bow." Lameth again brags that, whatever mark was put before him, he could shoot and kill--he was, in other words, indiscriminate about choosing a target, an object to satisfy his lust. The mark Adolescens spies in the hunt on stage is "Vndyr zon grett busche." Still a familiar metaphor for the vagina, "busche" may refer to anything "bushy," particularly hair; a "bride-bush" was hung outside the local tavern to signal a wedding celebration; and the lining of an orifice that is to take a shaft or spindle, such as a cannon, is the "bush" (OED). The language and action of the pageant become richly and sexually suggestive. Lameth shoots at the "best," really a human, Cain, who "with a brod arwe" is "ded and sclayn," and we may understand that Lameth's compulsive sexual act has brought down God's judgment on the race of mankind, the kin of Cain.

Evidence elsewhere in the cycle confirms that nothing more explicit than the bow emblem and the mention of archery would be needed to suggest the sexual analogy to N-Town's audience. A use that is not meant to be funny is in Abraham's lament as he walks up the hill upon which he will kill Isaac. Abraham grieves that he sired Isaac only to sacrifice him:

ABRAHAM: thyn owyn fadyr þi deth must be
 Alas þat evyr þis bowe was bent
 (28; 139-40)

Accusations of Mary after the Incarnation use the image twice. In the pageant of "Joseph's Return," Joseph, finding Mary pregnant, laments his lot:

JOSEPH: - Alas Alas my name is shent
 all men may me now dyspyse
 and seyn olde cokwold þi bow is bent
 newly now after þe frensche gyse
 (67v; 53-56)

Later, in the "Purgation of Joseph and Mary," Den the Summoner brings the charge of adultery against Mary, and questions her about the Archer. Here, metaphor becomes explicit, as often is the case in proverbs:

DEN: A Joseph good day with þi ffayr spowse
 my lorde þe buschop hath for zow sent
 it is hym tolde þat in þin house
 A cuckolde is bowe is ech nyght bent
 he þat shett þe bolt . is lyke to be schent

Ffayre mayde þat tale ze kan best telle
 now be zoure trowth telle your entent
 dede not þe Archere plese zow ryght well.

(77; 129-136)

In N-Town, as elsewhere, the metaphor was readily understood.¹⁶

Another use of "bow" in N-Town is in "to beat the bow," as in Joseph's classic senex amans speech, when he expresses his limited and literal understanding of Mary's pregnancy:

JOSEPH: It was sum boy be-gan þis game

 A dame what thought haddyst þou
 Here may all men þis proverbe trow
 þat many a man doth bete þe bow
 Another man hath þe brydde.

(68; 75, 80-83)

As it is usually understood, this proverb uses a hunting metaphor. Men "beat the bough" or "beat the bush" in order to start game, often birds, for another. The proverb may be a double-entendre, however, depending upon how "bow" and "brydde" are taken. "brydde" may be glossed "bird," or "bride" and the confusion of the two was not infre-

¹⁶The association is as old as Wisdom literature:

As a thirsty wayfarer opens his mouth
 and drinks from any water near him,
 so she will sit in front of every post
 and open her quiver to the arrow.

Sirach 26:12 (Metzger, ed., Apocrypha). The speaker here laments the difficulties of raising daughters.

quent in the Middle Ages.¹⁷ Thus, "many a man doth bete þe bow / Another man hath þe brydde" could metaphorically be taken either as: "many a man does the hard work to arouse or gain a woman, but another man gets her sexual favors;" or as "many a man has sexual intercourse with the bride of another man." Either way, "to beat the bow" may have sexual connotations.

These connotations are important to the Noah pageant. When Lameth turns on Adolescens, the boy cries out in words that signify death, but have now come to stand for sexual consummation (perhaps a veiled parody of the romantic Liebestod tradition):

ADOLESCENS: Out out I deye here . my deth is now sought
 þis theffe with his bowe hath broke my brayn
 þer may non help be . my dethe is me brought
 Ded here I synke down . as man þat is sclayn.
 (24; 186-89)

Taken literally, this violent action and Adolescens' cries might evoke a response of horror or pity. But taken in a Punch-and-Judy way,¹⁸

¹⁷ For example, "burd" is used for "lady or maiden" in the Cursor Mundi, a common, especially British, slang usage now.

¹⁸ The farcical Lameth episode sustains N-Town's pattern of using some comedy at each Fall, even at the Fall of Man in Lucifer's fart, a treatment uncharacteristic of the cycles. Farce uses, converts, breaks the conventions of melodrama, virtue over vice. The farcical Lameth episode produces an effect that supports the spirit of the Deluge: ". . . whereas in melodrama we recoil from the enemy in fear, in farce we retaliate . . . the principal motor of farce is not the impulse to flee (or Fear), but the impulse to attack (or Hostility). . . If in melodrama fear enjoys itself, in farce, hostility enjoys itself" (Bentley, "Farce" in Corrigan, ed. 296, 302). If the Lameth episode were not funny, it would terrify and erode the Christian meaning of the Noah pageant.

the beating is the climax of the sexual (and perhaps homosexual) farce. Understanding of the comedy builds as the audience goes through the process of destroying the tragic literal meaning to create a comic, sexual one. Their identification with and judgment of Lameth issues in laughter, and their taking "death" for "sexual intercourse" here, as in Lameth's vaunts, is confirmed by Adolescents' language. The closing "as man þat is sclayn" is ambiguous. The "as" may be a temporal adverb, telling us how Adolescents sinks down, or it may be a simile, a cue to us that Adolescents' death need not be taken as a literal truth in the world of the play. Whether Adolescents is "killed" literally or metaphorically is up to the audience to decide. Their laughter would signify an understanding of the extended metaphor: Lameth the bigamist and "twin-manslagt" has "killed" twice. His rhythmic thrashing of Adolescents may violently and vividly become a "beating of the bow" rather than a "beating with a bow," and so stand in for the second sexual act.

A reading of the Lameth episode as an extended sexual metaphor is very suggestive of illuminating comparisons with Noah's use of his sexuality to create family and community, the Church. Lameth's generation and "recreation" destroys; Noah's actions result in a "re-creation" and regeneration of all mankind. The Lameth episode is thus a negative and ironic digression on the affirmative statements of the Noah scenes.¹⁹ One aspect of the irony is that the audience,

¹⁹ Allen (Ethical 87) discusses the medieval typology of ironic and affirmative modes. The dialectical relations of these are echoed in the relations of farce and melodrama, the Lameth and Noah episodes.

by interpreting the action as sexual, admits to its own fallen understanding of the right use of the creative power of sex and of words and so is aligned with Lameth. The Lameth episode takes on a new value to the Noah pageant when we understand the scene as an extended sexual metaphor and recognize what it demands of the audience. But I believe that the vehicle of the bow carries two additional tenors, and that the audience's freedom to create the significance of the action is even greater than we might have thought.

In addition to the sexual tenor of the metaphor, the image of the bow metaphorically may express: 1) the human mind or psyche, and 2) the spirit or soul. These metaphors are mirrored in two medieval commonplaces: the bent bow of the thinking mind that must occasionally be relaxed or its strings will snap, and the bow of the soul whose arrows shoot toward God.²⁰ The metaphor carries within it one very plausible reason for the Lameth episode's existence in the Noah pageant: to relax the audience's minds and bodies in laughter. The beauty of the dramatist's conception, however, is that the metaphor simultaneously may sustain all three referents: the bow of the body, the bow of the mind, and the bow of the spirit. Body, mind and spirit are united in the image and the audience may choose as it interprets the action on the stage. This is more than a clever manipulation of language, action and response, although it is that. The Noah pageant assimilates form, content, affect and meaning, and the result

²⁰ On the bow and the human psyche, see Kolve 129; Olson, Literature 90-93 and elsewhere; Woolf 135; Travis 101-3. On the iconographic tradition, see Hassall, ed., Holkham 72.

is a rich array of ethical and spiritual statement. The right use of the bow, and the right understanding of the extended metaphor, requires self-mastery, self-knowledge, and spiritual wisdom, an act of will to defer the sexual meaning, a cooperation of body, mind and spirit.

Although the juxtaposition of the three levels of meaning is strenuous in the interpretation, I do not believe that it strains the intention. The medieval delight in detailed correspondences and multi-leveled meaning is well known.²¹ The competition of various elements of the human mind and body for supremacy is a popular motif in allegory, the drama and elsewhere. An interesting and roughly contemporary parallel with the Lameth scene is the French sexual farce, L'Arbalete, or "The Cross-bow," which is cited in Bowen's study of dramatic extended sexual metaphor. The dialogue of that play treats the conflicting claims of the body (physical power and sex), the mind (use of language and speech), and spirit (wisdom and understanding of Scripture). Husband and wife vie for mastery and the humor arises out of the husband's misunderstanding of his wife's metaphoric suggestions. (For example, admonished to chew over Scripture, he goes to eat the book.) In the end, the husband shows his physical mastery by using the metaphor of the crossbow: "A crossbow is a symbol of male superior-

²¹The four-fold method of scriptural exegesis is the best known example. Allen (Ethical 103-5) discusses other levels of correspondence: ". . . for the Middle Ages meanings tended to be multiple but not at all random."

ity because it stands for two different kinds of action, and men are naturally superior to women because they act, both on the battlefield and in bed" (Bowen 338). Sexual and violent actions are pitted against spiritually wise actions in words; the woman is forced to submit.

Battlefield and bed are the contexts for the two most obvious meanings of the bow in N-Town.²² A faulty understanding of the meanings of rhetoric and action makes the comedy of the N-Town pageant, too. Lameth's rhetorical and physical actions have spiritual meanings that he does not understand; his blind errors arise out of ignorance of the real meaning of God's word. He has misunderstood the terms under which he is to act, and has failed to recognize that his actions have other levels of meaning, levels that are only available to those who interpret the world with spiritual wisdom. Blind to everything but himself and his self-created image, he believes that his actions have no impact on anyone but himself, and glorify only himself. He denies the responsibilities attendant to this freedom to create, and forgets that the supreme archer is God:

²² Battlefield, bed and rhetoric, war, death, sex and words, frequently are related in medieval religious and romance traditions. Both sex and death dissolve the ego, in differing ways; the two often are conflated by rhetoric, as in the Liebestod tradition (see Lerner 54-55). Augustine consistently related rhetoric and fornication; Alain de Lille puns on grammatical perversions of case and gender as sexual perversions, a common joke (see Barney 194-95); 199, and see 238 on parodies of the romance tradition that describe the art of love in terms of pain, cruelty, death).

The bowe of Goddis wrath is bent

On hem that doth not that God bede.

(from "Knowe theyself, love God and drede" in Coleman 99-100)

Lameth cannot aim his own bow: his adolescent affections control his choice of target and direct his aim. He can only use the bow as an instrument of his pride, for physical subjugation. Lameth's lechery kills, as surely as he has cleft Cain's heart and Adolescents' brain, the two anatomical elements without which love, self-mastery and right-knowing are impossible. Noah, in contrast, loves with his heart, rightly understands with his mind, obeys God with his spirit, and bends the bow of his body to divinely instituted creation: marriage and the family. He is virile in his humility, as the bent bow is useful only when it is bent. He accepts guidance from Uxor, admits to physical and intellectual weakness, and uses language to teach, pray and praise God, not himself. Noah's words, intentions and actions have a unified and transcendent meaning and cannot be misconstrued. He weaves together the seemingly disparate threads of body, mind and spirit to create the fabric of a unified adult self in a Christian community. Lameth's passion dominates his will which then overcomes his reason, hence his sin; Noah's reason dominates his will and sublimates his passion, hence his salvation.

The process of weaving together all three levels of the bow metaphor echoes in the process of balancing the elements of the tripartite soul. Further, that process resonates in the act of spiritual wisdom required to understand the Trinity: the creative mind of the Father,

the body of the Son, and the spirit of the Holy Ghost. By the process of reconciling the earthly types with the heavenly, human self-mastery, ethical action, wisdom, creativity, and salvation become possible. Mankind may thus manifest that he is imago Dei. The Lameth and Noah scenes are "verbal events which include both reference and rhetorical effect" (Allen, Ethical 87), and the metaphor creates ethical meanings, in part by the choices it offers to its audience. No prohibitions, or commandments against adultery, or exhortations to use body, mind and spirit to serve the Trinity that created them could be as powerful as the experience of the pageant. The audience is given an experiential lesson in the feeling and conduct that obedience to these biddings requires, the conduct appropriate to a Christian. The pageant is therapeutic for the body, mind and spirit of the audience because it invites them to exercise and balance all of these for an appropriate response. Each member of the audience, by constructing meaning out of metaphor, recognizes, confesses and then constructively channels the impulse to interpret human words and actions in limited, physical terms. Sexual and violent meanings threaten to overwhelm spiritual ones in the drama, as in life.

The violent, narcissistic, libidinal forces that govern Lameth well up in the audience, too, and erupt in laughter. The metaphor lifts the taboo, the broad action invites response, the repressed is allowed to be expressed. The audience feels the physical impulse

grow and break out in its own physically pleasurable act of laughing.²³ The laughter evoked by the sexual farce works out of proximity and distance. Out of proximity comes confessional laughter, a recognition of kinship with Lameth and a delight in the release of repressed sexual urges. Out of distance comes a derisive laughter, a judgment of what is destructive and violent in the sexual impulse. The result is a dialectical process of expression and repression, eruption and sublimation, creation and destruction of feeling and meaning. This process follows the curve of the repressed meaning of "death" in the words and actions of the scene.

In Lameth's vaunts and Adolescents' confirmation, the word "death" comes to mean sexual intercourse, just as the figure of the archer may represent both Cupid and Mors. Death is distanced by the metaphor, and the speeches are thus very suggestive and funny. But when the action of killing starts, the meaning of "death" as dying intrudes. The two killings are literally murders--we see them on the stage--and only metaphorically sexual acts. The killing can become sexual only when we have destroyed, or at least diminished, the literal meaning of "death," in word or in action. Part of the giddiness of the laughter at the farce may arise out of the very human readiness to ignore death's inevitability, and part may result from our own perverse pleasure in witnessing violence against another. We laugh at what is violent in part because we are pretending that "death" means some-

²³ Olson discusses medieval assessments that the physical act of laughing had a stimulating effect. Writers considered that laughter had emotional and intellectual hygienic value, toward an ethical result.

thing else. But by Lameth's ending lament, the metaphor has ceased to be a metaphor. "Death" can no longer carry sexual meaning: God's vengeance is real, an ultimate truth not subject to human interpretation. As Lameth's blind pleasure ends in pain and terror, the laughter fades and breaks off. In this pageant, freely and indiscriminately expressed sexuality is not pleasurable in its aftermath of guilt, dread and retribution, and neither is the audience's free and indiscriminating laughter. The audience has been encouraged to create a false meaning for "death," and its choices of meaning have reflected its spiritual condition.²⁴ True, transcendent meanings are inescapable, and the audience is asked to recognize, in the end, that breaking the sex taboo is a distortion of meaning, a blasphemy in the body.²⁵ Illicit sex is tragic, not comic, for kin and for self because it has a higher, spiritual meaning informed by the reality of God's judgment and by death. The Lameth episode may offer a release from sexual repression,

²⁴ Munson ("Audience" 62-3) discusses "language as a function of choice;" "language . . . is . . . an index of man's condition," a fallible medium, although it is "the vehicle of religious truth," in the context of the Towneley "Second Shepherds Play," and the Chester "Adoration."

²⁵ The emblem of the bow and the act of killing the father are connected in an early 15th-century Italian exemplum used to illustrate the twelve sins inherent in blasphemy. A man dies leaving his inheritance to his one legitimate son; it is unknown which two of his three sons are bastards. A wise judge orders a test: the son who can shoot an arrow closest to his dead father's heart will gain the inheritance. Two of the sons shoot skillfully and delight at nearing the mark. The third, horrified at the sport, cannot take up the bow. He would rather surrender his inheritance than shoot. To him, the true son of the father, the judge awards the inheritance. Whether this story was known in East Anglia or not, its use as an exemplum against blasphemy, connecting archery, the death of the father, and language, is revealing. Lameth's shooting results in his gaining Cain's unfortunate inheritance. For a brief discussion of the story, its structure, and use in Italian sermons, see Delcorno, "Shooting."

but it also very powerfully represses the sexual impulse, and the impulse to create sexual meaning that spawned it, anew.

Like the laughter that responds to it, the sexuality of the Lameth action is not an entirely satisfying "cleansing of the affections" because it ends in disintegration and death. The disintegration is experienced by the spectator as an affective disintegration, a confusion of the feelings, an uncertainty about the expected response. The audience, like Lameth, has deferred the meaning of "death." Recovering the ultimate meaning abruptly has cut the audience off from its self-indulgent pleasure. The illusory freedom of creating meaning ends in the pain of transcendent truth. Language and actions must be understood in the context of the creator's mind, not the creature's. But "adolescent" physical affections are not really so easily beaten into submission by the spiritually blind. The audience needs a substitute for its lost physical pleasure, a focus for its energies, something that will reestablish the balance of affections and encourage a Bernardian transformation from sexual passion, a "blind and perverted form" of the love of God, to spiritual pleasure, a union with God (see Dawson 95). The audience must be led to interpret what they've seen in the "spirit of wisdom" and the "spirit of understanding" stressed in the commentary on the Pater Noster. They have participated in Lameth's lechery by their "likynge and delit" and must learn the process of transforming lechery to love, the physical image to a spiritual meaning. The Middle Ages included in its enumerations of the sins of lust and lechery the appreciation of mere words that

have no capacity to signify the movements of the soul:

A foul lecherie it is to have likynge and delit in mannes wordes pat kan namoore deme what we ben in oure soule pan bei wite what we penke" (from Wrecchednesse in Krochalis and Peters 260).

The operation on the audience of the extended metaphor of the Lameth episode is akin to that of allegory. All analogies, metaphor, allegory, symbol, were assimilated in the Middle Ages. They connect the known and the unknown. From the known, carnal pleasure, itself expressed distantly, the audience moves to the unknown, spiritual pleasure. The Lameth sequence ensures that the audience will not be "cold and listless," and arouses them to an activity that may urge them to love of God. Gregory's much-quoted discussion of allegory is useful to interpreting the Noah pageant:

. . . if the divine voice were to say to persons blind of heart, 'Follow God' or 'Love God,' as the law does say to them, they cannot get what they hear, both because they have been cast out, and because of the cold listlessness of their infidelity. On account of this condition the divine word speaks to the cold, listless soul in puzzles, and from things which the soul knows, God secretly insinuates in it a love which it does not know.

. . . By explicitly not rejecting the known, one understands something unknown (Commentary on Canticles, trans. in J. B. Allen, "Grammar" 200-01).

The Canticles were taken to express the love of Christ for His Church, the bridegroom for the bride. The Lameth episode, like the Canticles, "speaks to the cold, listless soul in puzzles." The meaning is commu-

nicated on a literal, a temporally metaphoric, and a spiritually allegorical level. The literal and temporally metaphoric meanings are entertained and then repressed. With sure dramatic skill, N-Town fills a gap in meaning by offering a new, devotional focus in spectacle, icon and song. The sexual "love-longing" explored in the Lameth pageant is transformed to a spiritual love-longing, just as the physical meaning of the Canticles is transformed into the longing of Christ for the Church.

In N-Town, the entry of the ark surely created a stir, even if the audience had walked by it ten times during the day. It had to be large enough for all eight members of the Noah family and, because it was constructed offstage instead of on, as in the other cycles, it could have been quite awe-inspiring. Given the medieval love of contraptions, it is possible that it had pulleys for Noah to send out and bring back the dove, and it may have been brightly painted to show that animals were in the ark. The mast likely rose up in the shape of a cross. Such a spectacle would inspire unanimous and energetic wonder and awe, positive, appreciative responses sufficient to purge the conflicting emotions that the end of the Lameth episode might have evoked.²⁶

²⁶ On Noah and the Flood see D. Allen, Legends; Poteet, "Symbolic." The farce of the Lameth episode is, in other cycles, offered by the uxorious wife of Noah. Only in N-Town is Uxor a fit type of Mary and the Church. In all other cycles, God communicates with Noah: in Wakefield, he appears to Noah; in York and Chester, his voice booms orders to Noah from the high scaffold. On dramatizations in other cycles, see Daniels, "Uxor;" Mill, "Noah's Wife;" Nelson, "'Sacred';" Woolf, ch. 7; Kolve; Travis, ch. 3.

As the ark wheels on, Noah and his family recite their laments for man's sexual sin and for the destruction of life wrought by the Flood. These laments contrast with Lameth's self-pitying recognition of his own self-destruction. The audience has participated in creating the "synne of mannys wylde mood," as it has confessed by its own wild laughter. The laments serve to realign their affections. Noah and his family lament both for the audience and with the audience.²⁷ The iconographic tableau and the liturgical laments have a chastening and calming effect (see Olson 211). Noah's ark and family, functioning as dramatic religious icons, draw love and devotion to themselves. The description of the Flood confirms the reality of death and cleanses and redeems the audience from its own confusing pleasures. Worshipful identification with the human community on the stage reintegrates them into the family that is the Church. God's judgment, as well as his merciful salvation of those who serve him, is made plain in this icon, a "symbolic fact communally affirmed" (Munson 62). Destructive aspects of the sexual impulse are sublimated and find a new satisfaction in community and thanksgiving to God. The closing song, a

²⁷ Just as one can, himself, pray for himself, the audience may identify with the one who prays as well as those prayed for. Past criticism often has denied the flexibility of the audience's identification. See, for example, Nelson, "'Sacred'," 399: a spectator "cannot think of himself both as Noah and as the object of Noah's exhortation." But note that a sense of guilt or shame arises in part out of the tension between the two identifications. The self-consciousness necessary to repentance comes from just this sort of double identification--an ability to see our actions through the eyes of the "good." Elsewhere in this article, however, Nelson connects audience responses with the meaning of the Towneley "Noah" in ways that are illuminating for the N-Town pageant, as well.

psalm of praise and thanks, encourages harmony in the audience, as individuals and as a group.²⁸ This is the first music of the cycle since its beginning, and the "Noah" spectacle and song are powerful to arouse the same wonder, longing, devotion and joy of that first creative celestial act. The audience has survived a false creation of meaning, a wild mood that has distanced them, as it distanced Lameth, from the ultimate meanings of words and sexual actions, and so from God and community. And they, with noe cum familia sua, are saved and promised new life.

The Noah pageant coheres in new ways when we understand the sexual metaphor of the Lameth episode. It is structured with a "double plot," one of which is humorous.²⁹ The audience is moved to identify with "another," the newly baptized man, blessed with the dove of the Holy

²⁸ Olson (Recreation 211) notes that spectacle was believed to be calming. The psalms, especially, were thought to calm. (See the N-Town "Betrothal of Mary," where Mary notes that psalms "makyht sowles fayr" and "lytenyth therkeness and puttyth develys Away," Fo. 57v, 429-35). Augustine, Jerome and others defend song and judge that it brings the listener to joy. Music was thought to harmonize body and soul by its effect on the passions. See Edwards ("Techniques" 162) on the affect of musica mundana; Sticca ("Drama" 71-73) on patristic defenses, emotion and the celestial origin of music. See also P. Taylor ("Chaucer's Cosyn" 325: "Music is to words what heaven is to earth, and what ideas are to deeds." Mathieu discusses the power of music to harmonize a group: "la musique . . . catalyse l'effusion communautaire" ("Distanciation"). See also Dutka ("Music" and Music, intro.).

²⁹ The "double plot" is much discussed in connection with the Wakefield "Second Shepherds Play." Morgan discusses the effect of the comedy on audience: ". . . natural laughter was a stage in the progress towards purified joy, and animal crudity was to be converted into spiritual awareness" ("High Fraud'" 688). Olson discusses the relevance of "excrecent realism" (Recreation 137; 182-84 and elsewhere).

Spirit. The old, physical man dies to the new, spiritual one. Breaks in the action and mood of the pageant occur at points of transformation, and the play is a therapeutic "transformational comedy,"³⁰ an affective dramatic experience that demonstrates a highly developed understanding of the corporate "soul" that is an audience. The metaphor arouses, the action expresses, the judgment against Lameth depresses and represses, and the Flood and Noah's salvation from it reconciles, offering a new focus for the physical, mental and spiritual energies that have been aroused. The audience is encouraged to seek a spiritual rather than a physical joy. Inward-turning lust is turned outward to love, the mock-heroic to the truly heroic, farce to devotional drama. Spectators may share with Noah the joy of fear and compulsion overcome--a salvation. The drama has aroused in order to repress and refocus violent and sexual impulses, confessed and neutralized in laughter. The Noah pageant directly communicates a physical, mental and spiritual understanding that the aggressive powers of the body must be united with mind and spirit in service to a higher corporate body: the mystical Body of Christ.

A good deal of action and information is packed into a very few lines in the Lameth episode and, as with any extended metaphor, it is open to almost infinite interpretation. Lameth's blindness fails

³⁰ Frances M. Leonard develops a theory of medieval "transformational comedy" and argues that it may convert or save the audience in "The School for Transformation" and in Laughter. Olson, Recreation, of course, discusses the "therapeutic" aspects of medieval literature at great length (see especially 39 ff.). See also Turner, Ritual, on "liminal" and "liminoid" drama.

to distinguish man from beast, man from God, kin from quarry, and such a lack of discrimination negates the possibility of human and divine love, family, and community. One lesson of the pageant is that words and actions have a meaning beyond themselves and that the capabilities of language and sex, God-given instruments of human creation, must be used with wisdom, the accord of mind, body and spirit. The process of recognizing, destroying, and recreating meaning that metaphor encourages demonstrates man's freedom to choose, and shows how the value of actions and words is to be judged. The pageant uses this process with a part of the action in order to make the statement that ultimate judgment and ultimate value rests in and with God. Learning right interpretation, wisdom, requires that old meanings and old desires be destroyed for new, higher ones. The result of that destruction is akin to the result of the Flood or the Crucifixion: each of them is a destruction that issues in a joyous re-creation, a redemption from the Fall of meaning.

Many of N-Town's pageants discuss in action the use and misuse of mental and physical creative power: language and sexuality. These themes gather significance when they are connected, as do the meanings conflated in the emblem of the bow. The Noah pageant teaches that language and sex may serve both the physical and the spiritual realms, that each individual can choose which realm to serve, and that ultimate value depends on how wisely these creative gifts are used. As the N-Town dramatist so aptly understood, sin and salvation have a good deal to do with the joyful and appropriate use of the bows of the mind, body and spirit.

N-Town's message to the interpreter, as well as to its audience, is communicated in metaphor, action, and the process of the responses it elicits; these together make the statement. The Lameth episode encourages us to bend all of our bows--body, mind and spirit--towards the targets of spiritual and interpretive understanding. The emotional effect of the Noah/Lameth pageant has been to re-awaken hope and confidence, to confirm the advent of mercy, to revive flagging faith, calm anxiety, promise the redemptability of mankind. More characters have peopled the pageant than the audience has seen before. The action and humor of the Lameth episode, the spectacle of the ark, the judgment meted out to the sons of Cain, all are emotionally satisfying to the audience. They have learned to repress the desire to take justice into their own hands and avenge Abel: only God has the power of life and death over his creatures. They have learned to repress sexual desires and channel them into spiritual ones. The audience has been urged to align itself with Noah and his family so that they may be part of the saved, the harmonious community of believers, the ark of the Church.

In the Noah play, justice is tempered with mercy for the proto-Ecclesia. The emblematic and the realistic, the moral and the erotic, the spiritual and the physical, God and mankind are united. The blot of original sin and the terror of earthly life unrelieved by grace are washed away in baptism and love. The next two pageants, the Sacrifice of Isaac, and Moses receiving and giving the Ten Commandments, shadow forth the way in which redemption and reconciliation must come: by

sacrifice, the fulfillment of the law. The audience of these opening episodes has learned two essential laws: absolute obedience to God (sustained primarily by fear, but with a nascent love of God), and absolute respect for human life (arising primarily out of an appropriate self-love, but suggesting the beginnings of love of others). These two moral commandments are given urgency because of God's role as creator and man's as creature, God's power and mankind's powerlessness. The play of Noah confirms that willed obedience to God, despite what earthly signs suggest, is desirable to avoid His wrath and death, and to gain mercy and salvation, life. The Noah pageant ends in hope, renewal, reconciliation. But once again, the sense of security and joy gives way to pathos and pain in the play of Abraham and Isaac that follows.

After the assurance of the Noah pageant that God's commands are clear and that, if mankind loves God and kin well and obeys, he may trust in his salvation, the play of Abraham and Isaac breaks that confidence in order to reestablish it on a higher level of trust. The breaking and reestablishing may be perceived as a circular movement, one of the loops of the ascending spiral of the cycle's design. The peak of the loop is the play of Moses, wherein God offers a reward to mankind--a promise of friendship in a covenant, and the law, the custodian of friendship with God until the coming of Christ. We will discuss the Abraham and Moses pageants in the context of the ethical dissonance sounded in God's command to Abraham, and of the emblem of Moses's bared feet.

Interpretations of the Abraham pageants in the cycles have concentrated on the typological connections between Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac and God's sacrifice of his son, and on the theme of the necessity of absolute obedience to God. The typological approach to Abraham's dilemma raises an interpretive disjunction: God bids Abraham to slay his son, a demand that arises out of his vengeful, judging aspect, and a judgment that is deserved by mankind because of original sin. Abraham, as a type of the Father and as a human father, as well, loves his son. Such love reflects God's loving and merciful aspect. Rosemary Woolf's judgment exemplifies the critical difficulties posed by stressing the typological meaning of this pageant:

Since he (Abraham) is a type of God the Father he can feel no conflict nor judge the situation as a tragic dilemma. The dramatists are concerned only to show what the cost of obedience can be (147).

To limit the dramatic resonance of the action in this way is, I believe, to evade the problem, the pathos, and the point of including the Abraham pageant in the cycles. Abraham's human choice is pathetic, in part because he has no choice and because "here is no grace" in God's command. Mankind is both condemned to death and saved: incipient grace comes in God's reversal of the judgment of death, as true grace will come in Christ's death, God the Father's sacrifice. Reconciling opposites, creating and resolving ambiguities, conflict, dissonance, paradox--these are of the way in which the story teaches the audience. Surely the dissonance of God's command with what the cycle has taught

before would not for the audience be resolved in a complacent connection of Abraham's sacrifice with God's, or even in a determination that the pageant illustrates the necessity of unquestioning obedience.

Before the audience can be convinced to obey the law, offered by Moses in the next pageant, it must be convinced that obedience accomplishes something, must trust God's superior wisdom and justice. The Abraham pageant justifies a particular kind of obedience, a sublimation of self to a higher truth. A primary problem of Christian faith is to reconcile an image of God as all-powerful, all-knowing, and justly condemning with the image of Him as merciful and loving, particularly in the face of a seemingly chaotic world and the experiences of pain, disorder and suffering of those who live in it. Trust, an aspect of faith, arises out of an admission that God is beyond human ethical criteria and judgment, beyond human definitions of justice, right, mercy, love, wisdom. An obedience that is more than merely mechanical arises out of trust, an acknowledgement of powerlessness, need, creatureliness, and a confidence in the power and wisdom of the Other, God. God's command to Abraham tests his creatureliness and trust and demonstrates God's potentia absoluta. God shows Himself not to be subject to any law known to man, not even one given by God, Himself (see Oakley 144-47 and n. 19).

The Angel's command that Abraham kill Isaac comes as a moral and dramatic shock, as a profanation of the innocence of Isaac, played in N-Town as an obedient, loving child. N-Town stresses Abraham's love of God, love of his son, and desire that his son, first, and

himself, second, be saved. In Abraham, respect for human life has flowered into love and mildness; fear of death and fear of God seem to have been resolved into a celebration of life and of love, flowing out of a trust in God's mercy. Abraham exemplifies a mean between the extremes of the characters that have come before. He and Isaac are the most developed representatives of the good that the audience has yet seen. Neither boastful nor self-depreciating, Abraham and Isaac are truthful, virtuous and dramatically interesting (see G. Olson in Ebin 231). Accordingly, God's command seems to deny the values of love and human life already well-established in the cycle, seems to breach natural human ethics.

Like Joseph K. in The Trial, Abraham suddenly is given a sentence without having done anything wrong. In fact, in N-Town, he clearly does everything right. His opening prayer of supplication acknowledges God's might and asks Him to save him from sin; he thanks God "with hert well mylde / of his gret mercy and of his hey grace" (25; 17-18); he exhorts Isaac "Al-myghty god loke pou honoure" (26; 34). Abraham's conception of relations with God is one of reciprocity--please God and he will reward you--an understanding on which the concept of sacrifice is based:

ABRAHAM: In þi zonge lerne god to plese
 and god xal quyte þe weyl þi mede
 (26; 41-2)

God seemingly betrays this reciprocal agreement; he reminds mankind that all deserve death and are only saved through God's power and mercy, and that God is not bound to any such covenants with man.

Although Abraham expresses the necessity of obedience, he does not sacrifice Isaac without articulating to the audience his reservations about what he is to do. Abraham shares his feelings, as a human being, in the face of the moral dilemma God has presented to him:

ABRAHAM: Now goddys comaundement must nedys be done
 All his wyl is wourthy to be wrought
 but zitt þe fadyr to scle þe sone
 grett care it causyth in my thought
 In byttyr bale now am I brought
 my swete childe with knyf to kylle
 but zit my sorwe avaylith ryght nowth
 for nedys I must werke goddys wylle.

. . . .

Alas for ruthe it is pete

(27; 89-96; 100)

Three times in the pageant Abraham says "but zit," indicating his reservations about what he is to do, although the necessity of obedience is not brought into question. From this boundness to obedience in the face of human death and loss comes the "ruthe" and "pete" of the pageant. Abraham's laments are more suggestive of those of Mary at the foot of the cross than any response of a type of God the Father. Abraham is first a man in a seemingly untenable human situation, a man faced with the inscrutability and inevitability of divine will.

In order for Abraham to assure his spiritual well-being, he must be prepared to break the body of his son. If we suspend the typological

connection between Abraham and God the Father for a moment, and concentrate on the sacrifice as an image of the Eucharist, we may see Abraham's anguish as that of every Christian. The Eucharistic sacrifice, a breaking anew of the body of Christ, is necessary for the spiritual well-being of each believer. Abraham's dilemma is thus made present to every Christian: he or she must cause Christ to suffer pain in order to obey Christ's commandments and to assure eternal life. Each of the sections of the cycle has a "Eucharistic moment," and each builds in intensity to the Passion of Christ. If we focus on the sacrificial meaning of the pageant of Abraham rather than merely on its typological connections, we may come closer to its spiritual import and sacrificial meaning.

Abraham's choice is the choice all must make, and is the stuff of which tragedy is made; his situation is as tragic as that of a Lear or Gloucester--and one that can lead to the self-destructive despair of Eve or to the rebellious anger, a type of hopeless despair, of Cain. We remember the lines in which Gloucester expresses his despair:

As flies to wanton boys are we to th' Gods.

They kill us for their sport (Lear 4.1.36-37).

We may also be reminded of Edgar's surety, an echo of Isaac's in *North Town*, that despair will be resolved in new law and grace, in the reward of salvation. Just as Edgar "trifles" with Gloucester's suicidal despair, the pageant "trifles" with the despair of Abraham and of the audience:

EDGAR: Why I do trifle thus with his despair
 Is done to cure it (4.6.33-34)

Like Gloucester's, and like Eve's in this cycle, the death of Isaac need not be consummated in order for it to work its ethical and spiritual effect on Abraham and on the audience. The suggestion of it is so powerful, the act so nearly accomplished, that it confronts Abraham, Isaac and, indeed, the audience, as both a death and a new life. Despair at confronting death's inevitability is cured by an escape from it; the audience may both confront death and receive the curative knowledge of the possibility of salvation:

GLOUCESTER: Henceforth I'll bear
 Affliction till it do cry out itself
 'Enough, enough, and die.' (4.6.74-76)

A new courage in the face of life's exigencies, born of trust in God's wisdom, is the result of Gloucester's, Abraham's and, potentially, the audience's experiences.

The necessity of salvation for all mankind, even the best, is brought close to the audience in this pageant. The disequilibrium of the human situation, suspended as is Isaac between death and salvation, is explored in order to reach a new and higher equilibrium (see Piaget 12-13, 30). The audience learns that ends and means do not conflict, that humanity is not in an ethically untenable position, so long as mankind trusts in God's superior wisdom and obeys out of that trust. A new level of ethical development is reached, one necessary to a comprehension of the significance of the Eucharist, in part because ends and means are shown to be in harmony (see Maguire 142).

The primitive morality of Cain and Lameth, their fearful attempts to accomplish individual ends by whatever means immediately and physically available, is transformed into a moral sophistication that reconciles means and ends, that is able to defer gratification, that issues in a trusting obedience to God, a consciousness and conscience (the same word in the Middle Ages)--a Christian understanding of what God requires in order for man to achieve salvation.

Abraham's actions signal mankind's accomplishment of that in which Lucifer, Eve, Cain and Lameth failed; he transcends pride and despair, the destructive antinomies of naïve belief and rebellious disbelief. His is an act of sublimation, of displacing recognized personal desires in order to follow and achieve truth. Judson Allen has discussed the medieval conception of such a displacement in connection with his exploration of Abelard's set of planctus of Old Testament characters:

Sublimation (and I take the etymological pun seriously) and not self-expression, is the achievement of these poems--the displacement of particular self-hood into truth . . . such a displacement is the central medieval paradigm of personality and personhood ("Grammar" in Ebin 217-19).

Abraham achieves "personhood" by striking the mean, balancing the conflicting claims of the commandment to "love well," sublimating self to truth. He connects his love of Isaac with his love of God. Augustine warned that "whatever is from God is loved unjustly if God is deserted in the loving of it" (Burke, Rhetoric 82). Abraham loves

Isaac without deserting his love of God, not an easy task, as Rolle recognized in his epigrammatic: "Luvē is ase hard as hell" (in Sisam, XIV Century, 39). Abraham balances the conflicting claims of love by his faith and his will, the two components of active trust. He is called to act on his faith, and illustrates Augustine's Fides sine voluntate non potest esse (There can be no faith without the will. In Burke, Rhetoric 271). What has mattered is Abraham's will to sacrifice, his intention, not the sacrifice, itself.

N-Town's Abraham pageant makes statements about intention, will, and ethical discrimination. The audience learns that the moral value of a sacrifice, like the moral value of killing kin, depends upon the intention and will of who so makes the sacrifice or kills, as well as upon the will of God. As a potential murder and sacrifice, Abraham's action echoes Eve's desire for death, Cain's false sacrifice and slaying of Abel, Lameth's murder of Adolescents. Each of the former acts arose out of sin; Abraham's killing would arise out of virtue. In the Lameth pageant, a father kills a son; the act is wrong. In the Abraham pageant, a father moves to kill a son; the act is right and is the occasion for a salvation, a prelude to the salvation effected by the Eucharistic sacrifice. Completing the action of human sacrifice, however, is not important: "the external act (of sacrifice) derives all its moral value from a corresponding act of the human will" (Catholic Encyclopedia s.v. "sacrifice"). Abraham's exercise of will is what matters. The audience is given a Thomistic lesson in ethical discrimination: Ergo actiones humanae secundum circumstantias sunt bonae vel malae (Summa 3, quest. 18, a.3.)--human actions are,

according to the circumstances, good or bad. Intention is inseparable from the value of human actions, although this is not to say that ends justify means. As Aquinas stressed:

In speculative things, truth is the same for all persons In matters of behavior, however, truth of practical moral rightness is not the same for all with regards to that which is particular but only with regard to that which is in common . . . (Summa I/II, quest. 94, a.4; trans. in Maguire, "Ratio" 24-5).

Speculative truth dictates that man should never kill kin. However, the "moral rightness" of Abraham's will and intent to kill Isaac cannot be judged by "that which is in common," since God's command to him is individual, not common.

From a preter-circumstantial ethical knowledge, one that ignores circumstances in its determinations and blindly follows laws, the audience is brought to an ability to distinguish circumstances, to balance conflicting ethical claims. It has a number of models with which to work: Lameth's unintentional killing of Cain and intentional murder of Adolescents; God's intentional destruction of mankind in the flood; Abraham's intention to sacrifice Isaac. One mark of moral maturity is the ability to distinguish these, to judge moral rightness based on intent and the relative value of actions. Similarly, a mark of spiritual maturity is the ability to balance despair and hope, the coexisting transcendent realities of damnation and salvation, of sin and redemption, of justice and mercy. Educating the audience

to hold these paradoxes and make ethical and spiritual distinctions is what much of the process of the N-Town cycle is about.

The Old Testament pageants address the problems of the first stages of the pilgrimage of the spirit, the ethical realities that must be confronted by individuals who live in a society before God. Maguire has expressed these essential ethical realities as propositions that support a statement that human beings are "relational, social, historical, and unique," propositions that must be accepted if a person is to reach moral maturity. Following each proposition, pageants in which these issues are addressed are given in parenthesis:

- What is right for one person may be wrong for another (compare Lameth and Abraham).
- What is right for a person now may be wrong for the same person at another time (Abraham).
- Some persons are, in ethical calculation, worth more than others (Cain and Abel; Lameth and Noah; Adolescents and Isaac).
- No two persons are the same (compare varying responses of characters to God's commands, judgment, wrath; e.g. compare Eve and Cain).
- Persons are social by nature, not by choice (Adam and Eve; Cain and Abel)--(Maguire, Moral 144)

Because Abraham shows God that he can act upon a comprehension of the necessity of obedience at the same time as he voices reservations that signal his understanding of these foundational moral propositions, he may be saved, and Moses, the next representative of humankind, may receive the Decalogue. Moses shares the law and the promise of

God's friendship implicit in the covenant with all mankind, here played by the audience. The audience of the cycles has been offered an experience that renders them deserving, that may bring them to Abraham's rung on the ladders of will, wisdom, spiritual maturity. Learning, intelligence and wisdom have been offered in symbolic and experiential ways rather than in an openly didactic manner. The audience, like historical mankind, has been prepared to receive the veiled promise of grace and salvation, the burning bush, and the covenant of the law. Fear, anxiety, and disequilibrium dissolve in a communally shared sense of release, of tragedy averted, a feeling that echoes the truth of Christian salvation.

The process of the Old Testament pageants has alternated equilibrium and disequilibrium, has offered security and then stripped it away, has established laws and then put them into conflict. The potential effect on the audience is to strip away its dependency on human wit and understanding; it is left with nothing but its trust in and desire for guidance from God, a prerequisite to salvation. Haughton's analogy between salvation and drama is telling on this point and bears quoting at length:

. . . the stripping away of old securities is reminiscent of the methods (now much frowned on) by which novices in religious houses used to be deliberately humiliated in elaborate and rather macabre ways--such as being made to do obviously useless things, and publicly reprimanded for faults they had never committed. This could easily be an exercise in concealed sadism, but the

proper intention of such techniques was to jerk the novice out of reliance on his intelligence, his talents, or even his virtues and general sense of being acceptable. He was forced from one position to another, until nothing was left him but naked faith and a residual obstinacy about the reality of his own religious vocation. If he survived this, he might discover the meaning of salvation and be able to live it and communicate it (Drama 104).

The process that Haughton describes is one that leads to the disequilibrium, the confrontation with the abyss, that Augustine stressed as important and that is one aspect of the process of the Old Testament pageants. The anxiety evoked by the pageants of the age of God the Father, a tension between despair and hope, damnation and salvation, forces a confrontation with the need for security, comfort, love, with the need for God. Augustine described the sort of anxiety that N-Town may arouse in the audience in the Confessions. Albert Outler summarizes:

In his nine years among the Manichees, he says, God 'allowed (him) to tumble and toss around in the darkness--striving to rise but falling back again the more heavily.' The unrighteous stumble and fall; fleeing from God's goodness, they collide with his justice. They stand vertiginous on a pinnacle shouting defiance at the heavens and then fall back again. Anxiety gnaws at the soul which is unable to find equilibrium in any intellectual or practical certitude (94).

Augustine's experience of the spiritual infancy of the soul parallels the experience of "Mankind" in the Old Testament plays. That experience results in a cleansing of the affections, a purging of despair, anger, passion, fear. The closing play of the sequence offers an emblem that is a commentary on the process that the race of Mankind and, potentially, the audience, has experienced. After Moses has wondered at the bush that burns without being consumed, the rubrum ardentum that was interpreted as a type of the paradox of the Incarnation, God confronts him and commands:

DEUS: Thu take þe schon anon ful rownde
 of þi fete in hast lete se
 fful holy is þat place and grownde
 þer þou dost stonde I sey to the.

(31v; 29-32)

Moses is to remove his shoes because he stands on holy ground.³²

Late-medieval vernacular works interpreted the significance of the feet and of shoes in varying ways. From Augustine's frequent image of the pes intellectus and the pes affectus came numerous uses of the image of the feet that propel the soul on its journey to heaven. The feet of the pilgrim, which must work together if he is to progress on the road to salvation, represent the reason and the affections. On holy ground, Moses does not need to cover his feet, he does not need his "scho of alle Heuen," the covering of heavenly

³² On Moses, see Dustoor, "Origin;" Woolf 153ff.; Kolve 91, 97-8; 75-78. The pageant has not been much discussed. On the burning bush, see the Wakefield Prima Pastorum, Morgan 681, Block ii. On feet as affections, see Glasscoe (1982) 203-6.

desire which is to array the foot of affection:

He hap̄ zeve to þi feet schoes of . . . heuenly desire, whereaftir
þi foot þe which is gostly affeccion shuld be arayed (in Glasscoe
204).

Moses doffs his shoes which protect the affections from contact with the earth. This image signals that Mankind's affections have been cleansed, his feet may touch holy ground. Abraham demonstrated that his foot of affection and foot of intellect (or foot of earthly affection and foot of heavenly affection) could work in harmony, could move his will to obedience. Ethically and spiritually capable of acts of will and sacrifice in order to gain friendship with God, humankind may be rewarded in the Moses pageant. The reward is "the spirit of wisdom . . . that is, pleasure coming from understanding of the law" (Krochalis and Peters 177). Faith, humility, desire, obedience, hope, are rewarded by the wisdom, intelligence and knowledge promised in the commentary on the Pater Noster, an understanding of the visible, the invisible and the connections between them.

God's order that Moses remove his shoes was in the Middle Ages connected with a warning to sublimate earthly wit to heavenly wisdom, a warning not to be "inquisitiff":

And þer-fore . . . lat vs not be to inquisitiff in oure own wittis, for God forbedeþ it and seyb to ererych of vs þise wordes, 'Com þou no nere hidurward. For þo þinges, seyb oure Lord, þat bep a-boven kynde, seche not to knowe hem naturally, but rapur,' seyb God, 'dop of þi shoes of þi feete"--þat is to sey, þe sotell coveryngus of þin affeccion for þis erthe þat þin affeccion stondeþ on . . . (W. Ross, Sermons 224).

In N-Town, Moses's response to the emblem of the burning bush is to observe it without seeking to understand its meaning or explain it to the audience. He begins to go near it, but his curiosity is halted by God's summons:

MOYSES: It fyguryth sum thyng of ryght gret fame
 I kan not seyn what it may be
 I wyll go nere in goddys name
 and wysely loke þis busch to se.

(31; 21-24)

Moses's ability to connect a visible sign with the invisible without questioning its meaning fits him to receive the law, our "schoolmaster until Christ" (Gal. 3:24). This is the law that acquaints men with sin, that teaches the cosmic meaning of earthly events, that reconciles God's laws with man's experience, the spiritual with the ethical. Grace and law, mercy and justice, are combined in Moses's experience of and with God. The audience is drawn into the circle of friendship with God by their experience of receiving the law from Moses:

DEUS: Loke þat þou preche all abowte
 hoo so wyll haue frenshipp of me

(31v; 41-2)

The Moses pageant and the Genealogy play that begins the Marian sequence that follows, calm the audience for a devotional and spiritual response to the gentler plays that portray Mary's life. The cycle has offered instruction as to how to avoid the errors of the past, has broken the cycle of chaos and violence, has cleansed the affections.

The audience has been prepared to move from fear and violence to love and grace. The longing for friendship with God, for an intercessor other than the law, for mercy, order, grace, is to be satisfied in Mary and in Christ.

In its movement from Paradise to chaos to communitas, from lawlessness to law, from fear and despair to love and hope, the opening sequence is a microcosm of the entire cycle, as well as a first stage in the pilgrimage toward redemption. The Old Testament pageants first encourage the audience to identify with the old or earthly ways of judging action, then break up that response and replace it with new, spiritual understanding. The pageants work to free the audience from the libidinal forces that may block their spiritual maturity. The cruelties of obsessive and biological existence are exposed in order to pave the way toward acceptance of a controlled, willed spiritual existence. The paradoxes of the human heart that may both love and hate, obey and rebel, are addressed directly, explored and resolved in a Christian understanding that mankind is suspended between these poles, as he is suspended between heaven and hell, salvation and damnation. The fallen desires of the self are put out into the open, confessed, as it were, and the audience is reassured that God knows and still promises redemption. Thus the opening sequence removes a barrier to wisdom, the corrupting passions, and clears the way for reason, judgment, spiritual development.

The "suspension" that is characteristic of Mankind's position in the Christian cosmos is mirrored in N-Town by a suspended form, a structure that rises and falls, rising again to a higher level. Reversals of plot and form, and juxtapositions of the comic and the

tragic, help to convert the audience from one way of seeing to another:

The use of suspense of form implies a systematic attack upon all the conventional--that is habitual, emotional and moral responses of the audience, a breaking-up of the established emotional and moral associations to replace them with new ones . . . it undermines the very foundation of their emotions and moral judgments (E. Olson 123).

The humorous often encourages the audience to identify with old or earthly ways of judging action in order to break up that response and replace it with a new, Christian, one. Every fall has a comic element; every Old Testament incident in N-Town has its comic and its tragic aspect, and manifests some tension between the comic and tragic visions. The tensions between fall and redemption, tragedy and comedy, fear and love, desire for flight and desire for union with God, are potent to create a longing for stability, love, relief from conflicting emotions that will be satisfied in the ensuing pageants.

The feelings and recognitions encouraged by the Old Testament sequence correspond to those of the first stage of the penitential process, recognition of sin and longing for salvation.³³ That recog-

³³ Other models suggested by the Old Testament sequence in N-Town include those of Father (Creation/Adam), Son (Crucifixion/Abel), and Holy Spirit (Church/Noah) and the corresponding qualities of power, wisdom and love, or of mind, understanding and will. The Devil (Eve), World (Cain) and Flesh (Lameth) is another plausible pattern, as is the microcosm of the process of the whole of salvation, from Fall, through sin (Cain), Baptism (Noah), the Passion (Isaac), and the Last Judgment, potential union with God (Moses and the Law). The Old Testament addresses sins of commission, not omission--what should not be done rather than, as in the Marian and Ministry sequences, what should.

niton, quite literally a re-thinking of one's relation to the world, requires that the audience lower its self-esteem, sublimate itself to God's will and to God's view of the world. In order to encourage a longing for God, the cycle shows the audience how to reconcile conflicts between impulse and conscience, body and soul, and offers substitute satisfactions for earthly passions. Human instincts are encouraged, the audience is allowed vicarious expression, so that passions may be sublimated to a desire for oneness with God, peace, salvation, community. The Old Testament plays begin in aporia or disorientation, the time of confusion that must occur before salvation is possible, and end in community and reconciliation with God.

The Old Testament plays in N-Town have offered to the audience an experiential knowing, a "foundational moral experience" of the feelings, desires and judgments that characterize the Christian soul in its infancy. The next and more spiritual stage brings historical mankind and, with it, the audience, closer to the ritual and dramatic goal of the cycle--salvation.

CHAPTER V

THE TRIUMPH OF LIFE: PROPHECY AND PILGRIMAGE

Ffor all þat hym drede . now is he cum.

(N-Town, Magnificat Fo.73)

Ffor now is cum mercy and venjauns is past (Fo. 74).

Like the Old Testament sequence, N-Town's Marian and Ministry sequences are mimetic of the entire cycle of the spiritual life, from unbelief and spiritual blindness to belief, revelation and salvation. The Nativity bridges these two sections and helps to make the transition from a focus on the attributes of Mary, the love and grace that alter the living of earthly life, to the attributes of Christ, the wisdom and power that assure the sinner victory over death. The Marian plays mediate earth and heaven, chronicle social and spiritual milestones, and emphasize love and faith; the Ministry plays confront the audience with death and hell, and what must be done to assure the afterlife. Although the pageants from the Jesse play through the Raising of Lazarus comprise a complete life-cycle, the Nativity marks a turning from faith and tropology to eschatology. Two "cycles" are explored inside the larger life-cycle structure: the first revolves around the Incarnation; the second around Christ's confrontation with Satan at the Temptation. Accordingly, we will discuss the two concerns of this dual sequence, earthly life and eternal after-life, in two chapters. This first chapter studies the Marian pageants and their focus on love and life; the next addresses the Ministry plays and their theme of repentance in the face of death.

In all of the cycles, the movement from the Old Testament to the New is one from the physical to the spiritual, from cupiditas to caritas, from death to life, justice to mercy, the age of the judging Father to that of the merciful Mother and Son. The Incarnation links God and Man; the person of Mary mediates earth and heaven, fear and love. In N-Town, the mediate period between the Old Testament and the Nativity is dramatized at length and with a special poignancy and stress. The lives of Mary and Joseph are developed more than in other cycles. N-Town not only chronicles the important events of Mary's earthly life, but it charts the spiritual progress of Joseph. The structure of the plays from the Conception of Mary to the Nativity is mimetic of the first stages of spiritual pilgrimage. Thus the cycle makes available to the audience what is necessary for a transformation from the fearful obedience of the servant and hireling to the loving devotion of a child of God.

The Marian pageants celebrate new life, fertility, regeneration, and love, and mediate heaven and earth in ritual actions, liturgical recitals and miracles. The pageants to Christ's Nativity focus on kinship and family relations, earthly love, and love and grace come to earth from heaven. The characters of the Marian plays demonstrate that mankind is worth saving, that the spark of the divine has not been extinguished, that harmony and accord are possible, that God's mercy is deserved as much as his justice. Whereas the emphasis in Part I is on sin, discord, and death, offering to the audience a recognition of what is damnable in the human condition, the emphasis in

this first section of Part II is on redemption, accord, and life, as it is lived and celebrated in the human community with hope of heaven.

Love, caritas, is the motive behind the Incarnation and is exemplified in Mary. The fact of this love motivates mankind to love each other and to love God. One appropriate response to the Incarnation is contrition, a feeling of regret for and detestation of sinful actions with the resolve not to sin again. True or "perfect" contrition is motivated by the love of God--a love-longing and desire for salvation--the primary emotion evoked by the mediating Marian section. The audience has learned in Part I what it is to dread; in Part II, it learns a hope born of faith in God's mercy, and of love. The transformation from fear and dread to love and longing is enacted in the drama of the Marian pageants, and they evoke a similar transformation in the thoughts and emotions of the audience. The dread and shame of Anna and Joachim ("For þe dredful domys of God sore dred I" and "God scheeld us fro shame" (38; 24 and 38v; 64)) are transformed by the actions of Mary into love and a desire for God ("þou (Mary) lernyst hem love lord þat on þe look / and makyst hem desyre thyngys celestly" (57v, 447-8)).

The importance of both fear and love to the process of salvation was stressed in the Middle Ages. Two understandings of the role of fear were recognized, and they are well-expressed by two passages from Scripture, the first from the Old Testament:

The fear of the Lord is the beginning
of wisdom (Psalms 111:10);

the second from the New:

There is no fear in love, but perfect
love casts out fear (I John 4:18).

In the formulation of the thirteenth-century English scholastic philosopher Alexander of Hales:

. . . theology, which perfects the soul 'per affectionem,'
moves it to good principally by means of fear and love
(Glasscoe 1982, 205).

In the mystical tradition revived in the fifteenth century, however, dread of God more often was identified with the earliest stages on the path to faith, characteristic of the soul's carnal and earthly concerns. In Bernard's exploration of the four stages of love, for example, the motivation of fear, like the motives of self-love and desire for gain, does not effect the soul's conversion. Fear may initiate a transformation, but it is only a cosmetic one:

Neither fear nor love of self can change the soul. At times they change one's appearance or deeds, they can never alter one's character . . . Let the slave have his own law, the very fear which binds him; let the hireling's be the lust for gain which restrains him when he is attracted and enticed by temptation. But neither of these is without fault nor can either convert souls. Charity converts souls because it makes them act willingly (On Loving God XII:35, Treatises II, Walton, trans.).

Fear may evoke recognition of sin, but it cannot spur true contrition, which arises out of love of God, nor can it support a resolution not to sin in the future, because it does not affect the will. N-Town stresses the importance of voluntarily performing good actions in the Marian sequence, especially in the character of Joseph, who begins in fear and self-love. This stress reflects medieval concerns with the role of the will. A characteristic distinction between the spiritual efficacy of dread and of love is made in the vernacular "Art of Dieing," a part of the late-fourteenth-century Book of Vices and Virtues. In the context of the soul's coming to judgment, we learn that fear is but an early milestone on the pilgrimage of the soul:

. . . the holy drede of God . . . is bigynnyng of good and holy lif and of al goodnesse . . . But it is not ynow to lete evele but a man lerne to do wel and to seche the vertues . . . love is wel strengere than drede. And than is a mannes lif fair and honeste when men fleeth yvel and doth wel--nought for drede to be dampned, but for desir to have hevене and for love of God . . . For he that hath love to his ledere renneth fastere and with lesse travaile than he that serveth God for drede. The hare renneth and the greyhound renneth: that oon for drede, that other for gret desyr. That on fleeth, that other chaseth. The holy men renneth as greyhoundes for thei have evere here eighen to heven . . . This is the lif of the right fyn lovers with gentel herte and trewe, that loven so much vertues that thei hateth synne (Blake, Prose, 137-38).

N-Town's middle section illustrates and arouses a turning from the fear of the slave and the rabbit, the fear aroused in response to the actions of Eve, Cain and Lameth, to the love of the "right fyn lovers with gentel herte and trewe" that we find in the courteous and often courtly pageants of the life of Mary. Through Mary, fear and love, justice and mercy, the Old Law and the New, accord.

The shift from a fear that hides from God to a redeemed fear that seeks to do his will, from a running away from to a running towards, is a transformation to what St. Theresa termed the "anxiety of desire," and Bernard, "chaste fear," a necessary component of charity. Charity "will never be without fear, but it will be a chaste fear" (Loving XIV:30). Curran has explored at length the positive role of fear and anxiety in the Christian tradition. He describes two primary and recurrent religious impulses, both arising out of anxiety. The first most strongly is evoked by N-Town's Part I, with its fits and starts of striving towards ethical maturity, an "anxious striving;" the second describes what is aroused in Part II--longing and love:

The second is a profound sense of the transiency of all immediate, earthly goals, but not their rejection--and consequently an 'anxious longing' for lasting security, fulfillment, and ultimate being and becoming in an increasing participation in the person and being of God (105-6).

Until union with God is consummated, anxiety is necessary; it is an anxiety that arises from and is a form of love and longing:

. . . the perversion of our longing for 'the love which casts out fear' . . . is the dread that we shall lose or never have such love. It is the fear of being naughted, the horror of 'groundlessness' (Outler 101).

such a fear does not lead to despair (as in the case of Eve), or to a damming of love (as in Cain and Lameth); rather it is made possible by love and feeds and is fed by that love. In N-Town, love and chaste fear are explored in the Marian plays, and the pageants may arouse love and "anxious longing" in the audience.

The love of God necessary for salvation is possible only when there is some hope of kinship between self and God, when the spark of transcendence that is in God's creatures, made in his image, is recognized. This recognition comes about in part by self-knowledge, a consciousness of what is evil and what is good in mankind. Part I of N-Town reveals the evil; Part II first reveals the good, and then demonstrates in the pageants of Christ's ministry how the good may overcome the evil, in love and humility, and by acts of the will. Knowledge of the demands on and limitations of the self leads to knowledge of God, as Wisdom instructs Anima in the play of Wisdom:

By knowynge of yowur sylff, ye may haue felynge
 Wat Gode ys in yowur sowle sensyble;
 the more knowynge of yowur selff possyble,
 the more veryly ye xall God knowe (ll. 95-8).

But the process of salvation, of kinship with Christ, is a circular one: by knowing one's self, one knows God better, but by knowing

Christ, one may be led to recognize one's own divine potential.

For example, the revelation of the first advent of Christ, the Nativity, may initiate the second advent, as it was described in many medieval works (e.g. Speculum Sacerdotale; see Vaughan 500ff.). Bernard describes the "middle advent" as being "in spiritu et virtute." It is this advent that moves the will to do good as well as avoid evil, that replaces fear with love and "anxious longing," that the Marian plays of the cycle may effect. By the Nativity, the audience may possess the self-knowledge and the knowledge of God that characterizes the advent of Christ in the heart, and so may say with Mary:

Magnificat, anima mea dominum

Et exultavit spiritus meus . in deo salutari meo (72v).

The revelations and recognitions of the Marian plays confirm faith, teach and arouse love, and offer to the audience the stages of spiritual development necessary to fulfill the laws of love. With the advent of love, the audience is prepared for true contrition and the penance made possible by Christ's actions in the Ministry sequence which follows.

Processing from Old to New: the Jesse pageant

N-Town signals that a new cycle is to begin by the genealogy play that follows Moses's receiving the Ten Commandments.¹ Although the pageant's function as epilogue to the Old Testament and prologue to the New is commonly understood, its mimetic quality and its possible reception by the audience has not been discussed. Twenty-seven prophets and kings make up the procession--a lengthy and impressive spectacle. Isaiah delivers the first and longest speech, two eight-line stanzas; Jesse, David and Jeremiah follow with one stanza each; the rest have four lines (splitting the eight-line stanza into two); Amon Rex offers a closing stanza of petition to God for grace "whan pat we xal dye." Although the lines of the prophets and kings communicate many important doctrinal and spiritual messages, and offer to the audience a preview of the Nativity and Passion to come, the spectacle and form of the pageant most interest us here.

It generally is accepted that the procession in all of the cycles is "expository rather than dramatic" (Dunn, "Recent" 186), "a pageant of icons" (Axton, European, 72-3) which is neither representational nor mimetic. Clearly those playing the kings and prophets do not "impersonate" the characters they play. Indeed, most could be switched

¹Block's edition designates this pageant "The Prophets," but as Woolf and others have noted, the pageant's end is signalled with an "explicit Jesse," signalling a scribe's consciousness that N-Town's procession of kings of Israel and Judah, as well as prophets, is indebted to the tradition of Jesse trees. It is more appropriately called a "jesse" pageant or genealogy play. On the tradition of the processus prophetarum, see Campbell ("Why"), Bonnell ("Sources"), Brawer ("Form and Function"). On the symbolism of the Jesse tree, see Cope 65.

about, costumes, emblems, speeches and all, with negligible effect. But the procession itself, as action and spectacle, is mimetic of a process that is very important at this particular juncture of the N-Town cycle. A procession travels from one place to another and comes very near to most in the audience in its progress. The Jesse pageant would encourage people to follow it in order to see and, perhaps, to catch lines. Whether the prophets actually processed as they spoke, or stood in a row for the duration of their lines, there would be movement that the audience would be encouraged to follow.

As a spectacle, a procession is "a basic variation of the pilgrimage" (Da Matta 217); it serves to connect one stage to the next. In this way, the spectacle is mimetic of its purpose and function, to transit from past to future, from despair to hope, from the old law to the new, from the age of veiled symbols to physical realities. A procession offers a sense of futurity, of going towards something, and away from something else. The spectacle of the procession is mimetic of the transition from sterility, lust, death and damnation to fertility, purity, life and salvation. The emphasis on grace, mercy and life helps the audience to move from the images of Part I, wherein "death reigned from Adam to Moses" (Romans 5:14) to Part II, a celebration of hope, kinship, love and life.

Assuredly the pageant is long. We have assumed that the length and didacticism would cause interest to flag and minds to wander. The opposite could be true: the spectacular costumes, and reiterations

of hope in the face of God's grace, could build the very longing and expectation that was to have been felt by the Old Testament prophets, themselves. The experience of this pageant could be mimetic of what it is about--the waiting and desiring of the Old Testament righteous. This affect, characteristic of popular literature and the advent liturgies, has been noted by Simone Weil (Religious Experience 1107): "No poetry concerning the people is authentic if fatigue does not figure in it, and the hunger and thirst which come from fatigue." That "hunger and thirst" is critical to building the "anxious longing" of this stage of N-Town's progress towards faith. The effect of the procession and the repetitive litany of prophecies suggests the emotional intensity behind the description of the second advent, the coming of Christ into the heart, found in the Advent sermon of the early-fifteenth-century Speculum Sacerdotale.

Of the secund aduent it is sayd þus at this tyme: 'Veni, domine, et noli tardare.' That is to say: 'Come, lord, with-oute taryng to louse the bondis and the gyltis of thy folke.' . . . Oure olde fadres gretely desirid the comynge and the aduent of oure lord, and opynyng here hertis and here desire they seid to hemself: 'When shall he come? When shall he be bore? For I shall dure thereto, and for I shall se it' (4-5).

Among the results of the Jesse pageant is an arousal of the desire and expectation of "oure olde faders." The plays of the Virgin work to draw some of that desire and longing to the figure of Mary, and to augment it. The time of the advent and of salvation is not yet.

The audience is to be offered a spiritual preparation for the Nativity of Christ beyond the giving of the law. First, they are to be instructed in love, the mediator which "copuls God and manne" (Rolle; see also de Lubac 41-2). They will learn how to love one another, how to participate in a family and community, and how to love God. Their progress along the road to love is explicitly compared to the process of a pilgrimage in N-Town. In order fully to appreciate and respond to the significance of the Nativity and to the demands of the salvation offered by Christ the audience must, with Mary and Joseph, ascend "pe fyftene grees."

Ascending "pe fyftene grees"

It is customary to stress N-Town's veneration of Mary, and to discuss her role as divine mediatrix, in the drama and in salvation history.² Discussions of Joseph, on the other hand, interpret him as "affirming that the miraculous happens in a natural world" (Kolve 249), hence his fabliau characterization (Baird, Gibson). That Joseph is converted from coarseness and suspicions of cuckoldry to courtesy and caritas is generally accepted (Prosser, ch. 5, for ex.). He is taken to be the type of the first convert. Although the pageant of Joseph's Doubts has spurred study, it has not been connected with the others in the Marian sequence, and his assumptions about Mary's pregnancy still are considered to be somewhat crude and unnecessarily abusive. Of the plays that come before Joseph's Return, only the Parliament of Heaven and Annunciation Play has drawn much attention. The pageants of the Conception of Mary, Mary in the Temple and the Betrothal of Mary have been shuffled away as somewhat unsuccessful St. Anne's Day plays, and Rosemary Woolf's judgments of them have stood: "we may doubt the literary advantage of including the three plays so far discussed;" since they lack a "sureness of touch" (164).

This discussion will begin by assuming that N-Town's writing has not lost its "sureness of touch" in these plays, and will further invert the terms of past discussion by concentrating on Joseph's

²On the Marian plays see, for example, Vriend, Forrest, Woolf (chs. 8-9), Coletti ("Spirituality").

dramatic role in the Marian sequence. Both Mary and Joseph mediate in a mediate sequence of the cycle. The mediatrix is human and accessible, as well as divine; to Joseph, a fallen heir to human foibles, the mysteries of God gradually are revealed. Joseph is a mediator between the old and the new, Adam and Christ, the law of justice and the law of love. In addition, Joseph mediates between the physical, intellectual and spiritual realities of those in the audience and those ideals exemplified in Mary.

But we will also shift the terms of past discussions of the figure of Joseph in N-Town by demonstrating that Joseph's "conversion" is neither sudden nor complete, nor can it be. He may have faith and love, contrition and confession. The results of grace, however, are not yet available to him either historically or as a type of the spiritual quester. His faith must, indeed, be blind because, in N-Town, his spiritual blindness is not cured, the stain of original sin not washed away. The cure comes with Christ's moral recapitulation of Adam's sin in the Temptation, after which true penance and salvation from death is made possible. Joseph represents the good of the Old Testament and is a fit spiritual model up to the point of confrontation with death, when Christ's grace becomes necessary and is made available. In the Marian pageants, the audience is encouraged to an imitatio Josephi; in the Ministry plays, to an imitatio Christi. We will discuss Joseph's "travayll" in the light of Mary's spiritual accomplishment; each comments on the other.

The primary themes, concerns and emblems of the sequence are introduced in the pageant of Mary's Conception, a sort of dramatic prologue. Anna and Joachim ("he þat to God is reðy," 38, 22) are exemplary, obedient and loving to God and each other. They suffer sorrow, shame, separation, exile for the sin of Adam and Eve: they are unfruitful, barren. The first couple's expulsion from Eden is re-enacted with ritual and dramatic poignancy when Joachim is shamed in the temple. His offering is considered presumptuous because he is barren: he is cast out. The society and fellowship of those inside the temple is contrasted with the shame and pathos of the exile, who is rifted from the society of men and even from his wife. As the priest chants the ritual benediction, Joachim laments his sorrow and public shame, his exile. The image of the temple or house, and the contrasting rituals and spiritual states of those inside and those outside, will mark points of Joseph's progress, which culminates in the Nativity, a spiritual event which takes place in a stable without a wall, excluding none.

Joachim's exile is in the hills, in the supportive company of his shepherds, who have a natural faith. The Angel's separate announcements to Anna and Joachim that they will bear a child results in their ritual reunion at the Golden Gate and their osculum pacis.³ Journeys, ritual arrivals and leave-takings, greetings and benedictions, and

³The kiss of peace commonly came before the Eucharist in the medieval mass.

kisses of reconciliation figure in every pageant before the Nativity.

Mary's advent releases Joachim from judgment, not by overturning the old law, but by fulfilling it in the new law of miraculous love and mercy. The exile returns: life, love, and kinship triumph. The play of Mary's Conception illustrates the effect her life will have on all mankind. With her birth, reconciliation between man and God is made possible. In the following pageant, Mary's Presentation in the Temple, she charts the path to amendment of life.

Mary's recital of the "fyftene grees . pou may Ascene . . . Ffrom babylony to hevynly jherusalem" (44, 79,81) explicitly charts the attributes the spiritual pilgrim must gain, and so helps the audience to evaluate the spiritual progress of the characters in the drama. At the age of three, Mary easily ascends the fifteen steps to the temple, one for each degree, symbolizing her spiritual advancement. Joseph's "travayll" will be longer and more arduous. His dramatic and spiritual role, too, begins with a summons to the temple. Both Mary and Joseph are called to fulfill a role in salvation history, and the pageants of the Presentation and Betrothal clearly were written to be complementary, to contrast the responses of Mary and Joseph to the call.⁴

When Mary is three, Anna and Joachim ask if she is prepared to be dedicated to the temple, and to fulfill her spiritual role:

⁴ Woolf believed the Betrothal pageant to be "episodic and diffuse," with "pointless inconsistency in narrative and characterization" 163.

Wole ze go se þat lord your husbond xal ben
 and lerne for to love hym . and lede with hym your lyff
 . . . Wole ze be pure maydyn . and also goddys wyff.
 42v, 12-16)

Mary responds in affirmative humility: she is willing but unworthy. When Joseph is summoned to present himself in the temple as a suitor for Mary's hand, he is lying on the ground, an emblem of his acedia, sloth. He is the unready, "may nother well goo ne stound" (52v, 162), and begs off on account of his age and infirmity. His is a perverted form of Mary's humility: he is unworthy, and therefore unwilling. Before he at last reaches the temple, Joseph fails in every one of the fifteen degrees, most particularly in the first (desiring to be with God--in his temple), the second (seeking to know God's will), and the third:

The thrydde is gladnes in mende in hope to be
 that we xall be savyd all thus
 I am glad of these tydyngys ben seyð to me
 now xal we go . in to goddys hous (44, 92-95).

Joseph is called to the fellowship of the temple, but he demurs. He doesn't see why he should take the trouble; although he journeys far and wide to work in the world, this journey, a spiritual work, does not seem to serve his self-interests:

Me to traveyll yt is no nede
 I prey you frendys go forth your wey (52, 167-8).

"Traveyll" in the Middle Ages meant both work and travel and was often used in connection with pilgrimage, spiritual and physical

work. Lazy, tarrying, and confined in the physical realm, Joseph inverts the ideal of Mary, who "beth bolde" and runs to the temple alone, before her parents. When finally moved to set out by the threat of the bishop's displeasure, by fear, Joseph tells the others:

ze be men . þat may wele ren . go ze be-fore
 I am old . and also colde . walkyng doth me wo
 perfore now wole I . so my staff holde I . þis jurny to wore.

(53, 188-90)

Although he takes off his coat in preparation for the journey, and takes up the staff emblematic of the pilgrim, he offers no prayers, no requests for God's help. Joseph fails to recognize that his actions have spiritual meaning and may set a spiritual example for his brethren and for the audience. His staff is emblematic of the pilgrim (although he is unconscious of being on a spiritual pilgrimage), and also signals that he is to be an example to others. As Christ later teaches in the pageant of the Last Supper:

And þe staf þat in your Handys ze xal holde
 Is not ellys . but þe exawmplys to other men teche
 Hold fast your sauys in your handys and beth bolde
 To every creature myn precepttys for to preche (155, 746-49).

Joseph needs Christ's admonition to "beth bolde." He shrinks from "travayll" and cannot follow, much less give, an example. He resists the possibility of change, physical or spiritual: "I chaungyd not zet of all my long lyff" (53, 180). Far from bold, the old dog wants no truck with new tricks: he fears falling down in the way--physical

hurt--and having his staff stolen by his fellows. He fears the derision of the community for even presenting himself with the young suitors. His very un-"chaste" and unspiritual dreads demonstrate that he falls short of the ninth degree of the gradual psalms:

a childely fer in dede

With A longyng love in oure lord þat ay is

blyssyd Arn All they þat god drede

Whiche þat gon in his holy weys (44, 116-19).

and does not, like Mary, seek

In goddys temple to serve evyr-more

and wurchep god in loue and drede (49, 59-60).

Once Joseph is in "goddys temple," the Bishop explains "þe cawse of our comyng." God has promised a miracle: he whose rod flowers will wed Mary. Although he has traveled (under protest) to be present, Joseph determines that there is no cause for his coming and, trusting his earthly reason, fearing shame, and pleading infirmity, he remains seated in the back row. He would go (he "wolde" do almost anything), but he will not:

Com za za . god help full fayn I wolde

but I am so Agyd and so olde

þat both myn leggys gyn to folde

I am ny Almost lame (53v, 224-27).

Joseph's lameness, his constant complaints about his sore feet and walking, reflects his status as a wanderer who is not yet a pilgrim in the way. Christ later offers commentary on Joseph's lame stumblings

in the pageant of the Entry into Jerusalem:

And some of zow . may not go . ze be so crokyd
 For of good werkyng . in zow . is lytyl habundawns
 Tweyn fete . heuery man xuld haue . and it were lokyd
 Wyche xuld bere . pe body gostly . most of substawns
 Ffyurst is to love god Above all other plesawns
pe secunde . is to love . pi neybore . as pin owyn persone
 and yf pese tweyn . be kepte in perseverawns
 Into pe celestyal habytacion . ze Arn habyl to gone.

(144, 238-45).

Joseph is lame in his love of God and of others and so is ill-fitted to make the pilgrimage to the "celestyal habytacion." Further, recalling the images discussed in connection with the play of Moses, we understand that Joseph cannot align his reason and his affections, the pes intellectus and pes affectus.⁵ Joseph is the unwilling pilgrim who does not want to set out, who gives up just in view of the goal, who stops to rest just short of the city gates. A pilgrim without a telos, he is an attainable example to members of the audience. If Joseph may be redeemed, so may they.

Joseph's physical and spiritual resistance almost requires more "travayl" than would obedience. Episcopus chides him for staying behind: "I-wys sere ze be to blame;" Joseph responds with what may be a fabricated excuse or a very real loss of his emblem of pilgrimage:

Sere I kan not my rodde ffynde
 to come per in trowth me thynkyht shame (54, 235-6).

⁵See Wenzel 67-8, 108-9.

Joseph has lost the emblem of his "travayll," his staff, and is thus unoccupied in the temple or, perhaps, vainly occupied seeking his staff. Outside the temple, Joseph labors for physical sustenance. Mary, on the other hand, labors for bodily and spiritual reward in the temple, in prayers and at her distaff, "evyr besy in holy occupacyon," "nevyr occupyed in thyngys veyn" (47v-48, 2-3). If we interpret the rod that is to flower as an emblem of male sexuality, Joseph's loss of his rod and his shame come about because he is a "ded stok," not the "dowty and bold" suitor that one would seek for a fair maid such as Mary. He does not feel sufficient to fulfill God's will, does not understand that his senescence and virginity may be the very essentials of God's plan for Mary and for mankind. He judges his fitness based on earthly appearances and his own reason. Up until now, Joseph's failures have been occasioned primarily by a combination of misguided trust in his own wit instead of God's wisdom, and a mistrust of his own God-given abilities, failures of self-knowledge and knowledge of God. Joseph is bound in the early stages of love and faith: he "loves himself for his own sake" and only incipiently "loves God for his own benefit" (Bernard, On Loving, first and second degrees, VII: 23; IX: 26). Hence he is unable to fulfill the new law:

3e muste love god severeynly . and 3our evyn crystyn pleyn
 god fyrst ffor his hyz and sovereyn dygnyte
 he lovyd 3ow fyrst . love hym a-geyn
 ffor of love . to his owyn lyknes . he made the (45v, 156-59).

The "degrees" which Joseph fails to ascend parallel those in which the characters of the Old Testament failed. The difference is that Eve, Cain and Lameth acted to break God's law; Joseph fails to take action to fulfill it. In what follows, he does not recognize that his selection to be Mary's suitor flows out of God's love, but only dreads the earthly results of the transformation from single man to spouse, kinlessness to kinship.

When Joseph's rod flowers, he does not join the general rejoicing at God's sign. He is not concerned with doing God's will or with helping Mary to resolve a very human and physical dilemma: by the old law she must marry; in order to fulfill her vow and the new law, she must remain a virgin. Episcopus's congratulations--"pou mayst be blyth with game and gle" (54v, 264) are met with loud protest. "Game and gle" are not appropriate descriptions of Joseph's response to the prospect of a January-May marriage, as he conceives it to be. Miracle or no miracle, Joseph will neither marry Mary, nor be merry. This stage in Joseph's participation in salvation history parallels Mary's at the Annunciation. Each requires some convincing. Episcopus tries to convince Joseph by arguments most appropriate to his spiritual state--carnality and fear: Mary is "buxum and whyte as laue" (54v, 275) and God's will must be obeyed, or else. Gabriel convinces Mary by appealing to her love and pity: without her assent, all mankind will perish. Both consent on the condition that their virginity not be compromised, Mary for spiritual reasons, Joseph for physical ones. Even though he is sure that to be married is "to levyn in drede,"

that "An old man may nevyr thryff / With a zonge wyff," and that "If
I here chyde she wolde clowte my cote" (54, 269-70, 278-79, 281-2),
he grudgingly consents on the condition

pat in bedde we xul nevyr mete

Ffor i-wys mayden suete

An Old man may not rage (55, 295-7).

Joseph's images of human relationships indicate his relation to God.
He approaches a love-relation with fear, dread, and despair of his
sufficiency.

This episode is humorous in its characterization of Joseph, and
very successful dramatically in its lines, action, and timing. Joseph
is neither a braggart nor a bully, tending more to a stubborn ineptitude,
a passive resistance. He is, we must remember, an image of the Old
Law--God-given, but now to be extended and fulfilled, not overturned,
in the light of grace. His failure of caritas and spiritual blindness
would not be expressed in the voice of Cain, for instance, or with
the boldness of Lameth. Joseph's attempted self-pervations and
stallings, transparent, conventional and comic, masterfully are timed
for maximum humor and response. What Woolf found most inconsistent
and distracting in this play is what makes it so successful. When,
reminded that God's will must be done, Joseph consents to wed, his
response suggests a "reverent and obedient spirit" (Woolf 164) that,
indeed, is inconsistent with what we know of him. His reverence and
obedience are to be understood as cosmetic, spurred by fear of judgment
rather than love, and so not integral parts of his character and

actions. Following his consent, the very medieval betrothal ritual commences. Episcopus intones:

Joseph wole ze haue þis maydon to zour wyff

And here honour and kepe as ze howe to do.

and the very recently "reverent and obedient" Joseph balks:

nay sere so mote I thryff

I haue ryght no nede þer-to (55, 302-5).

Surely this break in a familiar ceremony would have occasioned hilarity in the audience. Joseph has fractured a most important social and religious ritual and has broken his vow out of absolute self-interest. That he is doing what many in the Middle Ages may have wished to do, given the frequency of forced marriages, adds to the humor of the scene. But what seems to be a brash assertion of will really arises out of a defective will, a lack of the wisdom and love necessary to conform one's own actions to the will of God.⁶ The Bishop must reiterate "goddys wyll" that the marriage go forward; Joseph finally consents, and the betrothal ceremony concludes in Mary's very willing and loving consent.

Mary's willing consent is stressed in N-Town's Annunciation, as well. She, too, has concerns about how the Incarnation will affect

⁶ Joseph's speeches could either demonstrate his acute witlessness, his defective memory (one of the three intellectual parts of the soul: memory, will and understanding, in Augustine's scheme (De Trinitate 10.11.17-18), an unintentional evil; or it could show his voluntary and deliberate choice to subvert God's will, a form of voluntarism: "Human beings know the will of God, know what is good, and yet, their wills being damaged, they may deliberately choose not to do it" (Roney 707; and see for commentary).

her physical state, her virginity, a reflection of her spiritual purity. But whereas Joseph demurs out of fear, witlessness and self-interest, Mary accepts in love, wisdom and interest in others, the fate of "all þe gode levers and trew" (64, 271) who bide in Hell, her kin. The pageant of the Salutation and Conception is a courtship ritual, too, the ceremonial marriage of Christ and his Church. Jesus is the eager suitor who sends his ambassador, Gabriel, to Mary. Ffilius and Spiritus Sanctus brief Gabriel on his mission, Christ's speech in N-Town communicates all of the urgency of a courtly (and more carnal) lover:

Hy³e þe þou were there A pace
 ellys we xal be there the be-ffore
 I haue so grett hast to be man thore
 In þat mekest and purest virgyne (62, 199-202).

Mary will not be rushed, but hers is a tarrying born of spiritual wisdom. She considers, questions, and "studies" to know God's will and to gain understanding.⁷ Gabriel is kept waiting in a scene that must have evoked a gentle smile in the audience, a response appropriate to the joy occasioned by the Incarnation of Christ. Gabriel reassures her and asks for a response; Mary gives none; Gabriel offers his most convincing arguments to woo her:

⁷Mary's pause also well fits the courtly tone of the pageant. Medieval romances encouraged an opinion that "delayed gratification," particularly in sexual matters, "enriches the experience" (Lerner 244). On equations between wisdom and the love of God, see M.F.Smith 123-25, 156-72.

GABRIEL: . . . no thyng is impossyble to goddys vsage
 they (the Trinity) thynkyth longe to here what ze wyl seyn
here be Aungel makyth a lytyl restynge and mary be-holdyth
hym and be Aungel seyth
 Mary come of and haste the
 And take hede in thyn entent
 Whow be holy gost . blyssyd he be
 Abydyth pin answere and pin assent (64, 259-64).

That Mary freely assents is stressed here and later, when Mary reports to her cousin Elizabeth: "ther I conceyvyd god . At my consentynge" (72, 70). Joseph, the old man of the old law, the law of the slave and the hireling, must obey God or be damned. His consent in the time before the Incarnation is not important; his obedience is. Mary's consent prefigures the choices that will be available to all of mankind when it is freed from the bond of original sin and has voluntas, will, choice.

Mary's humanity receives greater attention in N-Town than most have noted. Gail Gibson's analysis of Mary's role, for example, is most successful when she discusses "the Mary who is paradoxically both handmaiden and exalted queen," and furthest from the mark when she judges, in part to support her case for Lydgate's participation in the writing or compilation of the cycle:

In both (Lydgate's Marian poetry and the N-Town Mary plays) there is a deliberate attempt to replace the humanized Mary of the English vernacular religious lyrics, even the noble lady of

English court poetry to the Virgin, with a mystical queen who is celebrated in a high lyric style derived from the Latin sacred lyric ("Bury," 86).

But N-Town also stresses Mary's earthly relations and explores the very human difficulties she must confront in the community (in the Purgation pageant, for example). Further, her spiritual condition often is manifested by her kinship with others, and her attention to courteous social rituals. For example, after the betrothal, blessings, benedictions and farewells are exchanged all round. Anna and Joachim take leave of their daughter with a litany of love relations that later will be extended in Gabriel's lyrical and courtly farewells. Each exchange is important and each recalls the others. Joseph barely merits a "ffor wel joseph and god zow spede." His sterile social and kinship relations reflect his relations with God, as do Mary's rich and extended ones.

After the betrothal, Episcopus addresses the carnal Joseph with concerns and reminders that emphasize Mary's sensitive human position:

Joseph pi selph art old of Age

And pi wyff of Age is zonge

and as we redyn in old sage

many man is sclepyr of tonge (56, 44-7).

Episcopus sends "iij damysellys" with Mary to quell any gossip about her actions. Joseph remains silent, but we can imagine him shaking his head with a worried "I told you so" expression in the midst of

the general rejoicing. As the "old" man, Joseph knows Old Testament prophecy, knows that Christ will be born, but he cannot connect spiritual promise with his own physical practice. An uncharacteristically prophetic stanza follows his taking of leave of Mary to go and find a house for them. Joseph demonstrates his knowledge that Christ will be born to Mary in the context of his own poverty:

he þat is and evyr xal be

Of hefne and helle Ryche kynge

in erth hath chosyn poverté

and all Ryches and welthis refusynge (57; 417-20).

Without self-knowledge and knowledge of God, connecting practical existence with prophecy is impossible. The audience, however, is instructed in the wisdom Joseph lacks. While he is absent, "laboryn in fer countre . . . to maynteyn oure housholde so" (58, 467-68), the Parliament of Heaven (Four Daughters of God, Three members of the Trinity, and Angels) convenes in an allegorical debate to decide the fate of mankind.⁸ Mary's perfection reconciles them to the Incarnation, and the Passion of Christ satisfies the virtues Justice and Righteousness as a penalty for mankind's sin; Mercy and Peace between God and man are the result, the daughters are reconciled, and Gabriel is dispatched to Mary. Joseph returns to a hugely pregnant wife.

As may be expected, Joseph looks upon his spouse with shock, indignation, and dread of social consequences, no doubt to the great enjoyment of the audience. When Mary riddles that the child she carries is "goddys and your," Joseph accuses:

Goddys childe pou lyist in fay

God dede nevyr jape so with may (67v, 43-4).

Joseph, like Abraham, and the Four Daughters before him, confronts a situation in which "twey contraryes mow not to-gedyr dwelle:" mercy and justice conflict, appearance and reality collide. Earthly reason cannot reconcile contraries. That Mary is both maiden and mother must be accepted on faith, hence the need for miracles. N-Town's Joseph is not so harsh as many have assumed from his lines. We must picture him as an old, somewhat pitiable, lame figure, more cowering than rebellious, a man who tries to obey the law as he knows it and who judges Mary in righteous indignation. His proverbial wisdom about the inadvisability of January-May wedlock has been borne out; he feels shamed, made a fool of, cuckolded. He responds in the only way open to a man who loves Mary as he loves God, with "doute and drede" (967v, 52). He attempts to reconcile his trust in Mary's virtue with her physical state, and with the old law's judgment of ritual stoning, but fails. He is a man in a state of aporia that will initiate appareo and aperio, a revelation, new knowledge (see Brown, "Turning Points"). Joseph is plunged into the central problem of ethical discrimination, deciding when to show mercy and when to judge, an earthly microcosm of the conflict that occasioned the debate of the Four Daughters of God over the fate of mankind. He is not to be expected to respond to his situation with anything but confusion and despair; it is beyond his ken. Faced with such an uncontrollable situation, Joseph responds with the solution of Joachim: he must go into exile, "ffor sake þe countre ffor evyr / and nevyr come in here company" (68, 11-12).

Original sin, pregnancy, shame and exile are here combined in new ways. Mary again intercedes, with an appropriate diagnosis of Joseph's condition: "ffor unknowlage he is desesyd." That Joseph's sorrow is to be accepted by the audience as a real and pitiable result of his spiritual blindness, his inability to recognize Christ when he is so near to him, is suggested by his exchange with the Angel.⁹

Note the uncanny resonances in Joseph's earlier speech to his kin, and in Christ's exchange with Mary Magdalene when she finds the grave empty and mistakes him for a gardener:

GABRIEL: Joseph Joseph pou wepyst shyrl
ffro pi wyff why comyst pou owte.

JOSEPH: Good sere lete me wepe my ffylle

Go forthe pi wey and lett me nowght (69-69v, 147-50).

The Angel asks Joseph to change and to perform an act of caritas, both concepts to which the man who has "chaungyd not zet" has been singularly resistant. "chawnge þe chere Amende þi thought" and "Go chere hyre," the Angel commands, and confirms that Mary will bear Christ. Joseph greets the message first with thanks for the comfort to himself, and then with recognition of his sin, contrition, and a confession: he has "myswrought," and asks forgiveness for having "mys-thought." With a strange mixture of lament and rejoicing he returns to Mary:

⁹ On Joseph, see Kolve (247-53); Prosser (ch. 5); Baird, Deasy, Gibson ("Porta"). Roston finds the play of Joseph's Return neither indecent nor funny (Biblical 31); Vriend finds the character sympathetic (82).

Alas ffor joy I qwedyr and qwake

Alas what hap now was this

A mercy mercy my jentyl make

mercy I haue seyde al Amys (69v-70, 180-83).

Gabriel's message is a proof to, a reproof and a reprieve of Joseph: he is at once made to recognize his sin, and is saved from an exile traditional for one of the spouses under the old law (see Gibson, Images). In a high point of the sequence, Joseph contritely goes to kiss Mary's feet. She protests:

Nay lett be my fete not þo ȝe take

my mowthe ȝe may kys i-wys

and welcom on to me (70, 186-8).

Mary asks for a kiss of reconciliation, not submission, to be kissed as a woman and wife, not as an icon or queen. And by this kiss, Joseph begins his transformation from the fearful servant and hireling to the confident and loving kin of Christ.

The results of Joseph's reconciliation are dramatized in his caritas, of language and action, and his stronger will. For the first time, he is genuinely interested in Mary's experience, and asks her to recount "the holy matere of ȝour concepcion" and "nothyng whonde (hesitate)." For the first time, he is thankful to god that he is married to Mary. He even begins the next stage of his "travayl," the visit to Elizabeth, without tarrying: "I wole with a good wyl" go forth. This journey is an errand of physical and spiritual mercy. Mary goes to help the pregnant Elizabeth with housework, to "wasche

skore and swepe" during her confinement. Mary sets out willingly, though she feels shame because she is pregnant. The result of her fear of shame, the "eyes of men," unlike Joseph's in the past, is that she wants to hasten on the journey:

Goth husbond þow it be to 3ow peyne
 thus jurny I pray 3ow . lete us go fast
 for I am schamfast of þe pepyl to be syene
 and namely of men þer of I am A.gast
 Pylgrymagys and helpyngys wolde be go in hast
 þe more þe body is peynyð þe more is þe mede (71 13-18).

The journey, a pilgrimage and a helping, is described in penitential terms. Joseph, the "chaungyd" man, now a spouse, active believer, and able-bodied man, dramatizes his transformation by his boldness to set out. His lines, full of surprise and childish pride, recall Mary's eagerness when she first set out for the temple:

Amen Amen . and evyr more
 lo wyff lo . how starkly I go before (71, 21-22).

But Joseph's spiritual transformation is not complete. He has had a recognition, has indicated contrition, has confessed, and has set out on a journey described in penitential terms. But penance is not possible until Christ conquers Satan; and the new convert still stands in need of strength, help and grace. Joseph wearies just short of the goal, Elizabeth's house, and so is exiled from a ritual of fellowship between kin, and between earth and heaven, the moving antiphonal recital of the Magnificat by Mary and Elizabeth. His soul cannot, yet, "magnify the Lord"--his will is not perfected by grace. He is

a kin with Zachary, Elizabeth's husband, who was struck dumb because he did not believe that she was pregnant in her old age. Zachary, another type of the old law, cannot confess; Joseph, lame and spiritually blind, tires and stops short of the goal because he cannot see it and so cannot do penance.

Joseph bursts in with a hail and happy "A how do ze . how do ze ffadyr zacharye," and establishes their kinship by noting that they both fall fast into dotage. For the first time, Joseph is happy and cordial to kin--he has progressed. When Elizabeth matter-of-factly explains Zachary's speechlessness, Joseph offers his first words of spiritual wisdom and counsel in the cycle:

Of your disese thynkys no greff

thank god of al aduersyte

Ffor he wyl chastyse and repreff (73v, 125-28)

Joseph's new recitations of proverbial wisdom reconcile chastisement and mercy, dread and love, and the "grutcher" has become the accepting, trusting and happy man. His trust in God has its first true test in the pageant of the Purgation of Joseph and Mary that follows.

The Purgation play explores both the mythic quality of Mary's pregnancy and the mythic quality of Joseph's earthly fears. It is a physical test of Mary which forces a confrontation with her pregnancy, and a spiritual test of Joseph which forces him to confront his fear. The ritual ordeal was considered in 15th-century England to be a barbaric remnant of old and superstitious ecclesiastical practice (P. Brown, Society 307-13). The Purgation pageant, then, offers the Virgin ecclesia

overturning the Synagogue and the old law even as she fulfills it. The Purgation pageant is a rite of passage from old to new, doubt to belief, that emphasizes resistance to belief, disequilibrium, the doubt without which miracles would not be perceived as miraculous. Much more than a signa certissima that a prophecy is miraculously fulfilled, the pageant encourages in the audience a turning from expressions of abusive doubt to an affirmation of contrite faith.¹⁰

The pageant of the Purgation opens by breaking the "frame" of the cycle and drawing the audience into the play. Den the Summoner calls the audience to the trial, and solicits bribes, perhaps a theatrical excuse to collect money from the audience of the pageant (see Bryant, "Function"). Den's thirty-odd lines of summons characterize the audience, define its roles in the pageant. The audience characters summoned comprise the common and corrupt, those who fictitiously await trial. Indeed, the faith of the audience is on trial in this play which confronts both the strength and the failure of faith, the conquest of fear and the victory of love. It prefigures the Last Judgment of mankind. Together, Joseph and Mary stand accused of adultery; each is tested by drinking of the "botel of goddys vengeauns."

¹⁰Although trials by ordeal were never common in England, they were often enough convened on the Continent that the Lateran Council of 1215 forbade "clerical participation in the ordeal" in the same session in which they "sanctioned the doctrine of transubstantiation" (Brown 307-27). See also Denny, 655. Kahrl first urged that the play be called "The Purgation of Joseph and Mary" (Traditions 75). See also Bryant, who develops the theory that the purpose of the "shockingly vile accusations" was to increase the purse of money collected from the audience (340-45). See also Kolve 113ff. and Woolf 175-7. On parallel images of women overcoming evil, see E. Brown, "Biblical Women," which discusses this situation in the context of the January/May relationship in the Merchant's Tale, an interesting comparison.

Their detractors, Backbiter and Slander, parody the reconciliation of Justice and Mercy in the heavenly court with their meeting kiss:

wilcom dere brother my trowth I plyght

zowre jentyl mowth let me now kys (75, 19-20).

Although this pageant has been called "one of the coarsest little comedies in the whole field of English drama" (Bryant, "Function" 340), the titillating and pornographic accusations of the detractors function in much the same way as Lameth's vaunts and sexually suggestive actions. In the Purgation play, the audience is encouraged to vicariously express its doubts about the source of Mary's pregnancy, and is titillated by the ribaldry of the play. The audience is in the pageant, but it simultaneously is encouraged to perceive itself from the outside. From a God's-eye view, the trial by ordeal makes a mockery of true justice and is laughable because the blind detractors base their case on earthly appearances, knowing nothing of divine reality. The action has dramatic irony--the audience, like God, Himself, knows something that these poor, puffed-up slanderers do not. But the audience is paradoxically guilty as the slanderers. Doubtless none in the audience comes to Mary and Joseph's defense; they, too, are implicated in the sin of disbelief and false accusation. The direct abuse of Mary and Joseph goes on for some one hundred-fifty lines. The mythic qualities of Mary's account of her pregnancy is, to the detractors, comparable with stories of virgins impregnated by snowflakes falling into their mouths. Den puts Joseph's doubts in perspective when he vows that, if Mary were his wife:

I wold ech day be-schrewe zour nose
and ze dede brynge me such a pak (77v, 159-60).

These are men of a will more evil than Joseph's, more active in doing wrong, more bent on retribution, although they are his models for earthly ecclesiastical court of the old law that degenerates to a "bawdy court."

Mary and Joseph each drink the draught and make a ritual procession seven times around the altar, an emblem of change, pilgrimage, process, penance. The potion is to mark the guilty by making "sum maculacion / Pleyne in his face." After Joseph drinks, he petitions God's help and mercy for the first time in the cycle. Den the Summoner draws attention to Joseph's physical procession, and threatens him with a beating if he does not go faster. The element of will and choice has been taken from Joseph in this old law procession:

DEN: This olde shrewe may not wele gon
 long he taryeth to go A.bowth
 lyfte up þi feet sett forth þi ton
 or by my trewth þout getyst a clowte.

 now sere evyl Thedom com to þi snowte
 What heylyght þi leggyes now to be lame
 þou dedyst hem put ryght freschly owte

 Whan þou dedyst pley with zon zonge dame (79; 225-32).

Joseph is absolved; obviously Mary has cuckolded him. Episcopus silences the detractors during Mary's procession with the threat of God's vengeance. When she is not affected by "goddys potacyon," he wonders

at it: she is a clean maiden and a mother. The detractors are not immediately converted, however; they assume that the potion was fixed. The first drinks the draught, falls down theatrically with a burning head, and repents. All then fall on their knees, repent of their language, and ask Mary for mercy.¹¹ In this pageant, the miraculous truth of Mary's pregnancy is confirmed to the world, including the audience; Joseph's progress is tested and demonstrated; the audience is allowed to express the human inclination to find the situation of an old man and a young, pregnant maid comic. The laughter and energy aroused by the Purgation play is transformed into joy and veneration of Mary and acceptance of Joseph. They both remain inside the temple and it is Joseph who makes explicit their duty to thank God with a happy heart:

That lord to wurchepe with hert plesaunt

we bothe be bownd ryght on þis place (81v, 365-6).

Mary concurs with Joseph, and the play ends.

¹¹It is interesting to note that the characters of this section repent their speech and not their actions. In N-Town, as elsewhere, words are taken to be deeds, as Moses exhorts in the Ten Commandments in N-Town:

The ffyfft comaundement byddyth all us

Scle no man . no whight þat þou kyll

Vndyr stonde þis precept þus

Scle no wyght with wurd nor wyll

Wykyd worde werkyht oftyn tyme grett will (33, 131-8).

They might well also repent their thoughts, for:

The vj^{te} comaundement of lechory

doth exclude þe synfull dede

but theys tweyn last most streytly

both dede and thought þei do for-bede (34, 179-82).

fallen as he is, however, and lacking God's grace, Joseph immediately relapses into complaint, thus initiating the pageant of the Nativity, which begins with an episode based on the well-known legend of the cherry tree:¹²

Lord What travayl to man is Wrought

Rest in þis werd be-hovyth hym non (82, 1-2).

Joseph must obey the emperor's command to offer tribute in Bethlehem; Mary gladly volunteers to accompany him. What Joseph interprets in terms of physical "travayl," she invests with social and spiritual meaning: the trip is an opportunity to see the city and to visit her kin, a pilgrimage. On the way to Bethlehem, Mary spies a cherry tree; Joseph does not see it, but assumes that it is fruitless. It is blooming out of season, a sign of Mary's virginity and fertility, and of the Eucharist. Mary expresses a very human desire to eat some cherries:

Ffor to haue þer-of ryght ffayn I wold

and it plesyd zow to labore so mech for me (82v, 33-4).

Once again Joseph is physically tested, asked to perform an action for the sake of another, and his success indicates his spiritual development. His answer is equivocal, and he lapses into an angry challenge:

¹²

Woolf's comment on the cherry tree pageant characterizes her valorization of these pageants, generally: "This brief episode in the Ludus Coventriae is quite well done and serves to provide dramatic dialogue to accompany the journey to Bethlehem, but it would of course only be fitting in a cycle that did not (emph. supp.) contain either the play of Joseph's Doubts or the Trial of Joseph and Mary" (177-8). See also Kolve 252. "Climbing a tree" in the Continental vernacular drama is a metaphor for sexuality (see Bowen 332).

your desyre to ffulfyllle I xal Assay sekyrly
 Ow . to plucke you of these cheries . it is a werk wyld
 ffor þe tre is so hyz . it wol not be lyghtly
 perfore lete hym pluk you cheryes . be-gatt you with childe.
 (82v, 35-38).

Joseph does not "fly in anger," as in the well-known carol. He gives
 up because the tree is too high for his reach and the plucking too
 difficult; his physical actions do not yet bear spiritual fruit.
 His derisive challenge demonstrates that he lacks the humility to
 petition God for help to cure his physical and spiritual impotence.
 Joseph's unsuccessful labor to get food for Mary indicates that
 he is still in the time before perfect redemption. When Adam and
 Eve leave the garden, Adam calls Eve:

But lete vs walke forth in to þe londe
 with ryth gret labour oure fode to fynde
 . . . tyllsum comforth of godys sonde
 with grace releve our careful mynde
 . . . Alas þat ever we wrought þis synne
 oure bodely sustenauns for to wynne
 . . . in care to ledyn oure lyff (17, 404-416).

Joseph's "care," the fruit of original sin, continues. When Mary
 asks God's help, however, the tree bows down. Because of the miracle,
 Joseph again recognizes his sin and repents. This time his repentance
 comes about not because he is chided or threatened but because he
 has witnessed an act of caritas and so is spiritually shamed. He

cannot "climb high enough" to fulfill the new law of love; Christ has not yet recapitulated Adam's Fall: Joseph cannot yet be a new man in Christ.

That Joseph's will is still imperfect, that his spiritual blindness and "vnknowlage" are not yet cured, is dramatized in the play of the Nativity. Joseph demonstrates caritas in his concern for Mary's comfort and his speed in getting midwives, actions that address the physical realm. But his caecitas is evident when he enters the stable in which Christ has already, without "travayl," been born. He sees neither the bright light nor the baby.¹³ The audience, of course, has witnessed Christ's birth. Joseph talks as if Mary had not yet gone into labor. Joseph's witlessness and the dramatic irony of the dialogue evoke a laughter in the audience that is appropriate to the birth of Christ, and which aligns them with the smiling Mary. Her smile, and the smiles in the audience, are physical manifestations of wisdom and love (see Rahner 37), two qualities which Joseph still possesses but imperfectly. Joseph responds to Mary's laughter with indignation and urges her to a deceit--to change the outside to reflect a different inner state:

¹³Iconography conventionally indicates Joseph's spiritual blindness, the blindness of the Old Testament and the old law (see Gibson, Images). Often, he is portrayed holding a candle made ineffectual by Christ's radiance at the Nativity. See also Cornell and Hemingway.

why do ze lawghe wyff ze be to blame
 I pray zow spowse do no more so
 In happ þe mydwyuys wyl take it to grame
 and at zour nede helpe wele non do
 . . . perfor be sad and ze may so
 And wynnyth all þe mydwyuis good diligens (85, 181-88).

The good will of others is still, for Joseph, something to be gotten by fear, sadness and deceit rather than with love, joy and truth. But when Mary finally puts Christ in the line of Joseph's vision, he is excited, joyful and transported. He wants to share the good news with others, runs out to the midwives and, with uncharacteristic "graciousness," ushers them in.

Salome and Zelome, good women who offer help to all women in need, stand outside "Ffor dowte of drede" of the bright light in the stable. They exile themselves from coming near to God out of fear, not having the wisdom to interpret the meaning of the light, that Christ's birth is a manifestation of the love that casts out fear. They know that no woman with a maidenhead may bear a child, disbelieve the miracle, and Mary invites each to test her virginity. Zelomy tests, marvels and believes; Salome will not trust Zelomy's word and, like the detractor who drinks the potion, must test Mary's virginity for herself. Her unbelief and curiositas are rewarded with a shriveled hand, which is miraculously healed by touching Christ. Salome eagerly sets forth to tell of the miracle in every place, and Mary sends her on her journey through the audience.

Salome's tidings draw the audience in as witnesses of the birth of Christ, of the Nativity that makes spiritual transformation possible. The figure of Joseph has dramatically re-created the transformation wrought by the events of this section of the cycle, a progress from malediction suffered to benediction offered, doubt and fear to faith and love, exile to communitas. The Incarnation is a primary turning point in the salvation history of the cycle. The Nativity makes knowledge of the miracle of the Incarnation available. Through the figure of Joseph, the audience confronts the old ethic of fear and witnesses it conquered by love. It is Joseph who offers the last and general benediction of the sequence, offered to and for the audience. Joseph petitions for power to overcome enemies, a request that demonstrates at least a nascent understanding of what must come next--Christ's victory over Satan and hell. Joseph's prayer also demonstrates his newfound recognition of God's mercy and his desire, born of love, to share it with all mankind. When he intones:

The blyssing of þat lord þat is most myghty

mote sprede on ȝow in every place

of all ȝour enmyes to haue þe victory

God þat best may grawnt ȝow his grace. Amen (87v, 317-20).

he demonstrates that he has mastered "confidens in goddys strenght A-lon," a strength of power and wisdom that will be dramatized in the ensuing Ministry plays. The prayer also recalls N-Town's illustration of the fifth degree of the gradual psalms, the "propyr confessyon" that comes of that confidence. As Mary recited in the Temple:

The ffyfthe is propyr confessyon

pat we be nought with-owth god thus

but god in vs haue habytacion

Per aventureoure enemyes shulde swelle (devour) vs (44, 100-03).

By way of the fifth degree, proper confession, and the tenth, overcoming carnality and dependence upon "fleschly syghtys," Joseph has completed his pilgrimage to the fifteenth degree of the gradual psalms, a graciousness and accord that marks God's servants, caritas:

The ffyftene is gracyous . with on Acorde

which is syne of godly love semyth me

se now blysse oure lord

All pat oure lordys servauntys be.

Ecce nunc benedicite dominum . omnes serui dominj. (45, 140-44).

The drama of the Marian sequence teaches the way of the spiritual pilgrim. The audience learns with Joseph how to use the "Tweyn fete . heuery man xuld haue," the foot of love of God and the foot of love of neighbors. By loving and by trusting in God's grace Joseph is able to accomplish the first stages of the spiritual pilgrimage. He overcomes his fear, recognizes his creatureliness before God, is contrite, and confesses. Old Testament fear and dread are overcome in the cycle and in the audience by God's love. We learn that without God's love, without his having "habytacion" among us (the first advent) and in us (the second), mankind is nought, doomed to dread and physical fear. N-Town's Ministry sequence provides the answer to Joseph's closing prayer: both dread and enemies are overcome by Christ--in love and by His power and wisdom.

CHAPTER VI

CONVERSION FROM DEATH TO LIFE IN CHRIST

Than xall 3e be savyd from peynfulnese
Of fyere brynnyng in hell
If þat 3e for-sak synne
hevyn blysse xall 3e wyne
Drede 3e not þe devylyys gynne
with Angellys xall yow dwell (112, 8-13).

At the birth of Christ, the conversion prepared for by the purgation of the Old Testament and the illumination of the Marian cycle is made possible.¹ Three pageants offer the image of the Nativity to the audience. The first stresses faith and love and closes the Marian sequence; the second, the Adoration of the Shepherds, introduces the prophecies of Christ's victory over Hell; the last, the Adoration of the Magi, initiates the struggle between death and life, the agents of Hell and those of Heaven, on earth. The plays from the Adoration of the Shepherds to the Raising of Lazarus, the Ministry sequence, fall into two sections: pageants that raise the problem--death--and those that offer the solution in Christ's actions for mankind. Imitatio Christi is made possible to those who seek eternal life, in part through the sacraments of baptism and penance.

¹The most conventional four-stage ladder of faith identifies the rungs of purgation, illumination, conversion, and union with Christ.

The Ministry plays continue the incremental cycles of history and spiritual growth begun in the Old Testament and continued in the pilgrimage of Joseph, the old man of the old law. Joseph's model may take the Christian as far as confession of sin, but not to satisfaction, which requires the intervention of Christ. Whereas the Marian sequence chronicles the "foundational spiritual experience" and the effects of the Incarnation on the life of mankind, the Ministry plays dramatize the effect of Christ's grace, power and wisdom on the after-life. The factum mortis is distinguished from the second death, eternal damnation, which results from the Fall and which Christ will recapitulate in the Temptation. Miraculous pregnancies initiate the action of the Mary plays; images of death bind the dramatic events of Christ's life. The sinner is moved to conversion and repentance by reminders of death, fear of hell, and love of Christ, the new example: "Euery man to lere . . . take ensawmple here by me" (113, 74-5).²

Christ's power assists man's weakness of will; his wisdom, man's witlessness. These two attributes of Christ, power and wisdom, are those necessary to overcome. The power and wisdom of Christ are accented in N-Town. Christ's help is made available to mankind by the grace of the two "sacraments of the dead," baptism and penance, which are instituted in this section in order to make imitatio Christi accessible to mankind. The judgment of death and the virtue of caritas motivate Christ's actions, and his love makes possible the sinner's love of God, the third of Bernard's four stages of love:

²On the Ministry plays, for comparison, see Brawer, "Dramatic."

who confesses to the Lord, not because he is good to him but because the Lord is good, truly loves God for God's sake and not for his own benefit. He does not love this way of whom it is said: 'He will praise you when you do him favors.' . . . It is necessary that we bear first the likeness of an earthly being, then that of a heavenly being. Thus man first loves himself for himself because he is carnal and sensitive to nothing but himself. Then when he sees he cannot subsist by himself, he begins to seek for God by faith and to love him as necessary to himself. . . . When man tastes how sweet God is, he passes to the third degree of love in which man loves God not now because of himself but because of God (Bernard, On Loving God IX:26 and XV:39).

In the mimetic process of the cycle, the first models, Mary and Joseph, encourage the audience to recognize their "likeness of an earthly being." Christ's actions offer to them a likeness of "a heavenly being," the model of the mature, adult spiritual life.

Plays from the Adoration of Christ to the Raising of Lazarus explore the threat of Hell, the merciful intervention of God, and the ways in which the second death, damnation, may be avoided by penance. Visions of death encourage the audience to recognize that God's help is necessary; exhortations to penance offer the way in which to gain God's help; the efficacy of penance is demonstrated in the plays of the Temptation, the Woman Taken in Adultery, and the Raising of Lazarus. Taken together, these plays trace the relations of the individual to sin and death from temptation through contrition and confession, death

and resurrection. In addition, these three plays, a "redemption trilogy," prefigure the eschatological events of Christ's Passion, the final overthrow of Hell. Satan and his minions, unregenerate sinners, act in the world of the drama for the first time since the Fall of Mankind. Their participation, a response to Christ's challenge to the forces of Hell, evokes a "chaste" or "anxious" fear in the audience, a Christian fear of hell and damnation that may move them towards God and the sacraments and away from sin: "Piety mixed with fear does not destroy fear; it chastens it. The punishment alone is taken away, without which fear could not exist while servile" (Bernard, On Loving XIV:38). In the process of the cycle, the servile fear of God of the Old Testament is chastened by caritas; a new fear is aroused by visions of death and is chastened anew by Christ's conquest of death in his actions on earth. The process by which the audience is reawakened to the threat of death and damnation, and then assured of its conquest by Christ and the sacraments, structures this stage in the cycle, and our discussion of it.

"Devyls dome": Magi to Death of Herod

From the image of God incarnate, the attention of the audience is drawn to the image of Lucifer incarnate, Herod, who enters the platea riding a horse through the crowd, forcing them to move aside to avoid hurt. His action is an inverted type of Christ's Entry into Jerusalem, and his speech combines terrifying vaunt with humorous parody and rant. If we take Herod's word, the prophecies of the shepherds are fulfilled in his very person. He even has power over heaven and hell:

I dyngge with my dowtynes þe devyl down to helle
 Ffor bothe of hevyn and of hert I am kyng sertayn.
 (92, 7-8)

Herod further parodies the Incarnation of Christ, born "in pore Aray" who "in oure kend is clad" and who is heralded by angels' song:

Wyghtly fro my stede I skyppe down in hast
 to myn heyz hallys I haste me in my way
 ze mynstrell of myrth blowe up a good blast
 Whyll I go to chawmere and chaunge myn array (92, 17-20).

"Changing array" is a recurring image for Christ's Nativity in N-Town.

Like the Devil, Herod maintains his power by the threat of death, and like Lucifer, he pridefully sits himself in God's seat. The play of the Magi recalls the rebellion in heaven and is a microcosm of the conflict to come in this new "cycle." Although the kings vow to return to Herod with a full report after they find and adore the Christ Child, God's Angel intervenes and so saves their lives. The Angel has the

effect on the Magi that Christ will have on the lives and afterlives of all mankind. The Kings are saved "ffro develys dome," and shown "hom tylloure halle / A wey by a-nother mere" (97,320-21, 328). Those in the audience, too, are saved--shown how, through Christian ritual and sacrament, they may regain heaven, the "home" lost in the Fall.

Hope of overcoming death and the old law of retribution is suggested in the following play of the Purification. It is usual to focus on Mary's demonstration of obedience to the old law in this pageant, and it has attracted little discussion of its drama and its ritual contexts. Rosemary Woolf summarized the three still-predominant trends of interpretation of the pageant: the needless purification of Mary, who was not unclean; the "offering of the first-born child to God in obedience to God's command . . . redeemed by the payment of five shekels," with its anticipation of the Crucifixion and Eucharist; and the revelation to Symeon in his old age (196-7). In the context of N-Town's process, however, the Purification initiates Christ's ministry by confirming that sacrifice is no longer necessary, and brings the light of grace, the new law, into the temple. Further, the observance follows Christ's birth by forty days, and so prefigures his forty-day wilderness sojourn, after which he was tempted and so empowered to loose mankind from the bonds of original sin. Such an interpretation carries the resonance of traditional celebrations of the Feast of Candlemas, the Purification, and draws together the themes of death and life, blindness and light, sacrifice and sacrament, the old and the new laws, that bind the cycle.

David Mills has connected the record of the Beverly Candlemas celebration with medieval "connections and distinctions between religious mythology, procession and drama" and has discussed its resonance in the Digby Purification pageant at some length (Revels 159-165). Candlemas celebrants symbolically re-enact the event dramatized in N-Town by processing into the Church with lighted candles, fulfilling Symeon's prophecy of "a light to the revelation of the Gentiles."

Mills describes the observance:

The rite is a symbolic interpretation of the historical event and an act of communal celebration in which each member of the congregation, by processing, affirms faith in the underlying myth and, re-enacting the event, becomes the bearer of divine truth into the darkness of ignorance (Revels 159).

In N-Town, Christ's Presentation brings the light of grace into the temple just as its most prophetic and holy representatives, Symeon and the prophetess Anna, are about to die. After Christ has been lifted over the altar, fulfilling the old ritual of sacrifice and prefiguring the new, the Eucharist (see Woolf 197-99 and Sinanoglou, "Christ Child"), the Nunc dimittis is sung and then repeated in the vernacular by Symeon:

Now lete me dye lorde and hens pace

Ffor I þi servaunt in þis place

haue sen my savyour dere

. . . þi lyth is shynand clere

to All mankyndys savacion . . . (99v, 147-56).

The good representatives of the old law, Symeon and Anna, are prepared to die and the New is initiated, fulfilling the Angel's prophecy:

he pat is goddys son ffor to nemene

in þe templ þer þou dwellyst inne

The dyrknes of orygynal synne

he xal make lyght and clarefye (98, 47-50).

Joseph's "blindness" is cured at this point. He, too, makes the transition from old to new and he distributes the candles to the other three, becoming, himself, a "bearer of divine truth into the darkness of ignorance" (Mills, Revels 159). The "focus of interest" in this pageant is not the Virgin (Woolf 198), but is Christ and the ritual of the light that overcomes blindness, introduces grace, and so offers to Anna and Simeon a peaceful death.

Violent death without grace intrudes in the following scene of the Massacre of the Innocents. The Purification play has promised life; Herod swears death to all male children to assure the death of Christ. He summons his troops with a martial flourish disproportionate to the defenses of the enemy; the "knyghtys" set out eagerly to impale babies on their spears. During the sword-rattling, the Holy Family sleeps and suspense builds as the troops draw closer. The Angel's warning comes just in the nick of time, and death is escaped for a second time in this sequence.

In N-Town, most of the carnage is left to the imagination. The physically descriptive and moving laments of the mothers ask the essential question of creation in the face of death. Before the flood,

God repented that he had created mankind; before the Sacrifice of Isaac, Abraham lamented "Alas þat evyr þis bowe was bente;" the mothers lament:

Longe lullynge haue I lorn

Alas qwhy was my baron born

With swappyng swerde now is he shorn

þe heed ryght fro þe nekke (102; 89-92)

and ask what use their "travayll" has been:

my Ffourty wekys gronyng

hath sent me sefne zere sorwyng

mykyl is my mornyng (102; 101-03).

Their "travayll," like Joseph's, is lost labor in the face of death.

Why labor, physically or spiritually, only to die? The pathos of the women's laments evokes a recognition of the need for release from the boundness of death (see Temple, "Weeping").

The audience is moved in much the same way as at the sacrifice of Abel--justice of the retributive kind, "an eye for an eye," seems the most appropriate response. The image of an innocent child killed is one of the most powerful:

The imperative to save a child from murder, even at the cost of killing the putative murderer, appears to be curiously immune to relativizing analysis (Berger, Rumor 83).

N-Town's audience is united in a condemnation of Herod, the Devil incarnate. They confirm the need for Hell to reward abominable sin, and the need for heaven to reward violated innocence. Such a condemnation has "the status of a necessary and universal truth" (Berger, Rumor

83). The pathos of the Innocents pageant calls for release from death, reward for the innocent, and damnation for the guilty. The audience is offered all three in the plays that follow, but in the context of their own, personal deaths.

The pageant of the Death of Herod is unique to N-Town. Herod boasts that he has extinguished the opposition: his power is assured over earth, heaven, hell and, indeed, death, itself. He commands a feast and sets to eating, drinking and merriment:

I was nevyr meryer here be-forn

Sythe þat I was fyrst born

than I am now ryght in þis morn

in joy I gynne to glyde (103, 164-7)

Herod has slaughtered out of vainglory and covetousness. Here, he manifests the sin of gluttony, the third of the sins of the Fall, to the audience. The allegorical figure Mors, Death, enters and watches the action. The audience would gradually notice Mors's presence and likely would greet the situation of an evil man feasting in the face of death with a combination of pleasure and horror. Herod's last hours fitly contrast with Simeon's in the Purification pageant. Each is happiest before he dies. Herod celebrates killing Christ; Simeon seeing and touching him:

I was nevyr lyghtere i-wys

to walke . nevyr here be-forn

Ffor a mery tyme now is

Whan god my lord is born (98, 57-60).

Simeon's "lightness" is an emblem of the lame old law made whole. His spiritual merriment contrasts with Herod's carnal feast. The heavenly music of the Nunc Dimittis is his last, not the "mery fytt" of the "menstrell," sacrificial rituals of life and light, not the soldiers' descriptions of the "good game it was pat boy for to shende."

Mors is likely to be welcomed by the audience as one who releases the world from a death-dealing tyrant. They perceive Herod as the problem and hear Mors's speeches in the context of a tyrant's overthrow:

I am deth goddys masangere

All myghty god hath sent me here

3on lordeyn to Sle with-owtyn dwere

ffor his wykkyd werkyng (103, 177-80).

Death declares himself a servant of God, the Devil on earth. Herod is His foe; thus death is, for the audience, "welcome at the feast." Death comments on Herod's revelry and that he will have no chance to repent:

Ffor deth kan no sporte

where I smyte þer is no grace

Ffor aftere my strook man hath no space

to make amendys ffor his trespace (103, 189-92).

Time for merit and demerit is past. Assisted by Diabolus, Mors takes the bodies of Herod and his two knights directly to Hell. The "mirth" of Hell is described in game terms that refer to the pageant, itself:

I xal hem teche pleys fyn
 and showe such myrthe as is in helle
 . . . and shewe zow sportys of oure gle
 of oure myrthis now xal ze se
 and evyr synge welawey (104, 235-45).

The antics of Diabolus as he pulls the three bodies into the Hell mouth, the predictability of medieval responses to gloating demons, and the satisfaction of seeing the fall of a ranting type of power and privilege, combine to suggest that the audience would greet this scene with "myrthis" and "gle." Their rejoicing would be as short-lived as Herod's, however: Mors wheels round to address them:

All men dwellyng upon þe grownde
 Be-ware of me be myn councel
 Ffor feynt felachep in me is fownde
 I kan no curtesy as I zow tel
 . . . of my comyng no man is ware
 Ffor when men make most mery fare
 þan sodeynly I cast hem in care
 and sle þem evyn in dede (104v, 259-71).

A sobering thought, this, as one is making "most mery fare." The audience unwittingly has been guilty of the sin of Herod--pleasure at the prospect of the death of another. It is a commonplace that death and laughter are the "great levellers." Usually, this is understood to mean that high become low, the prince dies like the pauper.³

³On the "dance of death" motif, see J. M. Clark and Gibson, "East."

In this case, the audience is levelled to Herod's moral stature by their laughter. Herod first is "levelled" by death and by laughter. The audience, then, is brought to Herod's state of damnation. Herod's "Last Supper," an inversion of Christ's, results in a renewed fear of death in the audience, a death without grace.

Death turns out not to be on the audience's "side" against the tyrant. His "feynt felachep" is universal and signals the need for mediation. The effect of Mors's physical appearance ("wurmys knawe me al a-bowte"), his stealth, his silencing the revelry of both the feast and the audience's rejoicing, is greater dramatically than even his sobering speeches. Embodied on the stage and in his final and terrifying walk through the audience, the reality and immanence, decay and disfiguration, effectively are made present to all. This episode is an important link to the emphasis on penance in the pageants that follow. Images of bodily death and Hell evoke a disgust and terror of damnation that prepare the audience more enthusiastically to greet the prospect of penance:

Ffor whan deth comyth ze stande in dowte
 Evyn lyke to me as I zow say
 shall all ze be here in bis rowte (104v, 274-77).

Confronting the dramatic and existential fact of death moves the audience to a desire for escape, and to an "anxious longing" for Christ. To break universal victimage to death, a result of the Fall, necessitates more than Herod's death: it requires Christ's. Only after the Resurrection will laughter in the face of death be an appropriately Christian response. The actions of Christ to release mankind from death begin in the pageants that follow.

Prophecy III: Christ and the Doctors

The physical proximity of Death, and Mors's closing promise:

Amonges wormys as I *zow* telle

vndyr þe erth xul *ze* dwelle

and thei xul Eryn both flesch and felle

As þei haue don me (104v, 281-84).

have most likely readied the audience to listen intently to how, by Christ's power and wisdom, death is to be overthrown. The pageant of Christ and the Doctors functions as a prophecy of and prologue to the events of Christ's life. It establishes both the fact of Christ's participation in the godhead, his power, and his wisdom. In addition, the play is a fit prelude to the institution of the sacraments of baptism and penance because it affirms that the "doctors of the Church" have ready access to "the Wisdom who is Christ," and so prepares members of the audience to imitate the doctors, to surrender their earthly wit to heavenly wisdom (see Ashley, "Wyt").

As Herod bragged and paraded his power, the doctors in the temple are puffed up with their wisdom: both are prey to pride. To Herod, the cycle has said: "All power over death and hell comes from God." To the doctors, it says:

Omnis sciencia a domino deo est

Al wytt and wysdam of god it is lent (106v, 32-3).

Herod vaunted his physical power; the doctors catalogue their intellectual powers in a litany of branches of learning that goes on for over thirty lines. The pageant is theologically very rich, but Christ's prophecies most directly point to his future actions to vanquish the

devil:

þe frute of here wombe xal saue euery manne

Ffrom þe grett dowte of þe ffyndys tormentry (109v, 187-8).

The doctors do not repeat Herod's folly. They are truly wise, types of the medieval philosopher, and so recognize Christ's superior wisdom.

They voluntarily surrender to the child and "mayster" their highest seats of learning: "We must hym wurcheþ with hyz reuerns" (108v, 140).

Lucifer's claim to wisdom and usurpation of God's seat is recapitulated here, not re-enacted. The light of Christ's wisdom converts them.

Unique to N-Town is the doctors' request that Christ stay with them longer in case "mo dowyts þat we fynde . . . þe trewth of hem ze may us telle" (109v, 195-6).

The implication here and at the end of the pageant, when the doctors leave with Christ and his parents in order

"of zow to haue more informacion," is that the doctors of the Church

walk with Christ and refer their questions directly to him. Support

of the priestly functions is important in N-Town to establishing the

efficacy of the sacraments of Baptism and Penance to gain grace and

overcome death. The play of Christ and the Doctors lays a doctrinal

foundation for the sequence that follows. In the play of the Baptism,

the "sacraments of the dead" are instituted and penance is proscribed.

The "redemption trilogy" that follows (Temptation, Woman Taken in

Adultery, and Raising of Lazarus) prefigures events of the Passion

and charts the spiritual course of the Christian life from tempta-

tion overcome to eternal life. These plays answer the primary question

raised by the "death sequence": How may we be saved from death?

Christ's "Travayll" of Love

The pageants to the end of the pre-Passion sequence begin a new "cycle"--baptism to death and resurrection. They also extend Joseph's earthly pilgrimage into the New Testament, eschatological journey, and recapitulate the Fall and its results. By recreating and revealing the mediation of Christ and the sacraments of Baptism and Penance, these pageants reveal to the audience the "wey of oure lord," and bring it along that path. John the Baptist prepares that way and, in his Prologue to the Passion I sequence, defines it:

. . . Of þis wey for to make . moralysacyon
 Be þe ryth syde ꝛe xal vndyrstonde mercy
 And on þe lefte syde . lykkenyd dysperacion
 And þe patthe be-twyn bothyn . þat may not wry
 Schal be hope and drede . to walke in perfectly . . .
 þe pathe þat lyth . to þis blyssyd . enherytawns
 Is hope and drede . copelyd be conjunccon
 Be-twix þese tweyn . may be no dysseuerawns
 Ffor hope with-outyn drede . is maner of presumpcion
 And drede . with-owtyn hope . is maner of dysperacion . . .
 How ꝛe xal aray þe wey . I haue made declaracion
 Also þe ryth patthis . Azens þe comyng of oure lord. (Fo. 138v)

This passage is worth quoting at length because it suggests the end to which the cycle has been moving and comments upon the action

of the Ministry plays, in particular. The "way" is defined by the passio, affections, that arise in response to mercy--hope, and judgment--despair, or "drede" and "dysperacion." The Marian sequence has aroused love for mankind and hope, the plays of death, dread. Christ's adult actions work to define the via media, and to arouse an affective response that both reveals that way and comments upon it. The emphasis of the section is imitatio Christi, and the way one imitates Christ is through humility of spirit, demonstrated in Baptism and confession, and through bodily penance, the sacrament that imitates the physical sufferings of Christ on earth.

Eleanor Prosser has stressed the penitential emphasis of the cycles and characterized "a typical Corpus Christi cycle as one vast sermon on repentance" (25). This description seems to impose undue limitations upon interpretation of the cycles, limitations which Prosser transcended in her own interpretive work. Her attention to the ways in which N-Town's Passion I sequence is painstakingly woven together, unified despite interpolations, and her focus on the effect of the Passion I sequence on audience are in many ways exemplary (ch. 7). This discussion of the plays from the Baptism to Lazarus will broaden Prosser's focus--will begin with the penitential meaning of these plays and the ways in which they prepare the audience to accept penance and the Eucharist. From these two concerns, we will go on to connect these plays to those before and after them in the cycle and stress the continuous process which is both brought to completion with the Raising of Lazarus, and fulfilled in the Last Supper (Passion I) and Passion (Passion II) that would follow.

N-Town's process could be said to culminate here, with penance, although the entire process of coming to faith in N-Town is not best described as "penitential."

The pageant of the Baptism establishes the significance of Christ's earthly acts and puts them in an active context: they are to be imitated by the audience by the sacraments of baptism and penance. Those who imitate Christ will enjoy the rewards dramatized: ability to overcome sin, merciful forgiveness, and victory over death. The opposites to be reconciled intellectually in this sequence are Christ's being as God and man (Temptation), the relative claims of mercy and justice (Woman Taken in Adultery), and life and death--that the penitent will have both death and new life (Lazarus). These reconciliations support the understandings and affections necessary to perform penance. The penitent must believe in the fact of death and in Christ's power and mercy, his ability to offer an after-life more "real" than the present life. Pain or suffering in this life, death to life, will result in reward in the next, life after death. This belief is manifested in the penitent in a balance of dread and hope. The Ministry sequence explores three stages of unbelief in order to to confirm belief: the aggressive disbelief of Satan, which evokes dread; the unbelief of the Pharisees who seek to protect the old law of judgment, which in N-Town is dramatized to arouse derision; and the "unknowlage" of those who love Christ, but despair of salvation--the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting, a dramatically pathetic situation.

John the Baptist follows on the play of the Doctors, which has put some distance between action and the audience following the warnings of Mors. Primus doctor closes with a prayer that draws the audience back into the circle of the play world by reference to the pageant in which it is offered:

all þat hath herd þis consummacion

of þis pagent þour grace þem saue. Amen (111, 287-8).

The subjects of the prayer for salvation become those to whom the sermons of John the Baptist are preached. He arrives, "þe voys of wyldirnese," preparing "the way of the Lord" and preaching repentance. The audience is first a congregation before a preacher; when Christ comes among them, they become witnesses to the institution of the two sacraments most important to salvation from death, baptism (moral satisfaction) and penance (poenalitas, penal satisfaction). This pageant is an instance of metaritual in the cycle--a ritual experience that re-creates and comments on the re-enactment of a sacrament that takes place outside of the experience of the ritual drama. As a congregation, the audience is exhorted to repent, and witnesses a faithful re-creation of the institution of the ritual of Baptism. Such an experience may be enriched by the memory of baptisms past, and is to deepen understanding of baptisms in the future.

The entire Trinity is present for the occasion, the first time since the Parliament of Heaven. John exhorts the audience to repent; Christ offers his meekness in baptism as an "ensawmple;" the Holy Spirit descends and, from the high scaffold, God the Father admonishes

the audience to listen and follow Christ's laws in order to achieve salvation. This is the most highly charged ritual moment thus far in the cycle. The Father addresses the audience directly, no longer the hidden God, and instructs them as His children:

PATER CELESTIS:

. . . Wysly to wysse zow ffrom weys wylde
 to lysten his lore all men I rede
 And zoure erys to herke
 Take good hede what he doth preche
 and ffolwyth þe lawys þat he doth teche
 Ffor he xal be zour Alther-is leche
 to saue zow from deuelys derke (113v, 97-104).

The penitential sermons of John and the admonitions of the Father and Son are not merely cases of didactic sermonizing in the drama: they heighten a ritual and revelatory moment. The process of the cycle has followed the pilgrimage of the soul to the point of this revelation: how mankind may be protected against sin, death, demons, Hell, and how it may be restored to kinship with God, be re-created in His image.

John the Baptist prepares the way of Christ historically, dramatically, spiritually and ritually. He exhorts the audience to confession and penance before Christ's appearance. In the Middle Ages, absolution was obligatory at the beginning of Lent, a season of penance that imitates Christ's wilderness sojourn before the Temptation. It is appropriate, then, that the audience be moved to repent so that it may follow Christ's way in the pageant that follows. John's

first sermon, which Woolf has called "historical" (216), begins with an exhortation to forsake sin in order to escape "peynfulnese / of fyere brynning in hell," an appeal to fear. The second stanza, a macaronic mix of Latin and the vernacular that signals a mediation between the language of heaven and that of earth, promises that "3e xall wyn hevyn dei deorum," an appeal to hope and to the desire for eternal life. The last two stanzas introduce Christ, first in the context of the institution of the sacrament of baptism. Jesus, "a lord of gret valour," is to come in humility to be baptised by John. Prophecies of the birth and Crucifixion of Christ are rehearsed in the "Ecce Agnus dei" stanza, the last, which looks forward to the Crucifixion as the Crucifixion will, in N-Town, explicitly look back to John's prophecy:

Ffor þis is þe very lombe with-owte spot of synne
 Of weche Johan þe baptyst dede prophesy
 Whan þis prophesye he dede be-gynne
 Seyng . Ecce agnus dey (154, 710-13).

The foreshadowing of the Crucifixion in this sequence is strong, and works to augment love of and pity for Christ, encouraging the actions that demonstrate the return of that love, confession and penance.

The preaching of John is not merely "didactic" or "historical." Rather, it builds upon the foundation of the emotions of fear and love, dread and longing, that the cycle already has aroused in the audience. John's sermon seeks to arouse the thoughts and feelings appropriate to one who is about to "see Christ," as an adult, for

the first time in the cycle, as well as appropriate to those who would "see Christ" in the Eucharist, instituted a few pageants later (Passion I). It is likely that all eyes sought to "Be-holde þe lomb of god" as He entered the platea--he is the one to be baptized now and later crucified.

Eagerness to see Christ, and the ritual re-creation of the first Baptism contribute an energy to this sequence and the audience would be attentive to John's words and his distinction between a sacrament and what it commemorates, demonstrates, and represents. The Baptism of Christ is interpreted as an act of humility from which "All men may take exaunple," and "þat sacrement þat newe xal be" is introduced as symbolic, signifying a spiritual transformation and a new connection between God and man, as John makes explicit:

My bapty m is but sygnifure
 Of his bapty m þat his lyke hath non
 . . . ffor he xall baptyze as seth scryptour
 þat comyth of hem all euery-chone
 In þe holy goost
 all goodnese of hem we haue (112-12v, 29-37).

In the cycle, Baptism produces the effect it signifies: the Holy Spirit, a dove, miraculously descends, and God the Father takes the baptized as His child:

Spiritus sanctus hic descendat super ipsum et deus † pater
celestis dicet in celo.

This is my welbelovyd chylde
 Ouer whom my spryte doth ouer sprede

clene and pure And vndefylyd

of body of sowle ffor thought for dede (113v, 92-95).

The sacrament restores the baptized to kinship with God by eradicating the original sin of the Fall, and makes salvation possible to the Christian who has faith.

John the Baptist makes a confession of faith in Christ's godhood: the miracle has confirmed Christ's divinity. John's "wyttnes" is said both in his own dramatic person and for the audience. Judson Allen has discussed the use of the pronoun "I" in the medieval vernacular lyric, and its connection with audience. The intention, he argues, was that the listener identify with the speaker--hear the lines as if they were spoken by himself (Allen in Vernacular Poetic). Many instances in the drama suggest this identification. John's lyric confession of faith, in particular, with its emphasis on witness and sight and in its highly ritual context, suggests that the audience would hear his words as if they, themselves, were confessing faith:

Here I se with opyn syght

The sone of God þat þou erte

. . . I xall wyttnes to every whyght

and teche it trewly with all myn hert (114, 105-6; 111-12).

This is a ritual point of conversion to which the cycle has been building, signified in the baptism of the child of God in the presence of the Trinity, the first sacramental milestone on the road to salvation. The audience is turned from images of death and fear to those of penance and confession, which overcome death and fear, and so are urged to commence the life of active faith, imitatio Christi,

to which Baptism is a necessary prelude.

Both Baptism and Penance overcome sin with grace: Baptism eradicates original sin; Penance, sins since Baptism. Between John's two sermons, Christ sets out across the platea on his journey into the wilderness, a physical and spiritual exile and "travayll" that is the model for the quadragesima, the forty-day penitential fast. Christ does physical "travayll" for love of man; the sinner is to do penance for love of Christ:

Ffor man þus do I swynke

. . . I xal nowther ete nor drynke (114, 126-30).

Christ's wilderness wanderings in the sight of the audience offer to the audience for imitation the dramatic exemplum of what John preaches--"contryscion, schryffte, and penauns"--in his post-Baptism sermon. John points to Christ: "now he is to wyldyrnes penauns þer to do" (114, 136) and makes explicit that since Christ suffers penalty for mankind, mankind should "do for oure trespace penawnce here also." John stresses the necessity of confession, speaking aloud, and couples it with the image of the unfruitful tree. The dumb are like the "ded stok" explored in the images of the Marian sequence, and Zachary's dumbness, the Cherry Tree episode, and Joseph's flowering rod are drawn together in a penitential image. The barren tree also offers the significance of action to come in the following three pageants, and signifies the Crucifixion. In Passion II, the image is explicated by Christ on the road to Emmaus. Aaron's rod, though dead, "floryschyd with flowrys ful thyk / and bare Almaundys of grett valure":

The dede styk was signifure
 how cryst þat shamfully was deed and slayn
 As þat dede styk bare frute ful pure
 So cryst xuld ryse to lyve a-geyn (204, 133-36).

The penitent Christian, like the "dede stok," may, through penitential acts recalling Christ's Crucifixion, be awarded the resurrection and the life. The stanza in the Baptism play offers the significance of the action to come in the following three pageants, the penitential process:

A tre þat is bareyn and wyl bere no frute
 þe owne wyl hewe it down and cast it on þe fyre
 Ryght so it be man þat folwyth þe fowle sute
 of þe devyl of helle and werkyth his desyre (Temptation)

God wyl be vengyd on man þat is both dum and mute
 þat wyl nevyr be shrevyn but evyr more doth delyre
 Clothe the in clennes with vertu be indute
 And god with his grace he wyl þe sone inspyre
 to Amendynge of þi mys

Schryfte of mowthe may best þe saue (Woman Taken)

Penauns for synne what man wyl haue
 whan þat his body is leyd in grave

His sowle xal go to blys (114v-15, 157-69). (Lazarus)

Christ's re-enacting the event after which penance is instituted, his sojourn in the wilderness, gives poignancy to John's sermon and acts both as the first of a sequence of exempla and as the barometer by which the others will be measured. The audience likely found

this to be a highly moving devotional moment of a ritual intensity scarcely able to be matched in Church. The choice is put to them: will they be corn or chaff? John's last stanza reassures his audience of God's love for the penitent, and closes with one of the most abrupt and business-like benedictions of the cycle:

Now haue I tawght zow good penauns
 god graunt zow grace at his plesauns
 To haue of synne delyverauns
 Ffor now my leve I take (115, 179-82).

The decision is with the audience and with God; John has done his duty by them both. The unconvinced may be further swayed by the terrors of the pageant that follows, wherein the "trinity" of the Devil plots its temptation of Christ.

The pageant of the Temptation is the first of the "redemption trilogy" that ends with the Raising of Lazarus. It closes the pre-Passion portion of the cycle and figurally represents what will happen in the Passion, its eschatological significance. As the closing lines of John's sermons fade away, the "wysest of councel amonges all þe rowte" of Hell gather in a parody of Christ and the Doctors: this pageant makes the Parliament of Hell undesirable to the "reasonable" in the audience and raises a question the answer to which has already been confirmed and confessed in faith. Bellyal and Belsabub promise to assist Satan in resolving a "grett dowte:"

ȝa sere telle us þe dowte by and by
 and we xul telle þe so sekyrly
 þat þou xalt knowe verryly

What þi dowte doth mene (116, 9-12).

The reiteration of "dowte" draws attention to its use. It may carry a double meaning of "doubt" and "fear," both of which are applicable. Satan's "dowte" is whether Christ is God or man; he is unable to reconcile those opposites and must devise a test. A temptation is proposed and, in a scene reminiscent of Gabriel's embassy to Mary, Satan sets out with the blessings of Lucifer and Mahound to fulfill the plan. The Christus Victor has become a pathetic sight, in pain of hunger and lacking bread:

A lytel of a loof relese myn hungyr myght

but mursele haue I non my comforte for to make (117, 72-73).

The powerful Christ, in his humility, has become one with the poor and needy. This scene initiates N-Town's development of Christ's humanity and pain, which culminates in the Crucifixion. At the Last Supper, Christ explains that he must "hasten" on to his death because "My flesch for fere is qwakyng fast" (158, 891). He repeats that he has fleshly fear three times. On the cross, he asks God to let him die because his pain is great, arising out of "The frelte of my mankende" (183v, 863). Here, in the desert, expressing that he would eat bread if he had it enhances the reality of Christ's manhood and the impact of his rejecting the temptation to turn the stones to bread. Christ directly addresses the audience, which can see Satan coming, in one of many speeches intended to arouse pity and so encourage imitatio Christi:

This suffyr I man for the
 ffor þi gloteny and metys wrong
 I suffyr for þe þis hungyr stronge
 I am afferde it wyl be longe

Or þou do þus for me (117, 74-78).

The audience, of course, may be moved to respond: "No, Lord, No--we'll repent right away!"--moved to penance by love and pity rather than fear of Hell. The demons arouse the opposites of love and pity, fear and derision.

Christ's "penance" results in his ability to overcome sin, strengthens him for his confrontation with the devil. This was a common claim for penance in the Middle Ages (see Prosser ch. 2 for general discussion), and supports the view that, as Christ's Temptation morally recapitulates the Fall, penance absolves the penitent from sins committed. The Baptism re-creates mankind as a child of God; Christ's "travayll" and Temptation recapitulates the Fall that separated them. Christ rejects the

. . . synnys thre
 the whiche mankende is frelte
 doth ffalle sonest Alway (116v, 50-52).

That N-Town reflects the doctrine of the recapitulated Fall is generally understood (see Woolf 200 and for doctrine, Murdoch, Recapitulated). Adam and Eve first were tempted by food, the sin of gluttony (inverted by Christ's fasting and refusal to turn stones into bread and anticipating the Eucharist, whereby Christ "ffor man . . . mad my body in brede," Fo. 192, 1427), then by becoming "goddys pere" (reversed by Christ's

humility when Satan tempts him to cast himself down from the tower), and then by avarice or covetousness (overtaken by Christ's denying the third temptation of the kingdoms, in return for kneeling to Satan). At the Fall, the tempter's identity was not perceived; in the wilderness, the identity of the tempted is not perceived.⁴ In this pageant, as in the two following, Christ reveals himself as God but the antagonists or onlookers in the drama do not see. They have not progressed with Joseph and those in the audience who have passed from spiritual blindness to sight. Satan tempted as a test to determine Christ's identity, but is left in confusion:

JHESUS: Go Abak þou fowle sathanas . . .

SATHAN: Out out harrow Alas Alas
 he byddyth me gon a-bakke
 What þat he is I kan not se
 Whethyr god or man what þat he be
 I kan not telle in no degre
 Ffor sorwe I lete a crakke (119, 183, 187-95).

Here the audience gains the enjoyment of expressing its perception of a dramatic irony--they can see what Satan cannot--and of laughingly demonstrating their contempt for the blind fiend. Satan still has not determined Christ's identity by the Trial before Herod, when he links the events of the Temptation and Harrowing in a mock-heroic, nearly pathetic speech:

⁴On Christ as "trickster," beguiling the beguiler, see Ashley, "Trickster." On the Temptation, see Wee, and Woolf 220.

I had hym onys . in A temptacyon
 with gloteny with covetyse . and veyn glorye
 þat rebuke þat he gaf me . xal not be vn-qwyte
 . . . ffor All his barfot goyng . fro me xal he not skyp
 but my derk dongeon I xal bryngyn hym to
 . . . And zet I am Aferd and he come . he wole do som wrake
 þefore I xal go warnyn helle . þat þei loke a-bowte
 (175, 482-496).

Satan's "falling back" recalls Lucifer's Fall and God's curse of the tempter at the Fall of Adam and Eve. It also will be echoed at Christ's Arrest when the Pharisees and soldiers involuntarily fall down before Christ. Lucifer's mastery emblematically is broken by his fart of fear at the Fall, recapitulated here.

The audience is to understand that Christ's penance and victory over Satan is to be re-enacted by their own--they, too, may "with-sett þe devyl in his dede" and should not fear him: "Ffor god hath the zovyn both myght and mayn / hym for to with-sytt evyr at nede (119v, 215-16). Even those who are unable to "concente nevyr to synne," and fall prey to the temptation Christ has overcome are offered mercy by the power of the inevitable Crucifixion:

sone of my ffadyr grace ze may gett
 with þe leste teer wepyng owte of zour ey
 My ffadyr me sent the man to bye
 All þe Raansom my-sylfe must pay
 Ffor loue of þe my-sylfe wyl dye
 Iff þou aske mercy I sey nevyr nay (121, 11-16).

This is the message of the exhortation to the audience of the following pageant of the Woman Taken in Adultery. She will imitate Christ's humility and demonstrate the effect of Christ's victory in the desert, the victory of mankind over evil.

Farcical Justice/Chivalrous Mercy:

The Woman Taken in Adultery

N-Town's fully developed play of the Woman has drawn more critical attention than most pageants of the cycle (see Prosser, ch. 6; Woolf, 223-27; Meredith, "Nolo Mortem;" Gayley, Plays 191-2). Its form has been found to be that of sermon and exemplum (Meredith, "Nolo"), an observation that does little to elucidate the meaning and impact of the action. That the pageant illustrates the theme of repentance, and dramatizes the conflicting claims of justice and mercy, is well-established. Prosser's discussion demonstrates how "the playwright entirely refocuses the action upon . . . the road to Salvation--and by so doing creates an exciting and effective religious drama." (ch. 2). Woolf has noted that the Pharisees recall Satan at the temptation: both attempt to manipulate Christ into revealing one aspect or another of his dual nature-- Godhood or manhood, justice or mercy. Woolf also has connected the Woman with the type of Eve and with the Virgin, a woman "not fixed by characterisation in her sin. . . in other words the treatment of an old theme in a new way signals the age of the redemption" (Woolf 223-4). The pageant is rich in resonances in other plays of the cycle. We will stress the ways in which genre is exploited in the play, its place in a process of redemption, its linking of presumption and despair, fear and hope, and its relation to the plays that surround it.

The pageant opens with 40 lines on repentance (on line numbering see Meredith, "Nolo") delivered by Jesus directly following the Tempta-

tion. Christ establishes the terms under which the actions of the play are to be judged in two stanzas that link Christ's mercy with relations between people. Those who break the law are "vnstabyll," but "thyn owyn frelte evyr þou attende" (121, 28), and help your neighbor to amend. The message is the new law of love, which recalls the "Golden Rule:" "Judge not that ye be not judged:"

Ageyn hym wrath if þou accende

the same in happ wyl falle on the (121v, 21-2).

The dramatist of the pageant of the Woman translated the message that the judge will be judged into the genre most suitable for stories of the beguiler beguiled, and most likely to arouse laughter, not wrath, from the audience--the farcical fabliau.

Following Jesus's exhortation to the audience to ask mercy of God and offer mercy to others, Scriba, one of the three Pharisees of the pageant, laments in fear. He fears that the law will be broken and that he will be shamed, an expression that by this point in the cycle confirms to the audience that he represents the old law:

Alas Alas oure Lawe is lorn

A fals Ypocryte jhesu be name

þat of a sheppherdis dowtyr was born

Wyl breke oure lawe and make it lame

he wyl us werke ryght mekyl shame (121v, 41-5).

Scriba recalls the accusers of Mary and Joseph, Satan before the Temptation (who feared that "all oure lawe he wyl down hewe / and þan be we all lorn" (116v, 33-4), and his type will be extended at the Council

of the Jews, who seek Christ's death "For oure lawys he destroyt / dayly with his dede." Indeed, Scriba, Accusator and Pharisee treat the woman to an experience parallel to that of Christ at the hands of their more powerful colleagues. Scriba demonstrates in these lines that he does not recognize Christ's godhood, identifies him as a hypocrite (his own sin), and that he fears shame--the Old Testament fear most vividly demonstrated in Joseph. The Pharisee, Accusator and scribe set to developing a plan by which they might shame Christ, "sum falshede to spyllyn his name." The terms used to describe Christ and their entrapment of him are the same as those of the Council before the Crucifixion. They develop the plan to break in on "A fayre zonge gwene" who is at the very moment committing adultery with "a tall man." Their pleasure at the prospect of catching a couple in flagrante delicto is evident in their lines and, if they have not committed adultery in deed, they here commit a voyeuristic sin in their thoughts and imaginations. Their action to "take them both to-gedyr / Whyll þat þei do þat synful dede" (122, 75-6) is described in hunt and game images and their anticipation and eagerness could be quite funny in the playing. Christ will lose no matter what he decides in the woman's case: if justice, he goes against his own preaching; if mercy, he breaks the law of Moses that adulterers should be stoned. The death of the woman is neither here nor there, however: the Pharisees seek to shame Christ.

The action is quite simple: the "trinity" of the Devil beats down the door of the woman's house, an action reminiscent of Joseph's home-

coming in the Return that also suggests the Harrowing of Hell to come. Her lover, Juvenis, runs out with his suspenders flapping and his trousers undone, threatens the three with "a dedly wownde" if they come near, and escapes. The woman is dragged out to "antiphonal abuse" (Woolf) and her first words are for mercy: "Ffor goddys loue haue mercy on me." They grant her none. She pleads for death on the spot rather than shame to herself and the slander that would shame her friends. The Pharisees assure her that they will kill her in conformity with the law. She is bodily pushed and dragged with coarse threats of violence across the platea to Christ, who squats silently, writing in the sand with his finger. The Pharisees accuse the Woman; Jesus remains as silent as he will at his own Trial. In Herod's court, the accusers become so enraged by his silence that they beat him with whips "tyl he is alle bloody." Here, Christ demonstrates that he has the power to use his silence to overthrow the opposition--that his actions later voluntarily suspend his power as God so that he can fulfill the penalty of death as man. The Woman begs for mercy; the Pharisees demand judgment; Christ writes their sins in the sand. omnes accusatores quasi confusi separatim. They fear shame and death for their sins, and slink away from Christ. Christ forgives the penitent woman and she promises "to be goddys trewe servaunt" in the future.

The situation is a potential tragedy averted, and the dramatist made it energetically comic. The comedy of the pageant raises expectations in the audience that are, like the expectations of the Pharisees, overturned. The form of the pageant exploits the dialectic of pathos

and farce, evoking pity and derision, and manipulates the anti-hierarchical, anti-pietistic and aggressive qualities of fabliau. Forbidden pleasure is anticipated by the Pharisees in the story of the woman, and the audience shares their anticipation. By manipulating generic expectations, the playwright manipulated the expectations of the audience. The audience is encouraged to develop the same definitions of the woman that the Pharisees hold: the formula calls for a brazen hussy to come forth, loudly justifying herself and threatening the intruders in the voice and rhetoric of a fish-wife. The audience is beguiled.

The N-Town play-maker has performed a creative act of imitatio Christi in his dialectical relations of theme, genre, character and affect in the play of the adulterous woman. The relations of pathos and farce often have been noted: farce is the "counterpoint of pathos" (Stephenson 325-6); it inverts pity and fear to evoke sympathy and contempt (Bentley 206); it perverts rigid mores, particularly courtly ones (Jauss 107). The "opposites" of farce and high spiritual seriousness are reconciled in the pageant; the reality of mercy evokes laughter, the reality of judgment, a sober silence, even a pity for those so recently derided. The audience is moved first to derisive judgment and then to pity for the "vnstabyl." "Old" dramatic requirements are both fulfilled and overturned. High homiletic seriousness is converted into a comedy of life in the face of death overcome. The freedom of the dramatic treatment, an "unbinding" of the Biblical story from the rather wooden and conventional treatment afforded it in other cycles, imitates Christ's freeing of the woman and mankind from the bonds of

death and a deathly seriousness about life. The dramatist happily chose to play the story as a farce, the most merciful and the most judgmental of dramatic genres: for in farce, "one is permitted the outrage but spared the consequence" (Bentley 194). Further, the genre aggressively unmask, it shatters appearances and exposes realities: "Without aggression farce cannot function;" "in melodrama we recoil from the enemy in fear, in farce we retaliate;" and "unmasking occurs all along" (Bentley 204-6). The audience responds to farce with laughter.

Mirth is the appropriate response to salvation and to the events which this pageant echoes and prefigures. Heaven often is referred to in play and game terms in the cycle. The Resurrection is greeted by the disciples and Marys with exhortations to "beth mary," and Christ promises Cleophas and Luke on the road to Emmaus that "ze xal haue tydyngys of game and gle" (205v, 211). The most laughable scene of the pageant, Juvenis's escape, is undoubtedly greeted by the audience with the mirth appropriate to the Harrowing of Hell, before which Christ dictates the appropriate response:

Now all mankende in herte be glad
 with all merthis þat may be had
 . . . now xal I ryse to lyve agayn
 from peyn to pleys of paradyse pleyn
 before man in hert be fayn

in merthe now xalt þou dwelle (185-85v, 971-77).

When John the Baptist is released, he rejoices in language that recalls Joseph's closing benediction of the Marian sequence, which refers to

the "play of paradyse" (juxtaposed in N-Town against the "game" of hell), and which is all the more joyful for its having come from a very "penitential" character:

With þi grace now xul we gon
 Ffrom oure enmyes every-chon
 And fyndyn myrthis many on
 In play of paradyse (1372-75).

Juvenis, too, believes that he has escaped from his "enemies" to mirth. He admits that "In feyth I was so sore affrayd," and departs with a curse:

Adewe Adewe a xx^{ti} devyl way
 and goddys curse haue ze every-chon (123v, 143-44).

The moral value of Juvenis, the false lover who escapes, comments upon the power of the three detractors. They are not true priests in that they lack the power to "bind and loose," are powerless over the souls of their flock. His sin is as great as the woman's. Indeed, in the Middle Ages, "men who frequented prostitutes were subject to more numerous and more severe punishments than were the ladies of joy whom they patronized" (Brundage, "Prostitution" 844). In the context of the pageant, however, Juvenis's escape is illusory; he has "falsed" his lover and neglected an opportunity for repentance.

The responses aroused by the pageant mirror the process of true repentance. The Pharisees first evoke fear mingled with fascination and anticipation of what will come; they are violent, damned, and out to kill Christ, but they also very graphically describe some very sensual stock comic situations. The audience is both repelled and drawn

in, fearful and desirous of what will happen. When Juvenis issues from the house, these ambivalences are reconciled in laughter. His fearful threats exorcise fear in the audience; his disordered "array" suggests his spiritual disorder. The detractors, too, are brought down to size because they "wyll not melle" with "suche a shrewe" for fear of death. Later, they "wyll not melle" with Christ, will not confess and ask mercy, for fear of death. Their game was to start the hare from the nest ("þe hare fro þe fforme we xal a-rere"), but the started hare has frightened them as much as they him. Theirs is the unredeemed fear of the rabbit, not the chastened fear of the woman, which draws her toward, not away from, Christ.

The detractors, thinking themselves powerful, have lost the soul of the woman by abusing their power, just as Satan will lose the souls in Hell at the Harrowing. Their actions are no more "serious" or spiritually motivated than the earlier medieval practice of sacking bawdy houses during feasts of misrule. Christ's power to "unloose" the woman, condemned to spiritual and physical death by the accusatores, looks forward to His raising of Lazarus: both the adulterous woman and Lazarus are given new life by Christ. The woman is "unloosed" because of her repentance. She is "converted" and offered absolution by Christ, just as the audience must convert its understanding of the situation, must absolve her of the sins that they have attributed to her in their own imaginations, must fulfill the old law but, in faith, practice the new.

After Juvenis's escape, all eyes turn to the house, expectantly awaiting the woman and, very humanly, hoping that she will appear "nott

zett well-up-teyd" as did Juvenis. The calling out of the woman builds anticipation and an unspiritual desire in the audience, as well as a preconception of her character:

SCRIBA:

Come forth pou stotte com forth pou scowte
 com forth pou bysmare and brothel bolde
 com forth pou hore and stynkyngge bych clowte
 how longe hast pou such harlotry holde.

PHARISEUS:

Com forth pou quene com forth pou scolde
 com forth pou sloveyn com forth pou slutte
 We xal the tecche with carys colde

A lytyl bettyr to kepe pi kutte (123v, 145-52).

Spontaneous laughter most often greets such a string of four-letter words in the drama: its excess diminishes the power of the invective to do harm or shock. And they expect to see a fallen woman. The adulterous woman was the lowest form of moral life in the ecclesiastical judgment of the Middle Ages. Chastity defined medieval woman: the chaste had moral purity; unchastity assumed manifold other sins (Haskell, "Paston" 462). The ambivalence of theologians and canonists on the subject of sex is well known. Prostitutes, in conventional glosses, were thought to make "bad use of an evil thing" (Brundage, "Prostitution" 831), and so compounded their sin. The audience expects to have low humor at the expense of a low character--to see the aggression of farce act against a similarly aggressive woman. Instead, they are treated to pathos. The woman's fear and fear of shame are chastened by hope,

humility and contrition rather than by a brazen form of despair; the daughter of Eve surprises the audience by acting as a type of Mary. They learn that even the most fallen of their neighbors may be transformed, that it is not theirs to judge, and that their judgment may be faulty. Christ is to judge and he judges in passive aggression in the pageant: the genre and the audience play the more actively aggressive role.

The woman is slandered, dragged through the audience, beaten, and brought before Christ as to a trial. Her journey across the platea, derided and threatened by her detractors, dramatically recalls Joseph and Mary's journey around the altar, and looks forward to Christ's buffeting and trials. Christ will be dragged back and forth across the platea in the Passion sequence, and it is possible that the woman actually travels Christ's "way of the cross" in N-Town--the very route he will take. As Joseph was threatened with a "clowte" that would make him fall, so is the woman; both near-fallings are parts of a penitential journey; the woman is at a later station on the way of the cross:

Com forth a-pase þou stynkynges scowte

be-fore þe prophete þou were þis day

or I xal zeue þe such a clowte

þat þou xalt fall down evyn in þe way (124, 184-7).

Christ, the supposed judge, is in the same situation that Pilate will be at Christ's own trial, but Pilate lacks Christ's wisdom and ability to read sins. After Pilate's Wife's Dream from Satan, she goes to

her spouse and begs him to release Christ because "þe jewys þei wole be-gyle þe / and put on þe All þe trespace" (176, 537-8). Christ here beguiles the beguiler; both he and the woman escape the judgment Pilate, an unwilling judge in N-Town, could not escape giving.

In the midst of the Pharisees' accusations, Christ appears to be an unwilling judge: he does not speak. The case seems to the accusers to be as clear as was Mary's: the woman's adulterous actions condemn her. The woman acknowledges her sin, that she is worthy of "Both bodyly deth and werdly shame" (124v, 214), speaks her contrition and repentance, and asks for mercy. Christ, the judge, becomes the woman's advocate, silencing accusation by writing the sins of the accusators in the sand. The woman has not said that she is deserving of eternal punishment in Hell, indeed, has not gone beyond what her body and reputation deserve in this world. Christ makes a judgment that arises out of knowledge of the possibilities of the next.

By accusing the accusators, Christ takes the part of the woman, becomes her advocate, accuses for her, which suggests the treatment of prostitutes brought to bar in medieval canon law:

She (the prostitute) was so base that she was canonically debarred from accusing others of crimes, according to one conciliar canon.

. . . Likewise, the harlot who had charges brought against her was not allowed to answer them in person but had to employ a representative to respond to them, just as did madmen and monsters

(Brundage, "Prostitution" 837).

The audience here is assured of Christ's role as advocate at the last judgment, as well as judge.

When accusations are brought against the Pharisees, they do not ask mercy, but run away in fear. Like Juvenis, they are not judged, but they are "doubly damnable for denying God," as Prosser has noted in connection with the unrepentant (ch. 2), and as confirmed by the proverb:

he that wyl nat whan he may,

he shall nat, when he wyl

(Handlyng Synne 4796-97; Prosser 29).

The monologues of the accusators are prophetic of the Last Judgment when, in N-Town, all sins are written on the sinners' foreheads, revealed to all:

PHARISEUS:

Alas Alas I am ashamyd

I am a-fferde þat I xal deye

all myn synnys evyn propyrly namyd

Ʒon prophyte dede wryte be-for myn eye

ACCUSATOR:

Alas for sorwe myn herte doth blede

All my synnes Ʒon man dude wryte

. . . I kan not me ffrom deth Acquyte

I wolde I wore hyd sum-where out of syght

SCRIBA:

. . . All my synnys be now vnhyd

Ʒon man be-for me hem all doth trace

If I were onys out of þis place

to suffyr deth gret / and vengeauns Able

I wyl nevyr come be-for his face

how I xuld dye in a stable (125-25v, 233-55).

They realize that they are condemned to death, but their fear blocks them from speaking their sins, from repentance. The penitent must reconcile fear and hope into the "anxious" or "chastened" fear of the woman. The dramatist of this pageant balances the evocation of responses of laughter, derision, pity and relief in the audience. Love, he evokes in the closing scene of the pageant.

The woman's accusers have fled; Christ and the woman are left together. Her false lover, Juvenis, has abandoned her; Christ, the lover of the Church and the soul, takes his place. The woman dedicates herself to be "goddys trewe servaunt." The fabliau form has allowed the aggression and sexual innuendo of the opening episodes, the dialectic of pathos and farce that defines mankind's situation from a god's-eye view. Farce, thought by many to be a "low" genre, is transformed by Christ's actions (and the dramatist's writing) into what it often inverts, romance. Christ becomes the "lover-knight" (see Woolf, "Lover-Knight"). In a fabliau situation, the woman would not be judged, but she would most likely run off with her new lover, an appropriate end to a story of the beguiler beguiled or the cuckolded cuckolded. Instead, the sexual and aggressive fantasies that the fabliau expectations have aroused chastely are fulfilled in Christ's forgiveness of the woman. The pageant portrays the salvation of a type of the Magdalene, who will appear in the next pageant. The Magdalene and the woman, thought to be among the vilest of sinners, become emblems of the human soul

of every sinner. The woman recalls Anima seeking for her spouse and true lover, Wisdom (play of Wisdom), Mary Magdalene's search for Christ after his burial, and Christ's words in the N-Town pageant of the Last Supper:

pat is seyd of me pat I xal dey

þe fendys power fro *zow* to flem

Weche deth I wole not deney

Mannys sowle my spovse for to redem (158, 897-900).

The effect of the pageant is to chasten sexual fantasies and transform them into a desire for union with God, a sign of faith. The pageant has addressed an essentially penitential problem, the fate of the soul bound in the flesh, and by its form and affect unbound the audience from the flesh.

The woman overcomes fear and despair, strikes the mean to which John the Baptist exhorts the audience. In his Prologue to Passion I, in preparation for the institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper, John singles out the sin of sensuality:

An yf be sensualyte . as it is ofte sene

Synnyst dedly . þou xalt not þerfore dyspeyre

but þerfore do penawns and confesse þe clene

And of hevyn . þou mayst trost to ben eyre (139, 29-32).

The effect of the pageant, too, prepares the audience for receiving the Eucharist, as well as schools it in the appropriate responses to Christ's Passion, which the Eucharist sacramentally evokes. The effect of receiving the Eucharist is to unite the soul with Christ in love and to offer spiritual delight. The pageant of the Woman Taken in

Adultery masterfully synthesizes Eucharistic and penitential meanings, the themes, doctrine and events of salvation history, and their significance. Further, it teaches the audience the necessity of suspending judgment and of trusting mercy, moods made possible by the historical events portrayed. This pageant teaches the operations of justice and mercy in life; the next, the Raising of Lazarus, teaches their operations in the afterlife.

Whereas the play of the Woman explores the fear and shame that dampen the affections necessary to repent, the next explores the despair of salvation that is caused by and nurtures an unbelief in the truth of Christ's promises of heaven. The pageant of the Raising of Lazarus demonstrates that the physical and spiritual salvation of the Woman by Christ will have a metaphysical result--that her contrition and confession may effect an everlasting victory over sin and death. The Lazarus pageant brings the spiritual process of the entire cycle full circle. It continues the penitential process, extends the woman's contrition and forgiveness to penance and satisfaction, and prefigures Christ's Harrowing of Hell and Resurrection, as well as "the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting" of the truly penitent.

Despair Vanquished: The Raising of Lazarus

As is so often the case in the N-Town cycle, the central action of the Lazarus pageant, the raising, is of lesser importance than the responses of the characters to the situation, and how that response might offer positive or negative models to the audience. Mary the sister of Lazarus (in N-Town portrayed as Mary Magdalene⁵), in particular, illustrates the despair attendant upon death, a despair that, in a penitential context, erodes the hope necessary for confession and penance. The outlines of the story are well known. Lazarus is "wonderly seke" and forsees his death coming on. As Rosemary Woolf has noted, "the dramatist here takes the opportunity to present a death-bed scene in the Ars moriendi tradition, and to investigate the grief of the sisters and the comfort offered by the consolatores" (227-8). But Woolf finds that the consolatores in N-Town "lack the moving gravity of tone of their analogues in the Fleury play, while the sisters' expressions of loss are less touching . . . than those in York and Towneley" (228). These judgments arise, in part, out of an error in reading the play. Woolf notes that "the author of the Ludus Coventriae, like the other dramatists, is too reticent to show Christ Himself grieving" (228), when in fact, Christ does weep in N-Town, and his weeping comments very strongly on the action. Further, the laments of the sisters are meant to illustrate the dangers of despair, and the comfort of the consolatores reflects their own ambivalence, as well as appropriately mixed responses to Mary's mourning.

⁵ On medieval portrayals of the Magdalene, see Garth.

When Lazarus is on his deathbed, Martha and Mary seek to comfort him. Martha's concerns are most for her brother; Mary's solicitude is more for herself:

A brothir brothir lyfte up zoure herte
 your hevvy cher doth us grevaunce
 If deth from us zow xulde de-part
 than were we brought in comberaunce

. . . ze do us brynge in distemperaunce (128, 33-39).

Mary's consolation attempts to ignore the fact that Lazarus is dying, does not concern itself with his preparation for death or his pain, and can be summed up as: "Don't talk about dying. It makes us too miserable." She denies the fact of Lazarus's death out of fear and despair of after-life. When he begins to grow cold and his color changes, Mary asks her friends to cheer him, notes that "Comforte of hym we kan non gete," and turns to her own grief. The consolatoes, too, communicate a message that is blind to Lazarus's painful situation: "Cheer up, man!" They mouth proverbs such as "you'll live a good while longer," and "if you think about death, you'll just die sooner." They discourage Lazarus from approaching his death in the appropriately Christian way. He has been sick, desires release, and greets death with appropriate welcome--neither eagerly nor fearfully. The irony of the dialogue is that what the consolatoes say in an attempt to ignore the factum mortis is eschatologically true. Lazarus will "haue hele and leue in qwart (health)," will "get better," but not in the ways they so heartily describe.

Christ is sent for but Lazarus dies before the messenger reaches him. When Lazarus dies, Mary describes her grief in graphic, physical terms: "Alas ffor wo myn here I rende" (129v, 109); Martha is more subdued. She doesn't wish that "sum man do us sle and qwelle," to "ly down by hym and dey," or wallow in her grief. Hers is the more appropriate grief that is reconciled to the fact of death but feels sorrow at loss. She is business-like about carrying the corpse to the grave and does not give way to a despair the magnitude of Mary's until the burial. She seeks the company of friends for her comfort and asks them all home.

Mary Magdalene, however, embodies her despair in the emblematic desire for death to which Eve fell prey after the Fall. At the mention of the fact that Lazarus must be buried, she laments:

Alas þat wurde myn herte doth slytt
 þat he must now in cley be graue
 I wolde sum man my throte wulde kytt
 þat I with hym myght lyne in caue (130, 141-44).

Her grief, self-interested and self-destroying, arises out of a perverted fear rather than love, and may lead to physical death, as well as spiritual. The speech of 3^{us} consolator to Lazarus comments on Mary's "disease:"

. . . many a man þis is no lesse

With his wantruste hym-sylf hath slayn (128v, 75-6).

The theme of the despair that kills is introduced here in a physical sense and later extended to the spiritual: despair kills hope and faith

in God's will and his power to save from death. Martha's final speech to Lazarus, which is concerned with his physical well-being, comments on the despair that acts as a self-fulfilling prophecy because it blocks faith and repentance:

What wele ze ete what wele ze drynk
 loke what is plesynge to your pay
 ze xal haue what ze wole thynke (129, 102-4).

She means to offer him anything he wants for his pleasure. But the lines must be understood in the context of the figure of Mors and with a memory of his speeches at the Death of Herod. Eating and drinking are not appropriate at the moment of death. At that time, "ze xal haue what ze wole thynke." If you think on Christ and repent your sins, you will have heaven; if you think on the needs of this world, and do not trust in the providence of God, your reward will be that of the worldly (cf Matthew 6:20: consider the lilies of the field).

At the grave, the consolators remark on the impropriety of grieving too long: it is to "grugge ageyns godys myght." The company leaves, but Mary stays behind to kiss her brother's grave, an act of desire for reconciliation with death. The 4^{us} consolator, Nuncius, reaches Christ with news of Lazarus's illness, to which he responds:

Dedly syknes lazare hath non
 but for to shewe goddys grete glorye
 Ffor þat syknes is ordeynyd a-lon
 þe sone of god to gloryfie.

. . . I xal come to hem whan þat I may (131, 200-03, 209).

Lazarus's illness represents the penance that follows confession, and Christ's response suggests the uncertainty of the Second Coming, the Last Judgment. Throughout the pageant, however, the certainty of death for all who live is reiterated, with the implicated meanings of the "second death," damnation. The disciples accompany Christ to the home of the sisters; Christ predicts that Lazarus is already dead; and Thomas, the unbeliever, echoes Mary's despair: "lete us deye with hym to-gedyr / þer as he lyth in þe same stede" (131v, 243-4). Mary and Thomas have carried contemptu mundi to an extreme; they cannot walk the narrow path between death to life and despair. Their responses model inappropriate grief in the face of Christ's promise of heaven, and perhaps would be understood as a warning to penitents who undertake penalties so severe as to threaten death, another form of self-destructive contemptu mundi that may arise out of a perverted self-concern, pride.

Back at home, Nuncius returns with the news that Jesus is on his way. Mary remarks that he is too late; Martha rejoices and runs out to meet Christ "in þe strete," hoping that he will have some comfort. The consolator reiterates to Mary that all must die:

Mary Mawdelyn be of good herte

And wel be-thynke zow in zour mynde

. . . Deth to no wyht can be a frende

All þinge to erth he wyl down cast

Whan þat god wol all thynges hath ende

lengere than hym lyst no thynges may last (132v, 280).

his words suggest God's power to extend the "ende." Mary is not cheered; "be-thynkyng" in her mind of death has given her a headache. She retires alone. Martha, who runs toward Christ instead of away, is consoled with Christ's assurance that

What man þat deyth and levyth in me

Ffrom deth to lyve he xal ageyn go (133, 303-4).

She expresses her hope and faith in Christ's divinity and goes to summon Mary. Mary is not occupied with spiritual thoughts, but physical ones: her bitter mouth, her heart split in twain; she regrets being born. The consolators fear that she will shorten her life by sorrowing, that "for sorwe þat she wyl shende," and admonish her to cease for God's love and in good wisdom. When she goes with Mary to Christ, she nearly chides him for tarrying:

Ha . where hath he ben many a longe day

Alas why cam he no sonere hedyr (133v, 341-2)

A Souereyn lord and mayster dere

had ze with us ben in presens

Than had my brother on lyue ben here

nat ded but qwyk þat now is hens

Ageyn deth is no resystens (133v-134, 353-57).

She believes that Christ may raise the sick, but not the dead: once dead, the dead are "wurmys-mete." Mary's words are true in a physical sense, but eschatologically they reflect her "old" understanding of death, that it is an irrevocable damnation. This same conviction is to be fatal to Satan's power over Hell in N-Town. Less than 150 lines

later, at the outset of Passion I, Satan "prophecies" Christ's failure:

Whan þe soule fro þe body . xal make separacion
 And as for hem þat be vndre . my grett domynacion
 He xal fayle of hese intent and purpose Also
 Be þis tyxt of holde . remembryd to myn intencion
 Quia in inferno nulla est redempcio (136v, 44-8).

Both Mary and Satan remember an "old text," and do not hear the new promises of Christ as truth.

At the grave, each in the company grieves in a different way before Christ. The audience is encouraged to evaluate their expressions of grief through the eyes of Christ, the newcomer, life rather than Mors come to the feast. Thinking on Lazarus's death slays the heart and mars the mood of 1^{us} consolator; the second somewhat coldly and self-interestedly remembers what a good neighbor Lazarus was, and how he "dede refresch with drynk and ffood." They did not love well enough; theirs is a presumptuous grief at the opposite pole from Mary's. Christ's response sounds an ironic note in an ironic situation:

ȝowre grett wepynge doth me constreyne
 Ffor my good ffrend to wepe also
 I can not me for wo restreyn
 but I must wepe lyke as ȝe do (134, 369-72).

Christ weeps. 3^{us} consolator remarks to Nuncius on the depth of Christ's love of Lazarus that he would weep. Nuncius (perhaps meaning "he of the present?") derides the consolator and implies that if Christ had really loved him, he would have saved him from death, an ironic prefiguration of what is to come:

A straw for þi tale what nedyth hym to wepe
 A man born blynde . dede he nat zeue syght
 myght he nat thanne his frende on lyve kepe
 be the uertu of þat same hyz myght (134v, 377-80).

Nuncius is the type of the believer who thinks he can best determine when God's powers should be used and when they should not, as if He were a magician for hire. Blind to Christ's love, mercy and pity, Nuncius's is the despair that challenges and derides, that attacks others rather than himself. The "myght he nat thanne" rings close to the challenge of the soldiers at the arrest that Christ break the "cordys bounde," to the deriding challenge that Christ bring himself down from the Cross if he be God, and harks back to Satan's temptations of Christ. Here Christ is challenged to a miracle, to reconcile the opposites of death and life. He does so, not out of pride, but to strengthen the faith of his followers, and in response to a challenge of his love. The crowd of disciples, consolators, and family is large, and no doubt intermingled with those in the audience, who become "þis pepyl þat stondyth about" in Christ's prayer to God the Father:

But for þis pepyl þat stondyth about
 And be-leue not þe power of þe and me
 them for to brynge clene out of dowe
 this day oure myght thei all xul se (135, 417-20).

In a moving spectacle, Lazarus rises at Christ's command and appears before the audience wound in his grave-clothes, an image of Mors transformed, Death dead, before the very eyes of the audience. Christ is confessed by Lazarus to have the powers that Herod vaunted in the

Magi pageant that initiated this sequence:

At zoure comaundement I ryse up ful ryght
 hevyn helle And erth zoure byddyng must obeye
 Ffor ze be god and man and lord of most myght
 Of lyff and of deth ze haue both lok and keye (135v, 424-7).

The "lok and keye," emblematic of ecclesiastical power, are in Christ's hands and are to be passed on to Peter, the Church. In an action emblematic of the sacrament of penance, in which the priest is given power to "bind and loose" penitents of their sins, the power of death and life, Christ commands the disciples "all his bondys losyth hem asundyr" and to "late hym walke hom with zow in þe wey." Lazarus is reintegrated into the community of the faithful in this dramatic and metaritualistic moment. Peter unties Lazarus's bonds, an action emblematic of absolution by a priest. The audience is given a speaking picture, a concrete image of what happens at the moment of absolution. In the cycle, the "unbinding" of death, through the power of Christ and the sacramental power of the Church, looks forward to the Harrowing of Hell in N-Town. Then Anima Christi "binds" Beliall "Fful harde," making him into the worm that seeks dead bodies for "mete," and confining him under the ground:

Ffals devyl I here þe bynde
 In endles sorwe I þe wynde
 . . . now þou art bownde þou mayst not fle
 Ffor þin envyous cruelte
 In endeles dampnacion xalt þou be
 And nevyr comyn out of helle (192, 1392-99).

This image also suggests retribution to Juvenis, the escaped false lover of man's soul, who lead the woman into temptation and fled.

The pageant of Lazarus completes a richly resonant Ministry "cycle" that recapitulates all of salvation history past and prefigures all of salvation history future. Unlike other cycles, it ends with rejoicing, images of death overcome, not with reminders of Doomsday. The figure Mors in the "death sequence" of the Ministry plays took upon himself much of the weight of warning that the Lazarus pageant in other cycles is made to bear (see Wakefield, for example). Lazarus's raising, like the raising of the Eucharist, is a visible confirmation of Christ's promised redemption, of eternal life. It makes the invisible and dimly imagined concrete and real. The spiritual progress of mankind, from Creation to Fall to Redemption, is dramatized in microcosm in this "redemption trilogy," and written larger in the entire cycle to this point. From Eve's despair and desire for death, the audience, with historical humankind, is moved to hope and desire for eternal life. Whether the audience was to see Passion I or Passion II following this pageant, or both, they would next witness a Eucharistic drama--the institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper, or the Passion, itself. The plays up to Passion I prepare the audience to accept the Eucharist, to witness responsively the Passion of Christ. They, like Lazarus, have journeyed from death to life, prophecy to fulfillment, spiritual infancy to spiritual maturity in the process of the cycle.

All of the emblems, images and dramatic situations of the Passion sequence will be familiar to the audience--each has been prefigured in the preceding "cycles." Each gains resonance from the images of

the past (for example, Christ's Trial from the many preceding trial scenes). The ethical and spiritual significance of each of these events has been explored from many different perspectives in the process and progress of the drama. The audience's response to the vaunts of the Devil, their understanding of the meaning of emblems such as Judas's kiss, or of Mary's lament at the Cross, or the significance of Pentecost, is informed by what they have learned before those pageants are played. The N-Town play-makers so constructed the cycle that the audience emotionally, intellectually, morally, and dramatically follows the progress of spiritual history. Passion I initiates a new cycle of Christ's eschatological actions, as well as completes a spiritual and sacramental process with the institution of the Eucharist. The final sequence, Passion II, portrays the final events of Christ's life and of the life of humanity on earth, as well as the completion of the spiritual journey of the individual soul.

The plays from the Creation of Heaven to the Raising of Lazarus, a sort of re-creation or reinstatement of Heaven, comprise one cycle, one pilgrimage, as well as at least three incremental "cycles" of spiritual growth. The sins of the Old Testament sequence have offered ethical instruction, primarily by negative example, as is appropriate to the stage of recognition and purgation; the progress of Joseph in the light of Mary's love mimetically explores early stages of growth to spiritual maturity, nurtures the seeds of love, faith, will and wisdom in the stage of illumination. With the plays of Christ's ministry, spiritual maturity and eschatological surety are available to the audience. The cycle has moved its audience to the knowledge and affections that

are needed for the pilgrim to walk the via dolorosa of the Passion without lameness. The Passion sequences are, for the audience, a sort of reward at the end of the road, entry into the Heavenly City, union with Christ in his humanity and his transcendence. The veil is to be lifted, all symbols signify, the Word made Flesh has dwelt among the audience, and it has beheld His glory. The passio of the audience have been aligned in preparation for the Passion. The entire life of the cycle and cycle of life has been a preparation for that sacred event.

CHAPTER VII

PASSION PLAY I: SACRAMENTAL CLOSURE

"Than this sacrament can anything be more marvellous?"

(Aquinas, Office for Corpus Christi, Lesson 5, Nocturn 2)

One of the unanswered questions about the N-Town cycle is whether it was played whole, that is, whether one year's audience would have seen both the Passion I and Passion II sequences. The manuscript has not yielded an answer, and the text, itself, suggests that one year's playing ended with Passion I, which was played in alternate years from Passion II. If we assume that the cycles sought to trace the entire salvation history of the world from Creation to Last Judgment, then an evaluation that the audience would have felt cheated follows. Two of the most important events of salvation history--Christ's Passion and the Last Judgment--would be denied them. Rather than proceed to the assumption that the whole cycle must have been played, however, we might more carefully assess the feasibility or merit of ending the ritual dramatic experience of one year with Passion I. If a cycle is mimetic of a spiritual process as much as it is of a historical chronology, then we may suspend our expectations of historical completeness and attempt to determine whether the spiritual process of the cycle is complete. Medieval devotion to the image of Christ crucified is well known. But Passion I centers on the sacramental counterpart of the Passion, also an event and object of great medieval devotion, the Eucharist. In Passion I, the Eucharist is instituted and its significance explored.

Both the Eucharist and Christ's Passion draw together all of the images and events of salvation history, illustrate the fact of the sacrificial redemption of mankind, and encourage devotion. Although we are more likely to stress the dramatic importance in the cycles of witnessing a re-creation of Christ's Passion, medieval writers more often stressed the spiritual efficacy of the sacrament. Connections between receiving the Eucharist and adoring the image of Christ crucified were frequent in the fifteenth century, when arguments defending images against Lollardry made so bold as to equate the effect of adoring images with that of witnessing the sacrament (see Sinanoglou 499 citing Mirk's Festial, Instructions for Parish Priests and Lydgate). The sacrifice of the Lamb of God as commemorated and re-enacted in the sacrament caught the late-medieval imagination.

Graphic images related the Eucharist with the physical world and with the event commemorated, Christ's Passion. In N-Town, Christ offers a lengthy homily on how the lamb, his own body, is to be eaten. Leah Sinanoglou (Marcus) describes "a more ingenious work" that depicts "Christ as the lamb roasted in the sun on the platter of the Cross" (499). Just a few years earlier than N-Town's compilation, Reginald Pecock (d. 1460) argued in defense of images by equating their efficacy with that of the sacraments:

Wherefore Holi Scripture of the Newe Testament witnessith thus miche in this purpos, that forto haue and vse seable rememoratiff signes is leeful, expedient, and profitable; for ellis the

sacramentis of Crist weren vnleeful, vnexpedient, and vnprofit-
able (Repressor 163).

peacock's argument suggests that the efficacy of the sacraments was most usually considered to be the highest, hence the value of his defense by equation. Given the veneration of the Host and the high feelings evoked by the Elevation in the Mass, we might reassess the generally accepted notion that, "if the performance ended with the completion of Passion Play I . . . the audience would have been left with a sharp sense of anticlimax" (Rose, "Staging" 211). A heightened sense of being present at the original sacrament, the audience's proximity to the action, and Christ's institution and explanation of the Eucharist's significance might contribute to a very climactic dramatic ending, indeed.

From a historical standpoint, it is interesting to note that playing the Passion of Christ before the audience was not a longstanding custom. The earlier Latin dramas rarely dramatized the event, and often the events of the Crucifixion were narrated by the Virgin in the planctus Mariae, the formal expression of grief that comes at the very end of N-Town's Passion I (see Kolve 175-6). Karl Young notes the infrequency of dramatizations of the Passion, and encourages a judgment that the medieval audience might have found the dramatization of the Last Supper and the rehearsal of the Mary's lament to be as moving and satisfying a closure as the events of Passion II:

We hear of no dramatization of the Passion earlier than the beginning of the thirteenth century, and even after that date evidences that such plays were promoted within the church are

extremely rare. We must infer, therefore, that the representation of the last occurrences in Christ's life was deliberately avoided. We may also surmise, if we wish, that for bringing vividly before the medieval worshipper the great Immolation, the Mass itself was felt to be sufficiently effective (I, 492).

Although Young's inferences and surmises arise out of a concern primarily with the liturgical drama, and although we no longer perceive the cycles as having developed or "grown" out of that earlier ritual dramatic expression, his suggestion that the drama of the Mass and dramatizing the Passion might satisfy equally deserves attention.

The Eucharist was described by the Council of Trent as "a pledge of our glorious resurrection and eternal happiness" (Session XIII, cap. ii), and it was venerated as the latest of the three "mysteries" (the Trinity, Incarnation, and Eucharist), and the only palpable one. The high pitch of feeling aroused by the Host had in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries erupted into a rash of reported visions of the Christ Child or Christ crucified during the Elevation of the Mass (Sinanoglou-Marcus; see Jungmann 1.118-21). Clerics and lay folk alike attended Mass in the hope of witnessing a revelation, or of having a vision, and many did. The consecrated Host was reputed to have cured maladies and diseases; it had magical temporal as well as spiritual effects. Few spectacles or ceremonies excited more anticipation, awe, and devotion than the Elevation of the Host. To witness the re-creation of the institution of that sacrament could have been as stimulating and climactic for the audience as the dramatizing of the actions it commemorates and contains.

N-Town's text supports such a judgment. That it reflects alternate playings of Passions I and II itself suggests that both the Last Supper and the Passion could move and satisfy, spiritually and dramatically. N-Town's Christ stresses the significance of and connections between the Last Supper, the old paschal feasts, and his Crucifixion, and the cycle illustrates that the Eucharist has immediate and physical power. In the Eucharist, Christ is "whole;" so partaking of Christ helps mankind to overcome "gostly enemies, thus fulfilling the prayerful desire of Joseph:

And as in þe olde lawe it was comawndyd and precepte
 To ete þis lomb to þe dystruccyon of pharao vn-kende
 So to dystroy your gostly enmye . þis xal be kepte (154, 70c/8).
 . . . As oftyne as ze do þis with trewe intent
 It xal defende you fro þe ffende (156, 809-10).
 . . . Ho so etyth my body and drynkyth my blood
 Hol god and man he xal me take
 It xal hym defende from þe deuyll wood
 And at his deth I xal hym nowth for-sake (156v, 825-28).

These promises, contained in the Eucharistic sacrifice of the Mass, are sacramentally dramatized in Passion I and mimetically dramatized in Passion II. In both sequences, the agon between Heaven and Hell is given stress.

Before the Last Supper, the audience, with Christ, enters Jerusalem. First, "Lord Lucifer," masquerading as a preening courtier, and then John the Baptist, dressed in animal skins, vie for the affec-

tions of the audience. Demon promises worldly delight; John, heavenly. Then follows the Council of the Jews, filling many of the playing stations and much of the platea with urgent goings and comings, messages and meetings, the busy-ness of council, chancery and court. The Council offers an image of false retribution and self-serving justice; Christ draws the audience into his circle of mercy and love: "Ffrendys beholde þe tyme of mercy" (143, 179). From the Prologue of Demon to the Entry of Christ into Jerusalem, the comparative merits of the city of man and the City of God are offered to the audience. Lord Lucifer promises fine clothes and wealth; Christ offers poverty and riches of the spirit. Demon rewards with "evyr-lastynge peyne;" Peter twice promises healing of physical and spiritual ills, comfort. The divisive and exclusive "ffelaschep" of Annas, Caiaphas, Rewfyn, Leyon, and the "doctors" highlights the love, warmth and genuine welcome of Christ's address to his "ffrendys." Demon scoffs at the poor dress of specific individuals in the audience; Christ and his followers are arrayed more poorly than they. The effect of the juxtaposition of the two "cities" is to fix the audience's allegiance to Christ. One is more likely to defend a person or cause that seems endangered.

By Christ's Entry into Jerusalem, the audience is among those rejoicing people, "goyng barfot and barelegged and in here shyrtys" who "sprede þer clothis be-forn hyme" and greet him as a king who will deliver them, crying "mercy mercy mercye." Perhaps some in the audience, too, took up palms, a symbol and a souvenir of pilgrimage:

The palms, which were collected in the plain between Jericho and the Jordan, were regarded as a symbol of regeneration, of the

victory of faith over sin . . . William of Tyre, writing in c. 1180, remarks that the palm of Jericho was 'the formal sign that the pilgrim's vow has been fulfilled.' And so it remained throughout the middle ages" (Sumption, "The Journey").

Christ's entry into Jerusalem, the pilgrimage goal, usurps the playing area that was filled by the peripatetic movements of the Council. The audience would have stepped aside to let those who were powerful, self-absorbed and self-important, the ermine-collared, pass. But Christ encourages a following as he rides around the platea on his lowly beast, the ass. The audience physically follows Christ, enters Jerusalem with him, and so declares allegiance to the City of God. Christ promises reconciliation, the union of God and man, that he himself represents and that is the spiritual goal of mystical pilgrimage:

The trewthe of trewthys xal now be tryede
and A perfyth of corde be-twyx god and man
Wich trewth xal nevyr be dyvide

Confusyon on to þe fynd sathan (145v, 302-5).

In a demonstration of his power, Christ heals the blind man, restoring "bodyly syth" and promising spiritual revelation. In the process of the cycle, Everyman, the audience, "raised" with Lazarus, enters Jerusalem and gains his reward--community, revelation, eternal life.

The end of a pilgrimage may be heaven, or a geographical place such as Jerusalem, or Augustine's "City of God," a community, the Church or Mystical Body of Christ. N-Town emphasizes conflict and contrast between the cities in every cycle of pilgrimage. In Passion

I, Christ and his disciples are set against the officialdom of the civitas terrena; fought on earth, the agon is between the agents of Hell and those of Heaven. Caritas characterizes members of the City of God; cupiditas the fallen members of the city of man. The audience may choose sides: Demon or Christ, Judas or Mary Magdalene, Cain's kin or Abel's. In the re-creation of the institution of the highest Sacrament of the Church, the audience is accepted into the Mystical Body of Christ and so reaches the goal of union. Augustine describes the institution of the two cities and describes the members of God's, pilgrims:

Now Cain was the first son born to those two parents of mankind, and he belonged to the city of man: the later son, Abel, belonged to the City of God . . . When those two cities started on their course through the succession of birth and death, the first to be born was a citizen of this world, and later appeared one who was a pilgrim and a stranger in the world, belonging as he did to the City of God . . . Scripture tells us that Cain founded a city, whereas Abel, as a pilgrim, did not found one. For the City of the saints is up above, although it produces citizens here below, and in their persons the City is on pilgrimage until the time of this kingdom comes (City of God XV, 1-3).

Accepting the Eucharist is a sign of membership in the kingdom, of oneness with Christ. This union with Christ, sacramentally accomplished in the Eucharist, historically was accomplished in Christ's Passion and Harrowing of Hell, eschatologically is to be accomplished at the Last Judgment, physically and commemoratively is accomplished in acts

of penance, "being crucified with Christ," and spiritually may be accomplished by devotional contemplation of the image of Christ crucified. Hence the two aspects of the Eucharist are mirrored in the two passion sequences of the N-Town cycle: sacrament and sacrifice. Separating the plays of the institution of the Eucharist from the Passion of Christ may confirm for the audience that their significance is to be equated: "Eucharist serves to recall both the Last Supper and the flesh and blood of Christ offered on the cross" (Kolve 48).

The Passion I and Passion II sequences also mirror the two aspects of the pilgrimage to the Heavenly Jerusalem: the communal and the apocalyptic. Around the Lord's Table, the community of the faithful affirms its communitas and its participation in the Mystical Body of Christ. By witnessing the Passion, the audience receives the revelation of the eschatologically significant events of the Passion and Last Judgment. Passion I stresses the sacramental and communal results of entry into Jerusalem; Passion II the apocalyptic. Each summons up an image of the other.

The apocalyptic meanings come through in Passion I, however, particularly in the connection between unworthily receiving the Eucharist and damnation. When Judas presumptuously and unworthily takes the Eucharist, he is immediately damned and Demon rejoices at this assurance that Judas's soul will come to Hell. Christ overcomes Hell in Passion I by exorcising seven devils from Mary Magdalene, a reverse image of the Harrowing of Hell of Passion II. Simultaneous action in the Council of the Jews and with Christ in the House of Simon juxtaposes Judas's actions against his professions, his treason against the disciples'

fidelity, the City of Man against the City of God, Heaven against Hell. The effect on the audience of the simultaneous actions of the Last Supper and the Conspiracy is to dramatize for them the agon which the Eucharist symbolizes and contains.

Throughout Passion I, the pageantry and power of Lucifer's puppets vie with the love and simplicity of Christ and his disciples. The audience physically and, perhaps, spiritually, is in the middle. The City of Man, political, power-struggling, divided against itself, is juxtaposed against the caritas and community of the City of God (see Brawer, "St. Augustine's"). The actions of the Council are mimetic of a whirlwind; they require that the audience be in almost constant motion in order to see and hear. In contrast to the chaotic and unexpected bustle of the Council, the Last Supper offers images and actions sacred and familiar to the audience, a calm center of salvation from the plotting and hatred of the world.

The institution of the feast begins after Judas sneaks across the platea to the Council, still in session, to exchange Christ's body for silver and the "love" of the conspirators. The Council adjourns to prepare "lanternys and torchys . . . exys gleyvis and swerdys bryth" for the arrest. "þan xall þe place þer cryst is in xal sodeynly vn-close rownd Abowtyn;" the ceremony begins. Christ draws the audience into participation in the mystery of the Eucharist and sets their celebration of the lamb in the context of salvation history:

And as we stodyn so dede þei stond

. . . With schon on here fete and stavys in here hond

. . . þis fygure xal sesse A-nothyr xal folwe þer-by
 weche xal be of my body þat am þour hed
 weche xal be shewyd to þow be A mystery
 Of my fflesch and blood in forme of bred (153v, 678-85).

The audience here walks in the very steps of Christ in a solemn and moving moment of metaritual, a dramatic re-creation that comments upon and extends the significance of the ritual of the Mass, itself. Christ elevates the "oble," or Host, at the words:

So þe newe lomb þat xal be sacryd be me
 Xal be vsyd for A sacryfyce most of price (154, 692-3).

Christ looks "upward in to hefne to þe fadyr," seated on the high scaffold, and asks God to reveal the "mystery:"

Thankyng þe fadyr þat þou wylt shew þis mystery
 And þus þurwe þe myth fadyr and blyssyng of me
 Of þis þat was bred is mad my body (154, 699-701).

Bread becomes body, and Christ offers it to his disciples as "Aungellys mete." Before the distribution, Peter confesses and asks forgiveness. Judas partakes despite his unconfessed treason, which the audience has witnessed:

whan oure lord zyvyth his body to his dyscypulys he xal sey to eche of hem . except to judas

This is my body Fflesch and blode
 þat for þe xal dey up-on þe rode.

And whan judas comyth last oure lord xal sey to hym

Judas art þou Avysyd what þou xalt take.

JUDAS:

Lord þi body I wyl not for-sake.

Judas's infamy must have caused a shocked stir in this dramatic and moving pageant. In the Office for Corpus Christi, Aquinas makes explicit the equation between Judas and all others whose hope of salvation by the Host outstrips their will to repent. Their unchaste fear will be rewarded with the guilt of the Crucifixion:

. . . whosoever shall eat this Bread, or drink the Cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the Body and Blood of the Lord (Lesson 3, Nocturn 1).

The tension and horror aroused by Judas's treason mounts. Christ announces that he will be betrayed; in turn, each disciple denies that he is the traitor. Judas breaks the uniformity of response:

PETRUS: Lord it is not I.

and so alle xul seyn tyl þei
comyn at judas weche xal sey

JUDAS: Is it owth I lord.

JHESU: Judas þou seyst þat word

Me þou ast solde þat was þi ffrend

þat þou hast be-gonne brenge to An ende

(155v, 781-6).

Suspense builds; the audience barely breathes; Judas returns to the Jews to collect his silver.

Judas is instantly damned. Demon greets Judas, promising him a crown in hell, and echoing Christ's words: "Sped up þi matere þat

pou has be-gonne." Christ already has power over Hell, and Demon already knows that he will come to Harrow. The speeches of Demon and Judas are the only ones designated "optional" in the cycle: "and sey þis spech folwyng / or levynt whether þei wyl." The players could choose between a sustained re-creation of the Last Supper and one in which the fact of damnation intrudes. The pageant is dramatized in such a way as to suggest both that the Crucifixion is in the future and that it has already occurred, an anachronism necessary to the sacrament of commemoration and anamnesis. As Demon departs, calm returns; Christ turns to the "chalys of þe newe testament," and to "þe memory of my passyon," where his blood "xal be xad ffor mannys love."

N-Town's stage directions refer to the bread as blood and the wine as body, and the pageant encourages a recognition that the sacrament actually was taking place on the stage. We do not know whether a priest played the part of Christ; we do not know whether the oble was consecrated; we do not know whether Christ's words after the elevation demonstrate the intention appropriate for transubstantiation to occur. But "among the English cycles only N-Town calls for explicit identification of the Last Supper with a Eucharistic service" (Coletti/Ashley, "N-Town" 181). When Christ is to distribute the bread, the directions say: "oure lord zyvyth his body to his dyscypulys;" when the chalice: "þe dysciplys com and take þe blod." The oble is body, not bread; the chalice blood, not wine. Whether or not the Sacrament was performed as a sacrament on the stage, its re-enactment with an emphasis on revelation of the mystery would, for a believing medieval audience, have been a moving ritual and a revelation. Christ's words

have the status of an official religious assertion--the bread is here made Christ's body. Surely these are the most moving and ritual moments of the drama, charged with the sacramental power of every Mass the audience has ever seen, and surely the pageant refreshed faith and renewed belief.

In an age when reified rituals no longer seem to produce lasting or concrete results, it may be difficult to grasp the potential power of N-Town's re-creation of the Eucharist. Perhaps a contemporary illustration would help. A recent example of an audience's desire to take as real that which they know is only a "show" is the reception of television soap operas. Studios and stations regularly receive letters addressed to characters in a serial. Some viewers express moral outrage; others congratulate. Audiences of these plays have blurred the distinction between real life and staged fiction. For example, on the day of the long-awaited marriage of two characters on one program, viewers reported dressing up for the ceremony. The studio received wedding gifts numbering in the thousands, dedicated to the happy couple. By an act of the imagination, denying what they "knew" was so and not so, the viewers filled the gap between illusion and reality. To re-create such a ceremony "even" now is to summon a ritual power, to evoke the deepest hopes, fears and desires that are aroused and allayed by our most cherished rituals, myths and institutions. Soap opera viewers did not witness a re-creation "in the flesh," but only on television. Their desires and their imaginative participation made the event real for them, as it could have done for the audience of the Middle Ages.

In the fifteenth century, veneration of the Host was alive and intense. The audience's experience of N-Town's pageant of the Last Supper very well could have been an experience of witnessing the Sacrament, itself (compare Poteet, "Time" 380). By the actions of their memories and imaginations, the audience could have become the community of believers before whom and for whom the rite was created and is re-created. Their experience in the world of the ritual drama may hardly have differed from that of the Mass. In both cases, they would feel the Real Presence, whether it was in the oble or not.

It is well known that in the fifteenth century the Eucharist had ceased to be a communion, a communal participation. The people rarely received the Host and never the cup; the priest ate and drank on behalf of all. Since union with Christ by sharing his body and blood was not available, the stress of the Mass shifted from communion to revelation, on witnessing the event with the hope of having a vision of the holy mystery (see Sinanoglou-Marcus 498-99; Dix 594-99). From the social and normative point of view, the ritual celebration was flawed, over-distanced from those it purported to serve (see Dix 248-9; 598-605; and Honigman 223). N-Town's audience may have felt closer to the actions and pronouncements of the Eucharistic celebration than they ever had felt before. N-Town's re-creation may have seemed more "real" than the drama of the Mass, more present, palpable, and miraculous. No rood screen separates the audience from the Host and the figure of Christ; no unfamiliar tongue obscures his words. For the audience, then, the pageant of the Last Supper may be an anamnesis, "an active 'reliving' rather than a merely passive remembering" (Oakley

83) and a communal commemoration. The dramatic context and the process through which the audience has been led heighten the ritual experience. A spiritual link between earth and heaven, a feeling of union with Christ, an epiphany, may be accomplished in the audience. The cycle offers a rememorative mimesis of Christ's life, of the life of the Church--Christ's Mystical Body, of the individual spiritual life, and of the Eucharistic sacrifice, the sacrament that contains them all.

The ritual drama of the Last Supper may compete with that of the Passion as an alternate high point in an alternate year, and surely the audience would not have gone home "with a sharp sense of anti-climax" (Rose, "Staging" 211). The Eucharistic experience, although it does not complete the historical cycle, completes a spiritual and sacramental one. The audience leaves with the fresh memory of the Eucharist to be evoked again at every future Mass. Christ is crucified at every Mass. Images of Christ's Passion are to be summoned up in the imagination by every witness to the Elevation. The pageant in the cycle gains power from the memory of Sacraments gone before, and confers power on those that are to come. O. B. Hardison has suggested the ongoing quality of this "cycle of remembrance," and the response it is to evoke:

Thus each Mass is an episode in a cycle that repeats itself every 365 days. The ordinary of the Mass, which is its constant factor, relates it to the original sacrifice . . . The transformation of the participants as a result of the peripeteia is essential to both the Mass and the cyclical drama (Christian Rite 83).

In response to the Last Supper, the audience is to feel joy, caritas, communion, love, the responses appropriate to the assurance of salvation and to the Mass. Bernard has connected the effect of "eating and drinking at his table in his kingdom" with the fourth, final, and nearly unattainable stage of his ascent to perfect love of God. In a section that describes the joys of the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting, he describes the emotions that may be evoked in response to the Raising of Lazarus and Passion I:

Once our bodies come back to life we shall be filled with everlasting life, abounding in a wonderful fullness. This is what is meant by the Bridegroom in the Canticle saying: "Eat, my friends, and drink; dearest ones, be inebriated." . . . It is right to call them dearest who are drunk with love; they are rightly inebriated who deserve to be admitted to the nuptials of the Lamb, eating and drinking at his table in his kingdom when he takes his Church to him in her glory without a blemish, wrinkle, or any defect of the sort. By all means he will then intoxicate his dearest ones with the torrent of his delight, for in the Bridegroom and bride's most passionate yet most chaste embrace, the force of the river's current gives joy to the city of God . . . The just are feasting and rejoicing in the sight of God, delighting in their gladness (On Loving XI:33).

The audience of N-Town has been invited to the "feasting and rejoicing" in a way that it has never been invited before. Those who have responsively followed the revolutions of the cycle celebrate in the City of God. By the revelation of the mysteries of God, the "good and

faithful servant is introduced into his Lord's joy" (Bernard, On Loving XV:40).

But one year's playing would not have ended with the Eucharist, which returns us to the problem of whether Passion I is a satisfying dramatic conclusion. The pageant of the Last Supper draws together the themes, actions and images that have gone before, completes a spiritual and sacramental process, in essence, "ties up the loose threads." They seem to unravel in the episodes that follow: Christ's Agony in the Garden and Arrest, Mary Magdalene's report to Christ's Mother, and the Virgin's Lament. These seem to initiate a new cycle, Christ's "jorne" to the Cross, and would seem more appropriate as an opening to Passion II, the sequence of trials and the Crucifixion.

But Passion I does complete the action of an entire day, Christ's "maundy." The mixed emotions it evokes may be those most appropriate to a resolution of what we shall call Cycle I, a very different work of ritual art from Cycle II. After the Last Supper, Christ declares that his "tyme is come," that he must go to his death, "Mannys sowle my spovse for to redem" (158, 899). He stresses his physical fear, and that he cannot "for-sake" his brother, "Nor shewe hym vn-kendenesse be no wey," but must die. Christ and the disciples go to Gethsemane, the audience following the action. The disciples are to "weche tyl I come A-geyn," words that resound in the promise of the Second Coming, the Last Judgment. Peter promises to remain, steady, until Christ returns. Christ indicates his readiness to God, in turn, a readiness that recalls Joseph's "unreadiness" to attain the degrees of faith:

I am redy in eche degre

þe vyl of þe for to fulfyller (158v, 922-3).

Christ is ready to his father; but the disciples are unready to their Lord. They sleep, reclining as if they were emblems of sloth. Christ rebukes them:

Of my deth ze Are not Agast

ze take your rest and I peyn sore (159, 924-5).

Christ returns to prayer, and very humanly asks God to "Remeve my peynes be þe gret grace / and lete me fro þis deth fle" (159, 930-31). His humanity and willing obedience in the midst of fear of pain are pathetic, particularly as they are juxtaposed against the image of the sleeping, unmindful disciples, emblems of all of humanity. Christ returns to the disciples, "and fyndyth hem Asclepe . . . latyng hem lyne." Christ's silence, a refusal to judge and an appeal to the individual will, leaves a gap for members of the audience, themselves, to condemn their behaviour and so heightens the pathos of the scene. For the third time Christ goes to prayer and asks for deliverance. His supplications sound like the appeals of a son about to be sacrificed by his Father:

On to þi sone fadyr take hede

þou wotyst I dede nevyr dede but good (159, 941-2).

In response, God sends an angel with "Angellys mete" and a chalice, an offering that is both a comfort and a reminder of pain and duty, as the Eucharist is to be for all Christians, and which may be understood to complete N-Town's sacramental cycle in the seventh sacrament, extreme unction.

Such a Eucharistic stress is augmented by the words of Angelus, who recalls the institution of the Last Supper and Christ's ordination of his disciples: "Fede my schep . . . zevyth hem my body as I haue to zow" (156v, 818, 821). The Angel also reminds Christ and the audience that Christ's coming had a purpose--he was incarnated to pay the penalty for mankind and so to reconcile the Parliament of Heaven:

As þe parlement of hefne hath ment
 þat mannys sowle xal now redemyd be
 Ffrom hefne to herd lord þou wore sent
 þat dede Appendyth on-to þe
 þis shalys ys þi blood þis bred is þi body
 Ffor mannys synne evyr offeryd xal be
 To þe fadyr of heffne þat is al-mythty
 þe dyscipulis and all presthood xal offere fore the.

(159v, 947-54).

Of the cycles, N-Town is "the only one to inform the Agony in the Garden with a visual reference to the sacramental meaning of Christ's approaching sacrifice" (Coletti/Ashley, "N-Town" 181). Explicit sacramental meaning in this scene supports a closing emphasis on the Sacrament of the Eucharist. Similarly, Christ's admonition to Peter to give to the other disciples "All þe cher þat þou kanst make" when Christ is arrested supports N-Town's emphasis on the power of the priesthood to cheer, heal, bind and unbind, and help mankind through the mediations of the sacraments.

From the Agony on Mt. Olivet through Mary's Lament, the cycle offers words and images highly evocative of Christ's Passion. The

audience is drawn into the circle of the play, and almost caught between the arrayed forces of Christ and the advancing army of the Jews. From behind the audience come "x personys . . . in white Arneys and breganderys and some dysgyzed in odyr garmentys with swerdys gleyvys and other straunge wepone as cressettys with feyr and lanternys and torchis lyth" (160; after 971). Judas makes up the eleventh on the "Council" side. The audience would turn to see the advancing conspirators, and would no doubt step back out of their way, shrink from confronting them, a physical indication of human fear. Christ, however, stands firm: "Serys I am here þat wyl not fle." At this, "alle þe jewys falle sodeynly to þe Erde whan þei here cryst speke and qwan byddyth hem rysyn þei rysyn Azen cryst" (160; after 984). The power that drove the fiend back at the Temptation here drives back Christ's enemies. They fall and rise at his bidding. His power over them is confirmed. Christ's power to bid them fall or rise anticipates the Last Judgment when he will raise the "quick and the dead." Christ repeats four times that he is Jesus of Nazareth, but his identity is not perceived; his words fall on deaf ears. Only the prearranged sign, Judas's kiss, reveals to them his identity. They do not understand Christ's word or words.

The kiss of betrayal sets loose the fury of the mob: they "ley handys on hym and pullyn hym as þei were wode and makyn on hym a gret cry All At-onys" (160v; after 995). The energy of this section looks forward to that of the buffeting and scourging. In anger, Peter smites off Malchus's ear, an action of retributive justice. Christ miraculously restores it whole with a rebuke that recalls the theme of the pageant

of the Woman Taken in Adultery, and that holds a lesson concerning the final judgment of mankind:

he pat smyth with swerd . with swerd xal be smete (160v, 1000).

The soldiers bind Christ in cords and challenge him to release himself if he is "kyng of þis werd rownde." The audience has seen that Christ has the power to bind and loose; he resists the challenge as he will when he is challenged on the Cross. Christ addresses the mob in terms that uncannily echo both his Entry into Jerusalem and his dying words:

Ffrendys take hede ze don vn-ryth

So vn-kendely with cordys to bynd me here

. . . now as woodmen ze gynne to Rave

And do thyng þat ze notwth knove" (161, 1025-35).

Christ's last words in Passion I are an expression of "Father forgive them for they know now what they do," his last words from the Cross. The scene of Christ's arrest has highlighted every one of the significant events of the Passion in some way. Christ is charged not to speak more and is pushed and shoved across the platea and away. His crossing suggests the many times he will be dragged across the platea to trials and, finally, to the Cross. His disappearance is, for the audience of a cycle ending in Passion I, his death: they will not see Christ played again this year. Mary's lament bears the burden of communicating the pathos and the victory of the Passion, itself.

When Christ is dragged from the platea, the "torchys" go with him. It is likely that night would be falling and that the audience would be left quite literally in darkness during Mary's closing lament,

heightening the drama of his departure and the pathos of what follows.

The Magdalene runs to Mary with the news that "to þe jewys he is solde:"

With cordys þei haue hym bownde and haue hym in kepyng

þei hym bety spetously and haue hym fast in holde (161v, 1051-52).

The Virgin first responds as a despairing human and then as the mother of God. She accuses herself of the sin that will cause his death and so speaks for the audience, as well:

A . A . A . how myn hert is colde

. . . So wold to god hert þat þou mytyst brest.

A jhesu . jhesu . jhesu . jhesu .

. . . Where-fore þan xuld ze sofer þis gret peyn

I suppoce veryly it is for þe tresspace of me

And I wyst þat myn hert xuld cleve on tweyn.

. . . þe swerd of sorwe hath so thyrlid my meende

Alas what may I do . Alas what may I seyn

þese prongys myn herte A-sondyr þei do rende (161v-62, 1053-68).

When the sinless Virgin so accuses herself, what then must be the guilt of the audience? From a response to the human fact of Christ's death, Mary moves to its transcendent significance, and is consoled. She ceases her lament at the recognition that her son will save mankind:

. . . þat xal comforte myn wo

Whan man is savyd be my chylde and browth to A good ende.

(162, 1079-80).

Mary's sorrow is to be shared by the audience. They are to feel guilt, loss, separation. Christ is gone to be crucified and there is nothing they can do. And the play is over. Mary's lament functions both to

make present the fact of the Crucifixion and to let the audience emotionally "catch up" with the play, to process the emotionally packed events of Passion I, to reach some sort of an equilibrium and a resolution. Familiar as the planctus Mariae would have been to a medieval audience from other expressions of it, they would have connected this lament with her planctus at the foot of the Cross. The sobering knowledge of the impending Crucifixion at the close of Passion I chastens the joy occasioned by the celebration of the Eucharist. The marvel of the Sacrament, and the marvel of Passion I, is that it connects and contains within it all of the themes and events of the entire cycle. The Passion is in Cycle I--it is ever present in the minds and imaginations of the audience, just as it is when they witness the Mass. Rather than having been re-created and then replaced with other images, the Crucifixion is repeatedly conjured up in the minds of the audience. The process of imaging the Crucifixion in this way is a process of the right reception of the Eucharist, the appropriate participation in the sacrament.

Passion I ends with both a challenge and an assurance, much as Passion II ends with the promise of judgment and salvation at the Last Judgment. Christ will be crucified, will save mankind, because mankind continues sinful (as Peter demonstrates in the garden) and needs salvation. The audience has been brought to the goal of the pilgrimage, is given a vision of the Heavenly City, but the struggle is not over. Once the soul is aligned with the City of God, the struggle has just begun. There is no assurance for sinful mankind beyond the striving. Hence the sorrow of the Eucharistic sacrifice and its concomitant joy,

as expressed in Mary's lament. Mankind continues to crucify Christ in the civitas terrena no matter how pure its motives and how great its strivings. Caught between the realities of earth and those of heaven, humanity must struggle to keep the road towards heaven.

Christ's final address and the ambivalent ending suggest that the audience is to be identified with the crucifiers of Christ. He, himself, undertakes the journey that no other can follow. In Passion I, the audience, by their sins, crucifies Christ; Passion II suggests that they are crucified with him. All mankind is in this mediate position, damned and redeemable, sinful and saved. It is left to the audience to complete the pilgrimage, to resolve the dissonance, to complete the action, in part through an act of the imagination:

Closure, it is important to stress, is imaginative, that is it embraces emotive and cognitive responses so that it not only releases a rush of feeling but also provokes a flash of awareness (Beckerman, Dynamics 153; see also Rugg 78-9).

The audience bears the responsibility for effecting closure, for completing the story. Will they be among the crucifiers or among the crucified? The rush and flash of Christ's arrest, the abruptness of his departure, may leave the audience stunned. They may experience a feeling of loss, feel that the image of Christ has been wrested from them. Mary's closing lament gives expression to these feelings, focuses the responses of the audience, and encourages them more actively to "think on these things," to interpret what they have seen and to align their lives and affections in such a way as not to "crucify Christ" by their sins.

passion I completes a spiritual process, and accomplishes the functions of the pilgrimage as Elizabeth Kirk has identified them: "process, epitome, and diagram." Before Passion I commences, the audience has been brought to the gates of the City by the operations of these three functions. Process has been accomplished by the "series of stages by which purposive change takes place" in the cycle--the historical, spiritual and affective movement toward spiritual maturity which has been a "mimetic representation of what change feels like from within," as well as a spur to that change in the audience. What Kirk designates as "epitome," a view of the audience's social world as a microcosm of the Christian universe, has been dramatized in the conflicts between good and evil and the strivings of the good against the evil. Epitome is most often expressed in the "realistic" action of the cycle, "realistic social observation and diagnosis." Fulfilling the third function of pilgrimage narratives, diagram, the cycle has given the audience a picture of its relations to the universe, has located "humanity on middle-earth in relation to God, eternity, nature and time" (Kirk, Kalamazoo 2-3). By Passion I, the audience has seen the forces of the Devil arrayed against those of God and understands both the place of humanum genus in relation to God, death, salvation, and damnation, and the weight of various individual types on the scale of God's judgment.

The process and pilgrimage of the cycle may be finished, but the Pilgrimage of the audience has just begun. As Kirk has noted in connection with the Canterbury Tales cycle, which was to have ended back at the Tabard Inn where it began: "the Heavenly Jerusalem, then, is a

process as much as it is a goal" (Kalamazoo 8). N-Town's audience has been schooled in this process, has experienced it in the progress of the cycle through Passion I, and so may leave the world of the drama to play its own spiritual cycle in the world, to re-create the drama in life. The open ending of Cycle I mirrors the freedom of mankind, quite literally, to create its own ending. Mary's closing lines invoke mercy for the audience and promise that Christ will act on his pity. But the audience, too, is to act on theirs--to love Christ because of his infinite love for mankind, the last rung of Bernard's ladder of love:

Now dere sone syn þou hast evyr be so ful of mercy

þat wylt not spare þi-self . for þe love þou hast to man

On All man-kend now haue þou pety

And Also thynk on þi modyr þat hevyr woman (162v, 1081-4).

These mournfully lyrical closing lines exhort the audience, too, to think on "þat hevyr woman," the mediating Blessed Virgin, who draws their love and pity and so may help to move their wills away from sin.

Passion I has aroused the emotions appropriate to the Christian, and appropriate to the celebration of Corpus Christi, a balance of joy and sorrow, hope and fear. Christ's abrupt departure arouses a desire; that he goes to be crucified arouses pity and fear; that he has left the Eucharist as an assurance to mankind arouses joy. These feelings combine in the "chaste fear" of Bernard or the "anxious longing" of St. Theresa. It is a desire for revelation, an anxiety for union with God, a hope of salvation, an "anxiety of desire" which, for Theresa, flowed out of the mystical longing for oneness with Christ.

That desire paradoxically is aroused both from Christ's proximity and from his distance. Berthold has summarized Theresa's desire:

. . . the closer one approaches the divine majesty, the keener is one's anxiety . . . Sorrow for one's sins grows more acute the more clearly one sees how much he owes God and how good God is; and anxiety lest, even at this advanced stage, one should miss his goal. Desire is creative; but so long as it is desire and not consummation, it is anxious (80-81).

The unconsummated ending of Passion I offers no certainty to the audience. The next "cycle of pilgrimage" is their own. They may be a Judas or a Magdalene. They have been taken as far as learning, models, feeling and the sacraments can take them. Their next acts must arise from their own wills. Only the individual members of the audience can complete the pilgrimage and so the play of Cycle I. Chances are very good that many in the audience would leave contemplating the inevitable and so, somehow, dramatized, actions of Christ's life to come. Those who occupy themselves with thoughts and images of the Passion will have achieved the goal of the ritual drama--the union of the soul with Christ:

The heavenly Bridegroom . . . enters willingly and often the chamber of the heart he finds decked with . . . flowers and fruits. Where he sees a mind occupied with the grace of his Passion and the glory of his Resurrection, he is willingly and zealously present there. . . If we wish to have Christ for a guest often, we must keep our hearts fortified by the testimony of our faith in the mercy of him who died for us and in the power of

him who rose from the dead . . . (Bernard, On Loving III:8-9).

The ending of Cycle I in medias rebus makes sense because it stirs the thoughts and imaginations of the audience to what is not re-created but what has ever been present, Christ's Passion and Resurrection. Those whose wills have been moved by this experience will complete the play and the pilgrimage, will "play" Christ, will repentantly live his story in imitatio Christi, will walk the via crucis. Few endings could be so ritually and re-creatively appropriate:

For the City of the saints is up above, although it produces citizens here below, and in their persons the City is on pilgrimage until the time of this kingdom comes (Augustine, City of God XV, 3).

CHAPTER VIII

"FROM PEYN TO PLEYS OF PARADYSE PLEYN"

Now all mankende in herte be glad
with all merthis þat may be had
ffor mannys sowle þat was be-stad
in þe logge of helle.
now xal I ryse to lyve agayn
from peyn to pleys of paradyse pleyn
þerfore man in hert be fayn
in merthe now xalt þou dwelle.

(185-85v, 971-78)

Passion II dramatizes the sacrifice re-enacted in the sacrament of Passion I. It ends with Doomsday, the last and general judgment represented in microcosm by Magdalene's salvation and Judas's damnation. Whereas Passion I satisfies with sacramental closure, Passion II effects a more narrative and dramatic closure. It brings the cycle full circle, back to heaven, and completes the histories of all of the characters--Mary, Christ, the disciples, the penitent and the impenitent of all mankind. By completing the story, prophesying the future, Passion II illuminates the necessity of living in the present as a pilgrim towards the future goal of salvation. Just as, historically, the Passion made heaven possible for all mankind, the experience of responding to its re-creation evokes responses

characteristic of the repentant and the saved, those who will enter the Kingdom, their eternal home.

Christ's Passion dramatically is very difficult to re-create and control. One problem of dramatizing a trial, buffeting, scourging and crucifixion is that people enjoy the suspense of a trial, the terror of anticipating violence and, perversely, the drama of violence done against another. Many of today's cultural performances (movies, hockey games, and not so long ago lynchings) declare the continuing human propensity to derive pleasure from terror and violence in a "game" context. These present entertainments are as eloquent as the bear baitings and witch trials of the past, no matter how eloquent the myths we develop to mask the distasteful reality. The challenge to the dramatist was to present the violence of the Passion in such a way as to arouse empathy ("Christ's pain is suffered for me--I should be on the cross"), and to subvert, or convert and channel, the potential "thrill" of violence. N-Town achieves this by confronting "thrill" responses to the violence against Christ, perhaps even encouraging them in order to refocus and replace them with more appropriately devotional ones.

Herod opens the action of Passion II by threatening all Christians, the audience among them, with torture and death:

. . . I am herowde of jewys . kyng most reverent
 be lawys of Mahownde . my powere xal fortefye
 . . . zef ony crystyn be so hardy . his feyth to denye
 Or onys to erre Ageyns . his lawe
 On gebettys with cheynes . I xal hangyn hym heye

and with wylde hors þo traytorys . xal I drawe
 To kylle A thowsand crystyn . I gyf not An hawe
 to se hem hangyn or brent . to me is very plesauns
 to dryvyn hem in to doongenys . dragonys to knawe
 And to rend here flesche and bonys . on-to here sustenauns.
 165v, 5-16).

These lines identify Christians as a threatened group, of which the audience and Christ are members. Herod's rant communicates a religious truth: all would die had Christ not been sacrificed; in Christ's death, the death of each member in the audience is escaped. Herod arouses awe and fear; his gory descriptions of deaths confront the audience with the physical terrors that make us instinctively shudder or shrink away. His soldiers go out to seek Christ. A messenger runs in and out of the audience delivering a report that arouses the thrill evinced by screaming tabloid headlines, or ambulance sirens stopping just down the block:

here xal A massanger com in-to þe place rennyng and cryng
 Tydyngys tydyngys . and so rownd Abowth þe place . jhesus
 of nazareth is take . Jhesus of nazareth is take . . .
 (166v).

The audience has been suspect and threatened, but now Christ has been captured--they are safe. Although the audience, like the viewers of a contemporary violent movie, knows that "everything will be all right in the end," there is a pleasure in watching bloody events spin themselves out to their inevitable conclusion. Gregory Bateson has noted the enjoyment children gain from being threatened and

behaving as if threatened: "play" threats offer children and adults the pleasure of playing fear overcome. Connected with this play impulse, or perhaps driving it, is the need for psychic distance from the terrifying. As René Girard has observed, participants in a ritual sacrifice often intentionally distance themselves from any identification with the victim--deny that he is sacrificed for them. Christ's Passion, then, must be re-created so as to allow the distance sufficient for the audience to empathize without feeling overcome, to feel the terror rise and to conquer it. Such a "play" sacrifice runs many dramatic risks.

René Girard begins his analysis of the connections between violence and religion by noting the "circular line of reasoning" that attends ritual sacrifice: "Because the victim is sacred, it is criminal to kill him--but the victim is sacred only because he is to be killed" (Violence 1). Girard explores the effects of sacrifice, the ways in which violence exorcises violence, at length: "The sacrifice serves to protect the entire community from its own violence; it prompts the entire community to choose victims outside itself" (Violence 8). The violence must, then, be present in order to be exorcised, re-created if its opposite, caritas, is to be aroused. Thus it may be important to dramatize the criminal aspect of the killing, and the enjoyment of the killers. Arousing in the audience the pleasurable effects of witnessing "play" violence done to another may build an energy to be converted into a pleasurable desire for union with Christ.

The relations of violence and desire have been explored in many disciplines. Girard's linking of the two suggests some of the ways in which violence re-created might re-create the audience:

Nothing, perhaps, could be more banal than the role of violence in awakening desire. . . . At the very height of the crisis violence becomes simultaneously the instrument, object, and all-inclusive subject of desire . . . in one way or another violence is always mingled with desire . . . Violence strikes men as at once seductive and terrifying; never as a simple means to an end, but as an epiphany. Violence tends to generate unanimity, either in its favor or against it. And violence promotes imbalance, tipping the scales of Destiny in one direction or another (Violence 144-5, 152).

The "epiphany" effect of violence, its seduction and terror, its ability to unite an audience, and its tendency to disturb balance may serve as a jumping off point to an interpretation of N-Town's Passion sequence in its medieval context.

In N-Town the sacrifice of Christ explicitly is offered as a reconciliation between God and man, as a way to stop the cycle of violence of the Old Testament, as a substitute sacrifice for those who should suffer for sin, all of mankind. The violence of the Crucifixion, then, is desired by heaven and earth, including the audience. From the Incarnation on, the Crucifixion of Christ colors and permeates all actions in the drama. It is the anticipated moment of grace, release, union between God and mankind, the moment of death overcome. Paradoxically, the bloody sacrifice of the Crucifixion

is to be welcomed and contemplated with desire. Late-medieval mystical writings illustrate the uncanny connection between the violence of the Passion and passionate desire. Mystical visions of Christ's trial and crucifixion build to descriptions of union with Christ couched in erotic metaphors, a descriptive tradition indebted to the sexually explicit language of the Song of Songs. M. F. Wakelin has connected the language of the bleeding body with the erotic language of desire in the context of exhortations to subjugate the physical, to sublimate sexual to spiritual desire. He concludes that:

For the mystics, focussing intense concentration on the sufferings of Christ is a way of concretizing, if we may so express it, the union between themselves as lover and Christ as the beloved, finding in him and his sufferings the spiritual intercourse which is so ardently desired (43).

Wakelin goes on to give examples both of violent descriptions of Christ's trials and Crucifixion and of the "overtly sexual imagery" that describes the union of the soul with Christ. The way in which this connection makes sense in the mystical context has to do with the operations of love. The more vile and violent Christ's sufferings, the greater the realization of his love, and the more fervent the love given to Christ in return.

Bernard's image of the soul that contemplates the Passion as a maiden strewing her couch with flowers is a lyrical example of this mystical relation of violence and love. Roughly contemporary with N-Town and from the same "neighborhood" in England, Julian of

Norwich experienced visions of the Passion that were accepted as a reward for her love and a spur to joy and desire:

And after this I looked with bodily vision into the face of the crucifix which hung before me, in which I saw a part of Christ's Passion: contempt, foul spitting, buffeting, and many long-drawn pains, more than I can tell; and his colour often changed. At one time I saw how half his face, beginning at the ear, became covered with dried blood, until it was caked to the middle of his face, and then the other side was caked in the same fashion . . . This I saw bodily, frighteningly and dimly, and I wanted more of the light of day, to have seen it more clearly . . . And when by grace we see something of him, then we are moved by the same grace to seek with great desire to see him for our greater joy . . . (Second Revelation, Tenth Chapter).

The cycles may fuel the imaginations of the audience with just these sorts of visions. In the context of love, the fourteenth-century

A Talkyng of þe Loue of God describes the scourging of Christ:

. . . & spitten in þi face mony tyme & ofte. And maden hit so slat-sum, so bleyk & so blo, wiþ betyng & busting and spit-tyng & spoutyng . . . þow weore naked bounden til a pyler, and scourget so sore þat þow miȝtest none weys wrenchen, no heore smarte lassches bi none gate blenchen. þer weore þou for my loue wiþ harde knotti scourges swongen and beten, so smart and so sore, so þat þi louely leor, þat was so briht and so cleer,

was al to-fouled and I-schent, pi skin to-riuen and to-rent
 (Westra, ed. cited in Wakelin 50).

Christ suffers as a lover for his love. From Girard's formulations and these medieval examples we may draw some postulates about how violence may function in the cycle. First, violence may be re-created in order to satisfy the desire for violence and arouse desire by violence, thereby exorcising or disarming the violent impulse, an impulse that endangers, must be subjugated to, caritas and communitas. Second, the spectacle of the physical abuse of Christ may re-create for the audience a vivid mystical experience of Christ's Passion, and so may move the audience to a parallel desire for union with Christ, to love. Third, witnessing the terror and horror of physical and final violence may "dislocate" the symbol of Christ crucified, may rift it from any more comfortable symbolic moorings that it may have in the audience's imaginations. By the action of the re-creation, the symbolic power of the sacrifice may be re-created for and in the audience. Its violence may shock the audience out of a learned, automatic, and external response (see DaMatta 214; Turner, Forest 103). These ritual uses of violence are related in subtle ways; setting them out separately is sufficient here.

One effect of Herod's threats and the ensuing special news bulletin in the cycle is to arouse a general threat and then focus the blame on one particular person. The thrill of the news of Christ's arrest is, in part, the thrill of arrest escaped--members of the audience, Christians, have escaped death at Herod's hand. The complex of responses to such an escape is born of fear, fuelled by

relief and distance from the object of violence, and buttressed by a feeling of moral superiority--one's own "sin" has escaped notice, spurring a sense of gratitude and release. This effect on the audience is mimetic of the experience dramatized, Christ's crucifixion, which allows Christian believers to escape the threat of death, and to resolve fear into joy. The feelings of threat and escape may seem illogical, but they are often felt and, somehow, enjoyable.

In the case of N-Town, the audience first is threatened, and then "escapes." Next it is identified with the mob, those who threaten the scapegoat, Christ. Christ is loudly accused, baited, reviled and, when he will not deny being God's son, clamabunt omnes: "zys . zys . zys . All we seye . he is worthy to dey . za za za (168v, 158). The rhythmic fury of the mob is unleashed, swirls in and through the audience. What is happening to Christ is what was threatened by Herod and, as a result of the Fall, what is deserved by "ony crystyn." Then begins the buffeting:

here þei xal bete jhesus A-bout þe hed and þe body and
 spyttyn in his face and pullyn hym down and settyn hym
 on A stol and castyn A cloth ouyr his face

The soldiers begin to play the game "ho was þat," asking the blind-folded Christ to "prophecye" who it is that is hitting him. Then ^{us} *iiiij* judeus initiates a newer and crueller game, dragging and whirling Christ from captor to captor, around in circles:

A and now wole I a newe game begynne
 þat we mon pley at all þat arn here-inne.
 whele and pylle . whele and pylle

comyth to halle hosso wylle

ho was þat (168-72).

The vertiginous effect of the game is an image of turnings, cycles. Christ is the "it" in a children's game astonishing in its cruelty when played by adults. Christ's turnings in a way recapitulate all of the cycles of violence past and expiate those that are to come. Thus his actions in the game of the Crucifixion are taken for all of mankind. The game continues as Peter is confronted by the women: he is one of "them," one of Christ's kind. Peter, too, does an about face: he denies Christ three times, in full view of his Lord, the last with vociferous oaths:

Sere I know hym not be hym þat made me

and ze wole me be-leve ffor An oth

I take record of all þis companye

þat I sey to zow is soth (169-69v, 188-91).

Peter has succumbed to the fear that Herod's rants and the disturbing and darkly comic games have aroused in the audience, as well. Indeed, we feel as if we do not "know" this Christ--powerless, made to play the fool, blindfolded, buffeted at every turn--he is as distant from our sympathies as the "it" of a children's game. This is not the Christus victor going forth to "sley the fende;" nor is it the silent, suffering, romanticized Christ of the icons. This man is the butt of madmen's jokes.

When Jesus "looks on" Peter, his disciple flees to the other side of the platea. The audience is between two images--the violent

game of the tortores with Christ and Peter's sorrow, between the urge to laugh and the urge to cry. Christ's unspoken rebuke reasserts what may have been forgotten or denied: Christ is in control; this is his game. Peter's lament speaks for the audience. Both have denied Christ in some way, out of physical fear and fear of shame. Enjoying violence done to another arises in part out of a feeling of "escape" from the same pain. The juxtaposition of the images helps to restore a balance that was threatened, offers a certainty as to what is the appropriate response, and reveals the greatest shame--denying Christ and distancing oneself from his pain. Peter's outcry exorcises the possibility of a childish response to what is really a very adult and serious game:

A weel a-way . weel away . fals hert why whylt pou not brest
 Syn þi maystyr so cowardly . þou hast forsake
 Alas qwher xal I now on erthe rest
 tyl he of his mercy to grace wole me take
 . . . Alas þe tyme þat I evyr hym for-soke
 And so wyl I thynkyn from hens evyr more (193-204).

The appropriate response to Christ's buffeting is indicated in Peter's confession, contrition and repentance. Judas's tardy and ineffectual admission of guilt confirms that response. Even the betrayer of Christ now sees his folly:

I judas haue synyd . and treson haue don
 ffor I haue be-trayd þis rythful blood
 here is 3our mony A-zen All and som
 Ffor sorwe and thowth . I am wax wood (170, 229-232).

Judas is "wood," mad, for sorrow and pity; the tortores are mad, swept away by their "game;" the omnes who clamabunt are mad with blood lust. The audience is in the midst, in response and reality; Christ is being buffeted like an animal sold for sport. Peter's confession throws himself upon Christ's mercy. Judas, however, despairs. When Annas will not let Judas "take back" his action, Judas hangs himself. He does not trust that Christ will "take" the punishment for his "owyn dedys":

ANNAS:

What is þat to us A-vyse þe now
 þou dedys with us counawnt make
 þou soldyst hym us . as hors or kow
 þefore þin owyn dedys . þou must take (170, 233-36).

N-Town's series of simultaneous actions manipulates the distance between the audience and Christ. Scholars of the cycles have found the games of the tortores disturbing and difficult to interpret. Interpretations that depended upon models of ritual and anti-ritual, and more literal-minded explanations that assumed that the medieval audience would have laughed outright at the captors now find few adherents. Two schools dominate interpretation of the effect of the games here and at the crucifixion in N-Town, and games in other cycles. For Woolf, "the game metaphor represents the turn of the screw in the accentuation of horror, for through it is conveyed a naked enjoyment in the activity of evil which is hellish in its reverberations" (255). For Kolve, the game helps to distance the audience: "the use of game and play in the Crucifixion scenes does

also serve to make the physical horror tolerable as an aesthetic experience. . . under control, so that it could be understood as well as felt, so that feelings would not numb themselves through excess" (199). Perhaps both are right. Kolve's remarks on game and play are particularly insightful (180-205). The gaming shows the "disinterest" of the crucifiers; Christ is forgotten in the "engrossing action, a game of skill and ingenuity" (187). They show that they "know not what they do;" "in so far as what they do is done in game, it is not done directly in hatred of Christ" (189).

It is difficult to determine which is the "right" response: laughter, horror, distance, pity, fear. Perhaps all of these are "right" and perhaps they compete in the responses of the audience. The combination is representative of the ambivalent feelings of human beings who confront violence. It also suggests the combination that comprises hysteria, response to an overwhelming crisis. I believe that the audience would have been as uncertain of how to respond to the games as we are to project their responses. This may be the power of the gaming and the "comic" action. The games are human, near, familiar as child's play; buffetting and, later, crucifying Christ is a feat not of power, but of game. In the midst of the pageant of Christ's Passion, another playing takes place; one performance encapsulates another. The tortores seem to be seeing and "living" a very different story from everyone else; they intrude from a different interpretation of the sacrifice. Their presence somehow signals the "made-up-ness" both of the cultural performance

and of Christ's crucifixion, Christ's "game" with Satan to win the souls of mankind.

The games of the tortores say to the audience: "This is play." Gregory Bateson has hypothesized that "the message 'This is play' establishes a paradoxical frame comparable to Epimenides' paradox." Such a metacommunication is self-contradictory, as it is in N-Town:

All statements within this frame
are untrue.

I love you.

I hate you.

Declaring "this is play" paradoxically equates play with "reality" and discriminates play from non-play, a circularity and a paradox analogous to Girard's observation about sacrifice. Bateson spins out the meaning of "this is play," as follows:

These actions, in which we now engage, do not denote what would be denoted by those actions which these actions denote (Steps 180).

Thus play both asserts and denies that it "means." The game of the tortores reveals the "play" of Christ's crucifixion, the "play" of the pageant, and the "play" of the world before the transcendent. It also reveals that the Crucifixion is not a game--it is a real event that has eternal results.

The tortores act with freedom and abandon, but are really bound by the rules of their game; Christ acts bound, but is really free and will free, unbind, all others. The games reconcile opposites by making paradox explicit. They both reveal the constructed nature of the drama and effect a revelation of what the original sacrifice was about, a necessary death for which the crucifiers are both blame-worthy and blameless. Christ is a "game" victim, a substitute marker, a stand-in for all of mankind, but he "really" suffers and we are to respond in pain and contrition to that suffering. Girard's paradox reveals the "play" character of sacrifice, an action which denotes and does not denote: Again, "because the victim is sacred, it is criminal to kill him--but the victim is sacred only because he is to be killed" (Violence 1). Christ must be a victim; he must suffer the torments so lovingly described by the mystics; someone must inflict them who is both a criminal and an instrument. The structure of game confers responsibility as it confirms innocence, in some way reveals this circularity of sacrifice, both damns and absolves the instruments of Christ's torture and focuses the attention on the it, Christ, the victim, the sacrifice.

Of course none of this is understood by any audience who would witness the Passion. The medieval audience would not have understood how one was "supposed" to respond to the game any better than we. They would likely receive the pageant with responses as jumbled, ambivalent, dissonant, as those to the pageants of Cain and Abel and of Abraham and Isaac. These two earlier pageants, types of the sacrifice of Christ, evoked a similarly disjunctive response.

The "crisis" of response there suggested that the sacrifice was beyond human understanding of justice, that it required the intervention of a God and necessitated a revelation.

Instead of exploring the benefits of not understanding what it is that the tortores do (as they, themselves, fail to understand), we have tried to explain them, often in limiting ways. We know and the medieval audience knew that one should respond to Christ's bloody physical shame with high devotion, pity, sorrow, love, manifested in weeping. The torturing boors do not. We would be disgusted with them if they were not so familiar, so human, so lacking in understanding and so dramatically interesting and potentially funny. The humor beneath the horror communicates the real unfathomability of Christ's crucifixion, the joy beneath the terror, a reconciliation of the opposites of rejoicing and sorrow, laughter and weeping, God and man. One effect of the games is to evoke a dissonant response, appropriate to a paradoxical action, that may be a prelude to revelation, to an epiphany. As William Carlos Williams has (most succinctly) put it:

Dissonance

(if you're interested)

leads to discovery ("Paterson IV" (On the Curies))

The games and grotesque humor mark the moment of turning from old law to new, damnation to salvation, death to life. These moments of turning, recognized as such only in retrospect, from the distance of history, must be revealed experientially to those in the now.

The beauty of dramatizing the tortores actions as game is that the

cycle does not simply attempt to evoke devotional responses and leave it at that. It explores the array of response, plays with it. N-Town first threatens devotion, confuses response, evokes a mix of human feelings, promotes a crisis. The crisis may resolve itself in the one dependable figure, Christ; devotion, love and pity may be reaffirmed, reinstated, re-created in response to the re-created sacrificial symbol. Threatening the expected responses both exorcises conflicting ones and assures the audience's heightened awareness and experience of the desired ones.

N-Town forces the audience to do a "double-take" (see Kermode, Ending 53) to break the stasis of a conventional response to a familiar image, to discover something new about the image and its meaning, the audience's relationship to it. The games at the buffetting and crucifixion bring the audience to the brink of an emotive and cognitive dissonance that may resolve itself into a new discovery of the meaning of the event. A very concentrated demand is made on the audience. That demand results not in the "numbing" that Kolve feared, but in a renewed response to a re-created symbolic action.

The cycle seeks to convert the energy of all other responses to love and desire. Movement from fear to love characterizes the process of the entire cycle, and of each sequence; this is the process of Passion II, as well. By empathetically witnessing the ultimate shame of Christ, the audience may overcome its own. Just as the trial of Joseph in Section II worked to confront and overcome the very shame he feared, Passion II may bring the audience to transcend this concern with the physical and with appearances in the

world. As Margery Kempe observed, "I telle þe he þat dredith þe shamys of þe world may not parfytely louyn God" (158). All of the powers of princes, potentates and the common people are ranged against Christ. By identifying with Christ and against the city of man, the audience may confirm its identity elsewhere, in the City of God.

Although the world causes Christ physical suffering, the "real" conflict is between Christ and Satan. In N-Town, Satan's monologue and tempting of Pilate's wife work to divert the audience's attention from Christ, for a time. These are the scenes that offer some relief from the continual abuse of Christ's captors. Christ has confronted Herod and the rest in silence. His refusal to perform a miracle and to speak enrages Herod and he commands Christ to be whipped. Eventually, even Herod tires of the game:

here þei pulle of jhesus clothis and betyn hym with whyppys.
ij^{us} judeus:

Jhesus þi bonys we xal not breke

but we xal make þe to skyppe

þou hast lost þi tonge . þou mayst not speke

þou xalt a-say now of þis whippe (174-74v, 441-4).

. . . and qwan þei han betyn hym tyl he is alle bloody þan þe herownde seyth

Sees serys . I comawnde ȝou . þe name . of þe devyl of helle

Jhesus thynkyst þis . good game . . . (174-74v, 441-50).

Christ is dragged off to Pilate and, on cue, "þe devyl of helle" appears.

The silent figure of the bound and bloodied Christ confronts the audience on one side, and Satan, who "enteryth . . . in to þe place in þe most orryble wyse" confronts it on the other. The audience's attention is divided between Demon and Christ who, during Satan's action, is led "A-bowth þe place and þan to pylat." Satan's monologue works gradually to temper the violence, horror and pity of the scourging of Christ, to heighten confidence in Christ's power, and to remind the audience that Christ, because of his submission to death, will be the victor in the pageants to come. Satan begins with what by now is stock cant about being dreadful and powerful:

ho so serve me sathan . to sorwe is he sent
 with dragonys in doungeyns . and develys fu derke
 in bras and in bronston . þe brethellys be brent
 þat wone in þis werd . my wyl for to werke (175, 470-3).

His vaunt shifts, however, when he brags about his mischief, "japyn with jhesus," whom he will "harry" to Hell. He recalls his rebuke at the Temptation, vacillates between gleeful description of how Christ will be crucified and bound in Hell, and uncertainty about Christ's identity. He goes to Hell to make ready for "A gest . . . þat is clepyd goddys sone." Demon, in Hell, predicts that "he xal oure power brest" and Satan realizes "than haue I go to ferre." His speeches become pitiful and the audience is assured that Christ will be victorious. The "break" in the action surrounding Christ, Sathan's monologue and appearance to Pilate's wife, draws attention to what is really happening, that Christ is preparing to Harrow Hell, and once again introduces, here in a different context, the game

quality of the Crucifixion:

Sathan:

My game is wers þan I wend here

I may seyn . my game is lorne (175v, 509-10).

All has been game, a game played by God's rules, not those of Satan or mankind. Part of the "game-plan" is that Christ will suffer pain and death so that mankind may overcome pain and gain salvation, may make a pilgrimage "from peyn to pleys of paradyse pleyn." In silence the devil appears to Pilate's wife in a dream, attempting to forestall Christ's condemnation. Uxor Pilaty runs screaming to her husband:

. . . zyf þou jewge hym to be dede

þou art dampnyd with-owtyn ende . . .

þe jewys þei wole be-gyle þe

and put on þe All þe trespace (176, 525-6; 536-7).

Pilate sends her back to bed: "all xal be weyl dame as ze xal se."

The trial recommences. Pilate, in N-Town played as a man caught in a political bind who does not want to condemn Jesus, is set upon by the will of the people--"Crucifigatur . we sey At onys. populus clamabit." Pilate is seeking any out and it is Christ who gives him one by assuring Pilate that his is not the greatest sin:

On me poer þou hast ryth non

but þat my fadyr hath grawntyd be-forn

I cam my faderys wyl to full-fylle

þat mankynd xuld not spylle

he þat hath betrayd me . to þe at þis tyme

his trespas is more þan is þine (177v, 596-601).

pilate believes that he is a pawn in Herod's game, but he is instrumental in Christ's. By making Pilate human rather than a type of evil, the N-Town playmaker again treads the thin line between designating him a criminal, as in other cycles, and absolving him. His dramatic treatment communicates the necessity of condemning actions to accomplish Christ's sacrifice, and the inevitability of the Crucifixion, Christ's game.

The action moves forward quickly to the Crucifixion at this point. Christ is stripped and scourged, robed in silk, crowned with thorns, offered a scepter. The jews play the "King for a Day" game and Hail him. The walking of the via crucis begins. Christ is stripped again to his own clothes, put under the cross, and "drawyn . . . forth with ropys" around the platea. Christ's progress to Calvary is short, punctuated by the meetings with the women of Jerusalem, Veronica, and Simon. In response to the physical threat of the captors, Simon takes up Christ's cross. Simon recalls Joseph, the unwilling pilgrim who had better things to do, and becomes a surrogate for the audience. Witnessing Christ's "stations," a highly conventionalized and devotional symbolic action, offers to the audience the image of the original pilgrimage after which all others are modeled. These are the steps of Christ in which the members of the audience must walk, as did the Woman Taken in Adultery, the type of the soul.

Similarly conventional, but no less physically painful to think about, is the stretching of Christ's body to fit the cross. "All the cycles preserve the traditional detail that the Cross with the holes bored in it was too large for Christ's body and that his limbs

had to be wrenched in order to make them fit the holes" (Woolf 258). Although N-Town doesn't embellish the scene with humorous or descriptive detail as in the other cycles, the practicality of the problem to be addressed jars the scene from the past, history, and into the present--this time, this place, hoc et nunc--from the illud tempus into the hoc tempus. N-Town, like the other cycles, seems to highlight the concrete details, the almost tawdry human ways in which the divine plan is fulfilled. Peter Travis has defined this juxtaposition as one between the "rhythms of ritual and those of real life." This is a helpful distinction up to a point. But the "rhythms of ritual" must be defined in terms of "real life" in order for ritual to have efficacy.

N-Town's treatment of the Crucifixion is conventional, judging from what remains of other cycles, and moving. The games of dancing about the cross, the "Hailing game," and dicing for Christ's clothes are the swirling background for the pathos of Mary's laments. The sequence of Christ's seven words is offered in dramatically satisfying ways. The pathos and sorrow of the scene are carefully developed. Once Christ dies, however, and goes to "sle þe fende þat freke," a series of exhortations to mirth begins. John exhorts the Virgin to "be of good chere / And merthis þat ze make." His role is to model mirth and move the audience (and Mary) to it; Mary's first is to stress the sorrow of the scene, and then to mediate. Mary mediates between the real and the ideal, sorrow and joy. Her laments give expression to the feelings that the audience is to feel; her ability to embrace the cross, to hold Christ's body on her lap, are

the images of love and union for which the audience is to yearn.

Mary laments as a human mother in physical terms that echo the laments of Mary the sister of Lazarus. The critical difference is that the virgin may turn from despair to reconciliation in the knowledge of salvation, from sorrow to joy, and may bring the audience with her.

Mary and John work together to evoke the joy and sorrow, weeping and rejoicing, appropriate to devotional contemplation of the Passion. John explains what is to come:

A blyssyd lady as I zow telle
 had he not deyd we xuld to helle
 Amonges ffendys þer evyr to dwelle
 In peynes þat ben smert
 he sufferyth deth for oure trespace
 and thorwe his deth we xal haue grace
 to dwelle with hym in hevyn place
 þefore beth mery in hert (184v, 921-30).

"Beth mery" is the exhortation from here until the end of the cycle. The effect of these early exhortations, however, paradoxically may be to heighten sorrow. When one is sorrowful and someone says "Cheer up! Things are going to get better," it often works only to renew weeping, to make the present even more sorrowful. That Christ suffered this shame and death is both the most sorrowful and the most joyful event in Christian salvation history. N-Town's exhortations stress the ambivalence of the devotional response.

Christ's body remains on the Cross; his soul, represented by another character, Anima Christi, goes to the gates of Hell. N-Town's

Harrowing of Hell is divided into two parts in N-Town. Rosemary Woolf has noted that the result of this division is "unhappy":

"Though in strict theological terms Christ's victory over hell begins at the moment of His death, in Passion meditation the human grief lasts until the Burial" (273). She notes that the Virgin's lament, holding Christ's body in her hands, "would be emptied of emotional impact if we remembered the irrelevance of it since Christ has already destroyed the gates of hell. The treatment of the Harrowing of Hell in the Ludus Coventriae is typical of the daring experimentation of the dramatist, but, unlike his other experiments, it is not dramatically successful" (273-4). Theology and Passion meditations aside, the split of the Harrowing and Mary's pietà scene, both unique to N-Town, may communicate something about how the Passion is to be contemplated.

Christ "goth to helle gatys" and declares "Attollite portas principes vestras . . ." Bellyall submits:

Azens þe may no thyng stonde

All thyng obeyth to thyn honde

bothe hevyn and helle watyr and londe . . . (185v, 1005-7).

Christ throws "þi derke dore down" and enters Hell. On the other side of the platea, at the Cross, the Centurion, two other soldiers, Nichodemus and Joseph of Aramathea contemplate Christ's dead body in growing faith. N-Town's dramatist here offers two images, evoking two interpenetrating responses, one of Christ's power (Anima Christi in Hell) and one of his pain (Christ's body on the Cross). The responses of the observers confirm each one. First, his power: Christ

must have been the son of God; second his pain. The confirmation by the Centurion of Christ's divinity carries especial weight because he has not "seen" the evidence of power, and also a dramatic irony. And when Nichodemus laments "Alas Alas what syght is this" the image of Rex gloriae is superimposed upon the suffering servant; the two, by an act of the imagination, become present in the one symbol, the Crucifix. By splitting the action of the Harrowing, and by the intervening speeches of belief and pity, the dramatist has cemented in the minds of the audience the double significance of the Crucifixion, the pity and the victory, the sorrow and the joy.

When Christ is brought down, Mary briefly laments and kisses his "bloody face . . . pale with-owtyn chere." The audience already knows what she, in her human mother's grief, only partly recognizes that Christ's body is empty, death already is overcome, his anima has fled. Joseph and Nichodemus bury Christ with businesslike dispatch. Mary promises them both the "blysse of hefne," indicating that she has spiritual knowledge that her human, mother's grief has overwhelmed. None of these scenes suffers for N-Town's theological consistency.

Christ's separation from his body also makes more appropriate the humor of Pilate's sealing of Christ's tomb, his fear that the disciples will steal the body, and his setting of the guard. What Pilate seeks to imprison has, the audience knows, already escaped. The militis brag about their strength with bravado, and each takes charge of one part of the body to ensure that Christ will not escape:

The hed I take
 here by to wake.
 A stele stake
 I holde in honde
 Maystryes to make
 crownys I crake.
 Schafftys to shake

And Schapyn schonde (190v, 1304-11).

Putting anima Christi in Hell during this action creates a good deal of humor and lightens the burden of grief. But the dramatist has avoided one staging problem attendant on having, essentially, two "Christs," and created another. Since Anima Christi has gone to Hell, only one Christ needs to be in the tomb. Anima need not secrete himself in the tomb during the Crucifixion so that he can emerge later. The stage directions are clear that Christ is in Hell during the burial. After the militis sleep, Christ "ueniet de inferno," where he has been all along. The dramatist sacrificed a well-known image, rex gloriae stepping out of the tomb over the sleeping bodies of the soldiers, and must have made a conscious choice. The result of that choice is, I believe, very happy. A deeper understanding of the symbol of the Crucifix results, and the joy of Christ's Resurrection begins earlier in the cycle. The audience is freed to respond with knowing laughter to the antics of the militis, and may relish the impending action of the Harrowing of Hell, the binding of the fiend. Certainly joy would appropriately greet the Harrowing, and "mirth" is one of the words most used by those who come out of Hell. Anima Christi

binds "þe gost þat all grevaunce hath gunne," so tightly that he must crawl as a worm and so evermore be recognizable to Christ's "chyldeŕyn þat were so dere." The children of God are restored to the Father, the "fiend" is bound in Hell, all of the damned of history emerge from the gaping Hell-mouth, death is overcome. Here the stage directions indicate that Anima Christi is to rejoin his body, which revives and speaks as Jesus, again.

This is the problem that the dramatist has created by splitting the Harrowing. How Christ leaves the sealed tomb, and where the character of Anima Christi goes, how it is that he rejoins his body, is left open in the stage directions. A grave with a stone rather than the coffin-shaped one more usual in iconography would allow Anima to burst the seals from the outside, as he burst the gates of Hell. He could thus enter and then re-emerge as the Risen Christ. Staying in the tomb, however, would present problems: when the Maries arrive, they must find it empty. A trap door or back exit to the tomb would solve the problem, but would be elaborate and difficult if the burial took place in the platea, ground level. Perhaps Anima simply disappears into the audience, his exit covered by the general rejoicing.¹

¹In the August, 1981, production of the Passion sequences at Toronto, the tomb problem was solved by conflating the two Harrowing episodes. Anima hid in the coffin before Christ's burial, and then emerged from the tomb as Christus Victor to Harrow Hell. This treatment was successful in that Anima could return whence he came and slip away during the action elsewhere. But this was not the dramatist's apparent intention, although his plan for disposing of the "extra" Christ is unclear. On the Resurrection, see Sheinghorn, "Moment."

Christ rises. In N-Town, he explicitly connects his Passion with the Eucharist ("Ffor man I haue mad my body in brede") and he appears to his Mother, a scene unique to N-Town. The dramatist heightened the joy of that reunion and its fulfillment of the purpose of the Incarnation by using the courtly and aureate language reminiscent of the Annunciation scene. Indeed, N-Town's banns comment on the intent of the language of this scene:

in þe xxiiij pagent þe soule of cryst jhesu
 xal brynge all his ffrendys ffrom helle to paradyse
 . . . Than doth cryst jhesu on to his modyr sew
 and comforyth al here care in temple þer she lyse
 with such cher and comforth his modyr he doth indew
 þat joy it is to here . þer spech for to devyse . . .

(8, 425-32).

Such language, as at the Incarnation, is to evoke joy in the audience, and is to signal the reconciliation of God and man. Jesus exhorts Mary to rejoice, for death is dead, an image given greater impact in N-Town by the earlier figure of Mors. The speeches swell in the litany of love and family relations that characterized Gabriel's earlier courtly address:

Jhesus:

Now dere modyr my leve I take
 joye in hert and myrth *ye* make
 Ffor deth is deed and lyff doth wake
 now I am resyn fro my graue.

Maria:

Ffare wel my sone fare wel my childe
 Ffare wel my lorde my god so mylde
 myn hert is wele þat ffyrst was shyld
 Ffare wel myn owyn dere love
 Now all mankynde beth glad with gle
 Ffor deth is deed as ze may se
 and lyff is reysed endles to be
 In hevyn dwellynge Above (193-93v, 1460-71).

The image of reunion, the measured lines, the familiar litany, the repetition of "deth is deed," soothes the audience, stills them and arouses their love. The frantic and humorous awakening of the guarding soldiers that follows moves to laughter, exorcises sorrow, and encourages a physical and outward expression of the joy appropriate to knowledge of the Resurrection.

N-Town deftly builds and controls a mixed response to Christ's Passion, evokes the full horror and insanity of it, its pathos, its necessity and its promise. The division of the Harrowing of Hell into two parts escalates the onset of joy and satisfies both theological exactitude and dramatic effectiveness. The audience's reaction to the near-slapstick comedy of the soldiers' awakening, their wide-eyed report of the Resurrection to Pilate, and their cunning bargains for hush-money release the tension all around. The militis promise silence in exchange for a bribe. Their actions contrast with Magdalene's later joyful reports to the disciples, and to the "quest" of the disciples for Christ. The quest for Christ, of course, gains the

best mead, proving wrong Annas's proverbial wisdom that money can
bind graves:

Ffor mede doth most in every qwest
and mede is mayster bothe est and west
now trewly serys I hold þis best

With mede men may bynde berys (195v, 1603-6).

So that they will not tell tales, the militis are sent off to Rome,
ironically enough on a pilgrimage:

Pylatt:

I wolde ze worn in zoure sadelys ssett
And haue here gold in a purs knett
and to rome rydyth ryght (195v, 1620-23).

Here the pilgrimage motif of the cycle is inverted and parodied.

Only now do these failed questers set out. In the Middle Ages, sending someone off on a pilgrimage was, no doubt, a convenient way of disposing of him for a while without raising questions. The "qwest" for gold of the militis is a false pilgrimage, a foil for the quest for Christ of the three Maries, and a suggestion of the true result of the Resurrection, the new possibility of a pilgrimage to the heavenly Jerusalem.

True to the tradition of following descriptions of Christ's Passion with passionate description of Christ, the Maries speak in the language of love longing in one breath, and describe how "þe spere gan punche and peyn" in the next. These speeches sustain the mix of the erotic and the violent, the desiring and the despairing, that the cycle has worked to evoke from the outset.

In addition, the effects of the Passion, the Passion II sequence, and those of the Eucharist, played in Passion I, are parallel. The Eucharist is to effect 1) the union with Christ by love; and 2) the spiritual repast of the soul (Catholic Encyclopedia s.v. Eucharist). Like the Eucharist, the Passion forges a bond of desire and charity between Christ and the audience and among members of the audience-- they have shared in His Mystical Body. Further, they have received a "beatific vision" which leads to delectatio spiritualis, a delight of the soul. These feelings may arise in part from the purgation of violence which the violent action has re-created, in part from pity and fear aroused and allayed in the joyful Harrowing and Resurrection, in part from a shared experience of crisis overcome. The Passion, doctrinally and dramatically, is a comic event for all mankind. But its playing is and must be tragic and violent in order to evoke in the audience the appropriate responses. N-Town heightens dread, fear, anticipation of violence, and balances them with anticipation of joy, knowledge, "mirth." In this way, the aesthetic and dramatic elements of the cycle communicate and elaborate upon the complexities and paradoxes of Christian doctrine without being explicitly "doctrinal." The result in the audience is the desire characteristic of descriptions of mystical visions of Christ crucified. As Wakelin has noted, contemplating Christ's Passion was to have had: 1) the potential to incarnate Christ, to bring the visionary to salvation; 2) the power to subjugate the concerns of the flesh to those of the spirit, a form of spiritual and social control. The re-creation of the Passion may chasten fear, violence and eros

in favor of spiritual desire, caritas and agape, and thus may bring the audience to the goal of the Christian life, a perception of union with Christ, and to the goal of all ritual, a sense of communitas, of a shared vision of the world here and beyond, and of one's place in it.

"Tydyngys of game and gle:" Three Maries to Pentecost

Doubt is allayed and faith confirmed in N-Town's series of post-Resurrection announcements and appearances. The three Maries offer perfect images of faith, hope and charity: they believe that Christ "hath us wonnyn owt of wreche;" they trust that "þe lord xal rysyn and gon his pas;" they bring expensive ointments to salve his wounds. The audience has already seen Christ leave the tomb, and the women are assured that he will rise again. Thus their surprise that "þe body is don A-weye," that "jentyl jhesu is owte," is muted and not very sorrowful. The audience has been in front of Pilate's scaffold and they follow the procession of the Maries back to the empty grave. The women's joy after the Angel's announcement that "ȝour Ffleschly lorde now hath lyff" is the focus of the pageant, not their grief beforehand. The women run with "myrthe and joye in herte" to Peter and the disciples and confirm what they have heard and the audience has seen. Peter and John neither believe nor disbelieve the women. Peter asks: "may I troste to þat ȝe say;" John finds the tidings happy and wants to "loke my lord yf I may se." They run to the grave and find the winding sheet and sudary which confirm for John that Christ is risen. The Maries have modeled belief without proof; Peter and John those who want to believe but need physical confirmation.

When Peter and John return to the disciples and confirm the report of the women one would expect general rejoicing at Christ's resurrection. Instead, Peter again denies what he knows, doubts whether he may know the truth. His speech is the necessary transi-

tion from the earlier faith and hope to a renewed doubt and despair, dramatized by Mary Magdalene, the one who despairs too much, before Christ's tomb. The result of the transition is that the bottom drops out of the rejoicing and affirmation of belief. Peter raises the question of how they can know that Christ is arisen and not just robbed from the grave:

The trewth to tellyn it passythoure witt
 Whethyr he be resyn thorwe his owyn myght
 Or ellys stolyn out of his pitt
 be sum man prevely be nyght
 That he is gon we saw with syght
 Ffor in his graue he is nowth
 we can not tellyn in what plyght

Out of his graue þat he is browth (199, 159-166).

Peter's mistrust of his own "witt" even when he has seen the empty grave introduces the structure and rhythm of this sequence of appearances, a zig-zag pattern of rises to faith and fallings from it. The pattern is a frequent one in N-Town, which encourages expression of active disbelief or unbelief in order to convert it to active belief, conscious, willed faith. To some in the audience, Peter and Mary's doubts may seem pathetic or foolish: they have seen and believed. To others, the doubts of the type of the Church and the type of the convert may be a necessary expression of scepticism and disbelief that, when allayed, will result in an even stronger faith. These two types of the earthly Christian demonstrate their earth-bound vision, but each works to bring the unbelieving to faith, as does the Church.

Mary Magdalene emblemizes the despair that may revisit the believer, a bar to faith, in her lament. She believes that Christ has been "stolyn away" because she does not rightly interpret the signs that should strengthen faith--the empty tomb, the report of the angel.

The Magdalene's lament is poignant because it is unnecessary, a despair that arises out of weakened faith. The language of her sorrow is highly conventionalized. Her heart breaks, she washes her face with her tears, she cannot speak for sorrow. She wanders about the grave as she recites the almost obligatory question of lament: "Alas Alas what xal I do . . . A woful wrecche whedyr xal go" (for the conventions of the lament for the dead, see Richmond). Christ's appearance to Mary allays her despair, as his appearance in the play of the drama is to allay the despair of the audience. He asks why she weeps; the audience waits in loving anticipation for Mary's eyes to be opened, for her to see Christ as Christ, not as the gardener. Peter's doubt of his "wytt" infected her earlier belief and lead to a despair that blinded her to the truth, even when Christ stood before her (an interesting commentary on the power of the Church to lead toward and away from truth). Mary's faith is confirmed, and she runs to the disciples with news, this time confirmed by her "opyn syght."

One effect of N-Town's alternating exploration of doubt and belief, sorrow and rejoicing, is to raise the pitch of the "mirth" reaffirmation, incrementally to build the intensity of response. Each successive appearance is a response to a different cause of spiritual blindness, unbelief. Peter witlessly mistrusts his ability

to know the truth; Mary is blinded by despair; Cleophas and Luke are blocked by their faulty and earth-bound reason. Christ leaves Mary with the promise of a home in heaven:

In hevyn to ordeyn zow A place
 to my ffadyr now wyl I go
 to merth and joye and grett solace
 And endeles blys to brynge zow to
 Ffor man I sufferyd both schame and wo
 more spyteful deth nevyr man dyd take
 zit wyl I ordeyn ffor all this lo

In hevyn an halle for mannys sake (200, 49-57).

The promise arises out of the pain; the joy is possible because of sorrow. Mary's rejoicing is the result of a revelation: she has seen and spoken to Christ with "opyn syght" and "opyn speche." She makes her experience concrete to the disciples by an image that recalls the kiss, N-Town's most common physical expression of reconciliation:

beth glad and joyful as for than
 Ffor trost me trewly it is ryght thus
 Mowth to mowth pis sertayn

I spak ryght now with cryst jhesus (200v, 90-93).

Peter again expresses neither belief nor disbelief. Mary's is a "woundyrful tale," but he craves his own physical proof and petitions God to receive it:

Onys þe presence þat we may se
 Ere thu Ascende to thi mageste

Gracyous god if þat ze plese
 late us haue sum syght of the
 oure careful hertys to sett in ease Amen.

(200v-201, 97-101).

The audience has had ample confirmation of Christ's resurrection, but only the Virgin and the Magdalene have yet expressed unequivocal belief. The audience is put in a situation from which they may judge the unbelievers, may shake their heads at their folly. The characters of Cleophas and Luke re-create for the audience another manifestation of the despair that arises from blindness. Unlike Peter, they trust their "owyn wytt." Their reason blinds them to Christ's presence among them.

Cleophas and Luke journey with an earthly goal, "þe castel of Emawus," not a heavenly one. There is some gentle humor in this pageant at the expense of pilgrims to Jerusalem, which is turned back on the jesters. Christ is "on pilgrimage" to Jerusalem in order to ascend into heaven; Cleophas judges him to be a pilgrim, and not very "up" on the news of the town. The irony of the situation, two men describing Christ's betrayal, death and burial to Christ, himself, is heightened by their condescending attitude, that of the reasonable and sceptical, towards pilgrims. Pilgrims, they believe, are unstable sorts, never in one place long enough to learn important news of the world. The irony, of course, is that Cleophas and Luke have not learned the important news of heaven. Cleophas's description of the pilgrim recalls Augustine's of the City of God. Christ is the "pilgrim and stranger in the world, belonging . . . to the City

of God (City, Book XV). Christ asks the earthly travellers why they are sad:

JHESUS: . . . 3our myrthe is gon why is it so.

CLEOPHAS: Sere me thynkyth þou art a pore pylgrym

here walkynge be þi selfe A-lone

and in þe cete of jerusalem

þou knowyst ryght lytyl what þer is done

Ffor pylgrymys comyn and gon ryth sone

Ryght lytyl whyle pylgrymes do dwelle

In all jerusalem as þou has gone

I trowe no tydyngys þat þou canst telle (202v, 49-56).

The deep irony of assuming that Christ, because he is a pilgrim, knows none of the "news" of Jerusalem surely was not lost on the audience. Christ, the pilgrim who goes to open the gates of the Heavenly City, has the only important knowledge--spiritual knowledge--that these earthly travellers lack. Christ humors them; he plays the fool. The two sorrow for Christ's death primarily because he was killed "With-out cawse " only because "hym to scorne they had grett game." They do not understand the spiritual necessity of Christ's Passion. Like Peter, they heard the "woundyrful tydyngys" of the resurrection, but do not know whether to believe them:

wethyr they sey truthe or ellys do raue

We can not telle þe trew verdyth (203, 79-80).

They even know that Peter and John "fownde þe women fful trewe sertayne." Jesus's answer and rebuke speaks for the audience, who must by now

be as impatient as Christ is patient with these blind, rational clods:

A ze Ffonnyz (fools) And Slought of herte

. . . why be ze of herte so dure

And trust not in god þat myghtful is (203v, 89-90).

Christ rehearses the prophecies of Scripture, and exhorts the pair to "turne zoure thought and chaunge zour witte," an echo of Angelus's exhortation to Joseph to "chawnge þe chere Amende þi thought" when he doubted the Incarnation. Christ's exhortation to conversion is rebuked by Lucas, the worldly wise, with a warning that Christ should beware of what he says in company for fear of Pilate. Of course Christ has confronted Pilate, and borne his worst sentence. Lucas misinterprets the meaning of Christ's Crucifixion, however. He perceives it to be a greater cause for fear rather than a cause for fearless rejoicing. He only understands an earthly "Great Assizes" in Pilate's hall; he doesn't yet comprehend the significance of the Last Judgment, when believers may be rewarded with eternal life. His "vn-knowlage" of such spiritual things is absolute:

. . . I cowncell þe such wurdys to ses

Ffor dowte of pylat þat hyz justyce

he was slayn At þe gre A-syse

be cowncell of lordys many on

Of suche langage . take bettyr A-vice

In every company þer þou dost gon (106-111).

Cleophas and Luke, types of the earthly pilgrim, recall and invert Joseph at every turn. They are righteously indignant that Christ

would deny what "everyone knows" is true; they chide Christ in the same terms as Joseph chided Mary when she tried to reveal to him the truth of the Incarnation. Christ tries to convince them of the truth of his Resurrection by analogies with Jonah who was three days in the whale and came forth alive, and with the now-familiar analogy with the dead stalk that bears fruit, the Cherry Tree of Joseph's experience bedecked with cherries out of season. Lucas finds that possibility marvelous; but that one should rise from the dead is even more to be wondered at. He can't believe that Christ is alive, even though the thought of his death pains him. Christ reminds them of Lazarus's raising, and Cleophas almost believes--wants to hear more. The two want Christ to stay the night with them so they can talk some more. Christ resists. He has "grett massagys" to do, would stay if he could, but must leave. Cleophas and Luke force him to stay "with strenth and myght" and "pulle hym with us þe wey well ryght." Their "wey" is not Christ's, but they believe it to be "ryght:" "walke with us þe wey is pleyne." Although their road is not Christ's and he is not subject to their physical power, he assents to stay "With herty wyll." Christ neither judges these earthly pilgrims nor openly reveals himself to them. They must "see" him with the eyes of their own faith. Cleophas and Luke desire the "goodly dalyaunce" of Christ, "Of hym to speke" is their "food," and they say they can never have their fill of Christ, but theirs is a blind desiring of those unwilling to make the pilgrimage on the less "pleyne" road of the pilgrimage to union with Christ.

Jesus performs a miracle before them that is, in one sense, a "trick" and in another communicates a divine truth. They sit to eat and Christ breaks the bread exactly in half and disappears from their eyes, vanishes. In the physical sense, he had promised to stay, but then left. In the spiritual sense, he has "stayed" in the bread that he has broken, the Eucharist which renews his presence with every eating, the "food" that is Christ, available to renew the faith of all believers. In the breaking of that bread, Christ's promise, and the joy that it occasions, is renewed:

CHRISTUS: Beth mery and glad with hert fful fre

ffor of cryst jhesu þat was 3our ffrende

3e xal haue tydyngys of game and gle

with-inne A whyle or 3e hens wende

with myn hand þis bred I blys

And breke it here as 3e do se

I 3eve 3ow parte Also of þis

this bred to ete and blythe to be (205v, 209-16).

Christ leaves the Eucharist for the joy of his "friends," earthly pilgrims, those like Cleophas and Luke who wend their ways vacillating between hope and doubt, joy and despair. The two confess, and act upon their contrition by setting out on a pilgrimage to their brethren, to witness the "talys trewe." When they tell their story to Peter and Thomas, confirming Christ's appearance by the miracle of his breaking the bread "As Evyn on tway / As on sharpe knyff xuld kytt" (207, 285-6), Peter responds for the first time in the cycle with absolute belief: "it doth well preve þat he levith a-geyn." But

the cycle of belief must swing to disbelief once again. As the pilgrims had chided Christ, Thomas, out of a despair that leads to doubt, now chides Peter. One must be mad to believe "these gode Novell:"

Be in pes petyr pou gynnyst to rave
 thy wurdys be wantowne and ryght vnwyse
 how xulde A deed man þat deed lay in grave
 with qwyk fflesche and blood to lyve ageyn ryse (207v, 301-4).

Thomas's disbelief may come close to arousing impatience in the audience. They have seen so many proofs and so many revelations and here, another of these "Ffonnyys," fools, must be convinced. Thomas voices his unfaith in a litany, repeating "I xal nevyr beleve." He must have "syght of Euery grett wounde / and putt in my ffyngyr in place of þe nayles" (207v, 322-3). No reports will convince him. Peter intercedes with a prayer that Thomas's "bad witt" will be converted:

Cryst be þi comforte and chawnge þi bad witt
 Ffor ffeyth but þou haue þi sowle is but lorn
 With stedfast beleve god enforme þe zitt
 of A meke mayde As he was ffor us born (208, 329-32).

The petition of Peter, the priest, the representative of the Church, is instantly answered with Christ's appearance. Thomas greets his lord with a confession of his "grett trespas." To doubt is insanity; he has been "A ravaschyð man whos witt is all gon." Thomas recites a five-stanza lyric of belief with a repeated last line that exhorts the audience to belief, asks them not to blame him for not believing

sooner, like Mary Magdalene, and offers his own doubt as their proof:

Ffor now I haue seyn with ful opyn syght

Quod mortuus et sepultus nunc resurrexit.

. . . . trust wele in cryst þat such meracle hath made

Quod mortuus et supultus nunc resurrexit.

. . . be-hold my blody hand . to feyth þat me Avexit

be syght of þis myrroure . ffrom feyth not remeve

Quod mortuus et supultus nunc resurrexit.

. . . . Thow þat Mary Magdalyn in cryst dede sone be-leve

And I was longe dowteful zitt putt me in no blame

Ffor be my grett dowte oure ffeyth we may preve

Azens all þe Eretykys þat speke of cryst shame.

. . . To hevyn zow brynge . and saue zow all in same

That mortuus et sepultus Iterum resurrexit. Amen.

(208v-209).

Thomas's conversion is, in part, illustrated by the repeated Latin line. The devotional ending exhorts the audience, prays to them for forgiveness, and prays for their salvation. The closing prayer merges into the following pageant of Christ's Ascension, the choice and ordination of Matthew as the twelfth disciple, and the baptism of the Holy Spirit of which the sacrament by water is a symbol. We learn that confession of faith is rewarded by the advent of the holy spirit in the heart of the believer.

The sequence of appearances works to recapitulate the themes of the entire cycle, explores various blocks to faith, and acts as a final and moving confirmation of it. The risings and fallings

of this cycle of belief parallel those of the other cycles in N-Town, and are mimetic of the often uneven progress of the spiritual traveller. This pattern is reflected in medieval mystical writings, which often describe the ways in which God reveals and conceals himself as Christ's "play," his playing "games with the soul" (see Riehle 209; Ashley, "Trickster"). Each dip into doubt, however, is balanced by a higher ascent to faith; each moment of despair turned to a greater joy. The experience of coming to faith is not straight; the pilgrim must strive to keep the path and not take the easy one. The sequence begins in sorrow and disbelief and ends in joy and reunion. Christ and all of his disciples are united before the audience, and the virtues of love, caritas, communitas are evoked in the audience, as well as enacted in the pageant. Christ exhorts his disciples, "on stage" and in the audience, to love: Pax vobis . Amonge zow pes/ bothe love and reste and charyte/Amonge All vertues lete it not ses/ Ffor Amonge All vertues prynspal his he (210, 1-4).

The audience is given an opportunity to express that love and charity by following Christ and the disciples to "pe mownte of Olyvete" for the Ascension, the close of this sequence of pilgrimage and belief. The spectacle of the Ascension, "With myrthe and melody and Aungell songe," would evoke wonder, awe, love. Christ's parting words are an exhortation to love, which is given some urgency by the Angel's promise of the Second Coming, the Last Judgment:

JHESUS: . . . lovyth no wrath nor no wronge

but levyth in charyte with mylde stevyn . . .

ANGELUS: . . . In a clowde As ze hym seyn

Steyng vp so xal comyng A-geyn

Of Al mankynde þis is serteyn

jugement xal he make.

. . . Before oure eye .

in A bryght skye

he dede up stye .

to hevyn blys. (210v-11).

The effects of song, the "ffelachepe" modeled by the disciples, the exhortation of Christ, the quiet joy following the Resurrection, all of these combine to arouse in the audience a blissful feeling of love, unity, salvation; they also, from this speech, understand that the cycle is drawing to an end. The effects of the descent of the dove on the disciples are shared by the audience, too. They feel the "presence" of the Holy Spirit in the aftermath of the marvelous events they have witnessed re-created. The disciples pray for grace: "Sey we All togedyr Amen . Amen." They all kiss the earth, a sign of the connection of earthly and transcendent available to the repentant, and a blessing of the earth.

As we have nearly come to expect in N-Town, the quiet bliss of the pageant is interrupted, however, by three challengers to the unity and blessedness of the gathering. At Pentecost, the disciples spoke in tongues by the gift of the Holy Spirit. Although there is no direct reference to the speaking, and no dialogue that would reflect it, such speaking seems to be what drew the interest of the three Jews:

primus judeus:

Now ffelawys take hede ffor be my trewthe

zondyr syttyth A dronkyn ffelacheppe.

iiij^{us} judeus:

To don hem good it were grett ruthe.

iijus judeus:

za I prey god zeve hem all shenscheppe.

i^{us} judeus:

Muste in here brayn so sclyly doth creppe

pat bei chateryn And chateryn As they jays were

(212-212v, 14-19).

They think a "jentyll sport" or "bettyr game" would be to take all of the disciples and "baptize" them in the river. Peter reveals to them the meaning of what is happening, a fulfillment of Joel's prophecy, and chases them off. The pageant ends with this confirmation of the power of Peter, the Church, to protect the faithful from enemies. The continuing resistance of the Jews to Christ's word and their inability to understand the holy utterances of the disciples link the Ascension and Pentecost to the following cycle of plays. The incident demonstrates that nothing has changed on earth as a result of Christ's mediation; the devil's "busyness" goes on as usual. The theme of the conflict between the city of man and the City of God is reintroduced in the closing sequence, the plays from the Assumption of the Virgin to Doomsday.

Last Plays and Last Things

Surgite . All men Aryse

venite Ad iudicium

Ffor now is sett þe hyz justyce

And hath Assignyd þe day of dom (223v, 1-4).

N-Town's closing cycle moves from the discord of the end of the Pentecost pageant and the conflict of the Assumption pageant to the possibility of the Last Judgment which, in N-Town, is incomplete. Mary's Assumption demonstrates the result of the salvation of mankind: the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. It demonstrates that earthly people may live Christ's experience, may imitate Christ in perfect faith and humility, and so gain heaven. The warfare between Satan and Christ, city of man and City of God, continues. The struggles and strivings of earthly life are the lot of the Christian, whose hope is for the release of death and eternal life.

The "seams" between pageants are more apparent in the closing sequence than earlier; perhaps the compiler became pressed for time. The movement from the Pentecost pageant to the next, the Assumption of the Virgin, is choppy. Indeed, Christ has promised his second coming; it is expected, and the cycle has drifted toward what would be a fit closing, reflective of the love and unity of Christ's believers. The Assumption play, however, returns the audience to the theme of the conflict on earth, the strivings of the city of man against the

faithful. In some ways the pageant is anti-climactic: it is written in the least successful poetry of the cycle, is ungracefully aureate (see Woolf 287); it revives the types of the old law, the plotting bishops, the potentates and planners, the demonic death-dealers. The audience had been lulled into a quasi-euphoric trust that all would be well to the end, that everyone would "live happily ever after." The Assumption pageant breaks the calm, goes on at some length, and separates Pentecost from Last Judgment. Although in some ways it is static and repetitive, it must be judged as spectacle rather than drama; further, it serves to remind the audience, those who live in this time between Christ's life and Doomsday, of the conflicts attendant to life on earth in the last age. The audience is not automatically "saved" with the disciples. It must live out its life on earth in struggle and turmoil, must confront the fact of evil and the difficulty of doing good. The rough language, graphically physical threats, and fearful violence of the accusers of Mary at the Trial, and of the pursuers of Christ, are re-rehearsed in the Assumption play. Mary is too good. She is gaining a following and has been on pilgrimage constantly since Christ left, visiting all of the places made holy and significant by Christ's life on earth. She must be captured and killed. The audience is reminded of the ever-presence of the devil's minions on earth. The fiend's power of death has been broken, but Satan still seeks to threaten life. That anyone could seek the death of Mary, the most perfect human who ever lived and a figure so highly venerated by all in the audience, brings home the need for constant watchfulness, for awareness of

the reality of evil in the world.

Like the opening of Passion II and so many other sequences, the pageant of the Assumption opens with a recapitulation of Mary's conception of Christ, and introduces the matter of her assumption, attested to by John in the Apocrypha, and a legenda sanctorum. The introduction is followed by "Pes now youre blaberyng in the develis name," addressed both to the introducing "Doctor" and to the audience. Anyone who talks is threatened with death; everyone must be silent before the high and august "worthy pryncis," the "statis of this lond . hye men of degre:"

Wherefore in pes be ye

and herkenyth on to hem moste stille I

ffor what boy bragge outh . hym spilly I

as knave wyth this craggyd knad . hym kyllle I

now herkenyth oure pryncis alle kneland on kne (214v, 1-13).

The effect of this speech is startling. The audience hasn't heard much of that language, hasn't been so addressed, since Christ's Crucifixion. The audience is given the last chance in the cycle to "play" fear, to be threatened and to respond. Knowing what they know now, that death is dead, and believing as they must by now believe, the audience surely would respond to the violent vaunts and the vileness of the princes of the world with derision and laughter. The meek Mary is the princes' "problem." She is the queen of the "harlotis" who threaten "oure lawe and oure scripture." They fear that Mary and Christ's disciples will shame them and so devise the plan: they will burn Mary's body and hide the ashes, and then pick off the dis-

ciples one by one. Episcopus commissions his "knights" and tormentors to set out:

than ye knyhtis I charge yow beth arayed

and ye turmentouris . redy that tyde

When mary is ded

and but she deye the sunere . the devyl smyte of here hed.

(215v, 64-67).

These characters are types of Anti-Christ, he who will come in the last days before Doomsday; Mary here fills the role of the "woman clothed in the sun," who will appear in the last days. During the "council," Mary prays in the temple. As the knights go forth she prays to God to take her to heaven, not because she fears death, but because she "longith to youre presense now conjunct to the vnyte." She wants to be one with Christ. As Sapienta, wisdom, the character of the Son in Heaven, Christ sends an Angel to comfort Mary with the knowledge that she "schul ben expirand." The Angel's embassy is cast in the same frame as the Incarnation, and expressed in language similar in intent, if not so successful in execution:

Heyl excellent prynces . mary most pure

Heyl radyant sterre . the sunne is not so bryth

Heyl modern of mercy and mayde most mure

the blessyng that god yaf Jacob vp on you now is lyth.

(216, 91-94).

Mary greets the angel with her customary caution in such matters, and demands his name. The angel gives her a token to prove that she will soon ascend to God, a palm, an emblem of pilgrimage and

proof of having achieved the goal, of entry into the Holy City, Jerusalem. As she was in the Marian sequence of N-Town, she is now the perfect pilgrim, the model to all others. Before she dies, she has two requests: that she see all of the disciples together one more time, and that she "se not the fende," the only thing she fears. The Angel reminds her that she, the "empres," need not fear the one whom Christ conquered.

Mary models the perfect death. She has advance knowledge of the time of her going, she gathers her friends together for farewells, she prepares both her body and her soul for "this Jurne." The disciples miraculously are transported by clouds to Mary's bedside from the far corners of the earth to which they have gone to preach. Mary gives the palm received from Sapientia to John: he is to carry the palm before her bier as she progresses on her last journey, to her heavenly home. The stress on the palm here, the earlier discussions of Mary's pilgrimages to holy places, and motifs of pilgrimage in the appearance to Cleophas and Luke, explicitly take up the themes only suggested in the signs, symbols and structure of the plays through the Raising of Lazarus. Although the Assumption pageant is clearly in a different dramatic and poetic style from the rest of the cycle, it uncannily works to recapitulate all of its themes, to bring the pilgrimage full circle to its end, union with Christ.

All twelve disciples, Mary and, at her Assumption, Christ, gather in this last play before Doomsday in an image of love, mystical union, communitas. Music, pageantry and solemn procession mark the movement of the play. The mourning of the disciples is subdued and appropriate

to a death that explicitly is a release from earthly striving and fear to heavenly peace. Rosemary Woolf has noted that N-Town's disciples express "only one stilted line of regret, 'Youre peynful absence schal make me doloure'" (289). Such restraint fitly contrasts with earlier expressions of despair, beginning with Eve, and progressing through the Magdalene and the Virgin at the Cross. Mary's death is known to be "the wyl of god." John warns against "hevy speche" at her death for earthly and political reasons: if the Jews should note that Christians were afraid of death, then they would think their promise of eternal life was a lie. John's concern contrasts with the political fears of Cleophas and Luke; here it is appropriate. John makes explicit the doctrinal reasons for welcoming death and limiting mourning that were not available to Mary at Lazarus's dying:

Ffor we seyn all tho belevyn in the hol Trynyte
 they schul ever leve and nouth deye this truly we preche
 And yif we make hevynesse for here than wyl it seyde be
 lo yone prechouris to deye . they fere hem ful meche
 And therefore in god now beth glad euerychon (218-18v, 238-43).

The disciples take candles and begin their watch over Mary, who waits for death. Peter connects the death watch with awaiting the Second Coming in a highly symbolic and effective speech. Their watch with candles recalls Mary's Purgation and the Candlemas celebration, and signals that the "light of the World" is not snuffed out:

Brether eche of you a candele takygh now rithis
 And lith hem in haste whil oure moder doth dure

and bisyly let vs wachyn in this virgyne sythis
 That when oure lord comyth in his spoused pure
 he may fynde vs wakyng . and redy wyth oure lithtis
 for we knowe not the hour of his comyng now sure
 and yn clenness alle . loke ye be redy (219, 275-81).

Unlike Joseph, the "unready," and the disciples who slept while Christ watched and waited, the disciples, and the audience, are to watch and wait for the hour of Christ's coming. Indeed, Christ does come again, in this pageant for the individual soul and body of Mary, and in the next, Doomsday. As the organa cantabunt, Christ descends to the Virgin's bed, surrounded by disciples bearing candles. The spectacle would likely be magnificent and its symbolism of glorious union with Christ is rich and suggestive. Mary's humility is demonstrated in lines so homely as to evoke a smile--lines that mediate the concerns of earth and the concerns of heaven. Christ has come down personally to conduct his mother up to heaven, as a dutiful son. Mary greets his descent like a mother who doesn't want to bother her busy offspring:

A wolcom gracyous lord . Jhesu sone and god of mercy
 an aungyl wold a suffysed me hye kyng at this nede.
 (219, 286-7).

Not only has Christ come, himself, he has ordered the entire Heavenly choir Mary's "dirige to rede." Rosemary Woolf has discussed the spectacular qualities of medieval Assumption plays, and N-Town's pageant in particular (287-90): "Music and spectacle in this play happily combine, and especially so at the end, when an image of the

virgin was raised by some machinery to the sound of the organ with its 'heavenly harmony' and the Coronation was applauded with the angels' resounding song "Deo gracias'." The Virgin's Assumption suffuses the ideal image of the personal death with images of union and communion of the soul with Christ. These are the images most desirable to be fulfilled by members of the audience:

DOMINUS: Veni de libano sponsa mea veni Coronaberis.

. . . hic exiet anima marie de corpore in sinu dei.

Now com my swete soule in clenness most pure
and reste in my bosom brithtest of ble
Wyth this swete soule now from you I assende.

Mary's soul goes to heaven to intercede for mankind. The angels welcome her anima in heaven, and on earth two virgins wash her body in preparation for burial and kiss the corpus mariae in the familiar image of reconciliation.

But the pageant is not over; the Virgin is not yet "assumpt." The disciples take the corpse toward the sepulchre to the sound of the angel's singing "Alleluia." The sound is heard by the evil Episcopus, who does not understand "what they signefye" and so is afraid:

myn herte gynnyth ogyl . and quake for fer

there is sum newe sorwe . sprongyn I dowte (220, 354-55).

The unbeliever, the representative of the old law, still doesn't understand the "Word made flesh," in the world and in the cycle. His misinterpretation of signs may arouse some derisive laughter in the audience, a very different laughter from that that greeted

the "glo glum glas" interpretation of the earlier angels' chorus. The fearful wrath of the three "princes" of the world similarly echoes Herod's fear at the news of the birth of Christ. A new cycle has begun, perhaps the cycle of the Incarnation of Christ in the hearts of the audience.

Episcopus is furious that Mary has escaped them by her Assumption. He threatens the "dodemvsyd prynces," knights and tormentors, that by "mahound" their "bodyes schul blede" if they do not regain Mary's body and desecrate it, burn it to ashes. The bodily assumption of the Virgin is significant in that it offers proof of the Creed, "the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting." Further, Mary's body was pure, had never done any wrong, was unsullied. The princes seek to "don schame to that body . and to tho prechours." Episcopus dispatches his minions:

Efaste harlotys . go youre gate
and brynge me that bychyd body I red.
. . . hens than a devyllis name . and take me that thef
. . . Go stent me yone body wuth youre stonys
Outh harrow . al wod now I go. (220v, 367-381).

The pursuers catch up to the funeral procession. The princes all set upon the disciples, but suddenly one is blinded: "I here . here noyse . but I se ryth nouth." Then the second becomes "so ferd I wold feyn fle," and becomes mad. The last berates the cowards, and goes to jump up and take the body. His hands stick fast to the bier. He is bound, hanging from his hands, and screams to Peter to unbind him. Peter exhorts him to believe and to kneel and honor Mary's

body, which Fergus does.

By the late-fifteenth century, the legend of Fergus occasioned mirth in some districts, if we may take the request of the linen-weavers of York to be excused from producing the play as any indication. Rosemary Woolf summarizes the request, which stemmed in part from their judgment that "the subject provoked unseemly laughter." Woolf judges that "the York cycle appears the more dignified without it" (290). Dignity was not necessarily the end of the N-Town cycle, and if the episode of Fergus provoked laughter, which is likely, that laughter could be interpreted as a fit response to the death that is not a death but an entry into eternal life. In addition, laughter at Fergus and at the antics of the princes that follows would be a release of the energy aroused and sustained, but denied outlet, in the somewhat static and more dignified plays that have come before. This sustained and "holy" laughter prepares the audience for a quiet appreciation of the moving spectacle of the Assumption, and for the Doomsday pageant that follows.

After Fergus/Primus Princeps is converted, Peter instructs him to take the holy palm and to return to his "nacyon" and convert and cure them by the power of the palm. The prince takes the palm "Wyth hye repentaunce" and departs. Peter's power to bind, to loose, to ordain others, and to send the penitent forth on pilgrimage is confirmed, as well as his power over the princes of the earth. The prince converts another with the palm, but Tercius princeps commands them "hens fro me in the develis name ye go." The newly converted princes do, indeed, go from the third, but in a way very different

from his plan. Perhaps because he touches or attempts to grab the sacred palm, the devils come up from hell and drag him down:

I deye outh outh harrow

the wylde develys . mot me to drawe.

Demon: they schul brenne and boyle and cille in oure denne

. . . Harrow harrow . we com to town (222, 446-457).

This astonishing episode offers to the audience the image of what Mary most feared and wanted to escape just before her death, as well as an image of what will happen to those who blaspheme, and those who reject the message of Christ, at the Last Judgment. The action of the movement from earth to Hell of the demon is countered by Christ's descent to take up Mary's body, an action from heaven to earth and back to heaven, again. The image of the journey of death is complete, taking full account of the alternatives--damnation or salvation. Michael restores Mary's soul to her body and Mary speaks her thanks to confirm that she is, again, alive and whole. Mary ascends to organ music, and is crowned "qwen of hefne . and moder of mercy." Michael closes the pageant and "alle hefne makyth melody."

The effect of the Assumption is to arouse desire for heaven, to spur the audience to want such an end for themselves. The themes important to the Last Judgment, the general End, are explored fully here, but in the context of a personal death. Although the Assumption pageant seems to be a "late entry" in the manuscript, and N-Town's Doomsday play is incomplete, the two do flow from one to the other. The figure of Michael the Archangel fitly connects them.

Michael was known as the militant angel who led the hosts of heaven against the revolting bad angels, led by Lucifer; he is the champion and protector of heaven and the Church. The pageant of the Assumption closes and that of Doomsday opens with the Archangel's announcement:

Surgite . All men Aryse

venite Ad iudicium

Ffor now is sett þe hyz justyce

And hath Assignyd þe day of dom (223v, 1-4).

The success of the Assumption play is not only in the spectacle, although it rests very greatly in that. It is also in its drawing together of the themes of the entire cycle in both a personal and a general context.

After Mary's welcome into heaven, Mary, Michael, and the Trinity sit at the "grett Assyse." The audience's attention is divided between this regal and glorious spectacle up above, and the noise and disorder of the demons in hell. The demons clamant and await souls; the damned in hell cry for mercy, at the same time as they "byden in drede / It is to late to Aske mercye." The spectacle of the Assumption, which connected earth and heaven and earth and hell, here grows to even more monumental proportions. Action happens on at least three different planes, and the audience, mediate creatures, are "in the midst." Deus welcomes the good to heaven. The worms fall from them and God's blessing "burnyschith zow as bryght as berall." These souls become "crystall clene" and are admitted by Peter through the gates, to god's right hand, "Where myrthe and melody nevyr may mys."

The damned souls clamor for mercy, and Deus responds that those who have never been merciful cannot now hope for mercy:

Deus: How wolde ze wrecchis Any mercy haue
 Why Aske ze mercy now in þis nede
 What haue ze wrought your sowle to saue
 to whom haue ze don Any mercyful dede (224v, 70-73).

What we have in the manuscript is incomplete. It ends with the devils reading the sins of the damned, written in black on their foreheads. The seven deadly sins are personified in the damned who come to judgment. They formed, perhaps, a procession of allegorical and emblematic figures. Each of the sins is interpreted as a failure of caritas: the proud would not feed the poor; the covetous would not offer drink to the thirsty; the wrathful harangued their neighbors; the envious never visited prisoners; the slothful missed mass and matins and would not bury the dead; the gluttonous were drunk and ribald. Consistent with N-Town's sustained concern with sexual sin, the longest reading and description is given to lechery. Just as Moses devoted an extra stanza to adultery when he gave the Ten Commandments, the devils devote nine lines to lechery, and only four to the other deadlies. The pageant ends with Omnes dampnandi clamoring for mercy. Deus was to have silenced them in the speech following, but the rest is missing.

The pageant as we have it devotes more attention to the damned than to the saved, and weaves the seven works of mercy, those works which may lead to salvation, into the speeches of damnation and the

seven deadly sins. This is somehow fitting, however, since the prior play of the Assumption concentrated so heavily on the fate of the saved--offered such a full and desirable image of what salvation is like. Rosemary Woolf has noted the difficulty of dramatizing Doomsday, "a common topic in sermons designed to move people to penitence through fear of the dies irae; but this emphasis would not fit the close of the mystery cycles, which required rather a demonstration of God's work completed" (298). The ambivalence of ending with judgment, in Woolf's estimation, puts the audience "outside the play. The effect is therefore that the audience must identify in turn with the blessed and the damned" (299). I believe that this ambivalence is highly appropriate, since the audience is both damned and offered salvation. In N-Town, the Assumption play would arouse desire and so a desirous identification with the saved. The Last Judgment pageant, however, seems to draw the audience into the larger and more vocal group of damned souls who cry "mercy," having repented too late. This penitential emphasis is appropriate to a cycle that has emphasized, through the sermons of John the Baptist and the action of the Ministry plays, the importance of repentance. The Last Judgment pageant does not stress the imminence of Doomsday, so much as the personal nature of judgment, that it will happen to each soul who dies.

Like Passion I, Passion II is an uncompleted pilgrimage, to be finished by the audience. The ambivalence of the End works to leave the audience in exactly the position to which the cycle has tried to bring them, suspended between hope and dread, love and fear.

Although Doomsday is a satisfying narrative conclusion, bringing the historical cycle full circle, it cannot "satisfy" as the end of a process because the spiritual progress of each member of the audience continues. The End is in the future; the audience lives in the present, in medias rebus. N-Town can make no assumptions about the ends of each member of the audience. Each must, individually, complete the drama by "living the story" of the cycle, living with an ability to "read" the significance of actions from the viewpoint of the other, God. In order for their ethical and spiritual progress to continue, the audience must re-create themselves in the images of the drama, must observe their own lives as if they were watching a play, must develop "reflexivity" (See MacAloon 11; Geertz, Interpretation 448). The sacred narrative is complete with the Last Judgment, a prophesied future event. But the places of each member of the audience in that pageant is, as yet, unknown. They may identify with the damned, with the saved, with both, or, perhaps more appropriately, with the judging figures. Demon recites the sins of the damned in N-Town, God does not. This leaves open for the audience an identification with God and the God's-eye view of mankind's actions on earth. Because God does not, at least immediately, judge, the audience may step in and perform that function, may practice the process of making the moral judgments that God will exercise at Doomsday, a learned process important to the living of the ethical and Christian life. This supports N-Town's stress on personal will, choice and death rather than on the last, general ending of the world. There is no anti-Christ play in N-Town and, although the

actions of Episcopus and his princes in the Assumption play suggest Anti-Christ, that connection is implicit rather than explicit. Doomsday is not imaged so much as the end of the world, it does not so much say donec finiatur mundus corruptionis, as it is as the end of the life cycle of every individual. The day of repentance is at hand, not the day of Doom.

Frank Kermode has analyzed modern narrative endings in the context of apocalyptic thought. The end of the world, he notes, has been long expected. Only forty some years before N-Town's manuscript, in 1420, the end of the world was prophesied. When the End continually is projected and never materializes, people move from a sense that it is "imminent" to one that it is "immanent." Although medieval writings indicate that people perceived theirs to be the "last age," the length of that age was not determinable. Indeed, Augustine had cautioned in his discussion of the epochs that

We are now in the sixth epoch, but that cannot be measured by the number of generations, because it is said, 'It is not for you to know the dates: the Father has decided those by his own authority'. (City ch. 22, end.).

Kolve has outlined the classification and history of the seven (often eight) ages in connection with his hypothesis that the schema augmented typological connections in determining what plays were to be included in the "protocycle," the plays common to almost all known Corpus Christi cycles (102). The imminence of the End was still felt in the Middle Ages, but its immanence, in the sacraments and in the

living of the individual life towards death and potential salvation, also had great importance. Typological thinking is more likely to accent the "immanence" of the End; the seven ages supports "imminence." The typological habit of mind is more likely to perceive that "eschatology is stretched over the whole of history, the End is present at every moment, the types always relevant" (Kermode, Ending 26). "Immanence" is part of the moral value of the typological approach. Life lived in the present becomes important because it fulfills types, both now and in the future. History, the sacraments, individual moral choices, all are most relevant in the context of the End. Kermode has stressed the value of "immanence":

No longer imminent, the End is immanent. So that it is not merely the remnant of time that has eschatological import; the whole of history and the progress of the individual life, have it also, as a benefaction from the End, now immanent (Ending 25).

In Passion II is revealed both Christ's eschatologically important acts and the hope of all who have come along the path thus far, union with him at the End, Doomsday.

Passion II leaves the audience with the same question posed by the end of Passion I: will I be among the damned or the saved? Each member of the audience must complete the narrative by living out his or her own life cycle, a creative and re-creative act made possible, in part, by the re-creation of the N-Town cycle, a life-enabling ritual process.

The audience has been given the complete "pattern which is to be reproduced in those who will rise again at the last day," the complete cycle of imitatio Christi (Augustine, City of God, Book X, ch. 32). The cycle has re-created mythical history so as to offer its models for imitation. N-Town has offered to its audience an experience of walking in the way and a feeling of what it is to enter the Heavenly City. It has pointed and said to the audience: "This is the way which purifies the whole man and prepares his mortal being for immortality, in all the elements which constitute a man" (Augustine, City X, 32).

N-Town affirms the reality of Christ, of heaven, and of the possibility of the audience's participation in it. But as in dreams, the importance of the dream is not the dream world, but the way in which dream colors our perceptions of the possibilities of waking life. The cycle leaves the audience in a state of desire, because desiring and striving structure the Christian ethos, and structure the pilgrimage of Christian life. Were surety possible, there would be no point to the sacraments and rituals. N-Town's message is not an arid one, but is joyful and hopeful; it does not exhort to penance in the self-abnegating sense, but to a joyful taking up of earthly sorrow with trust in the "turn" of the cycle, in the surety that joy will follow, as invariably it does in the cycles of life and death, fall and faith, of N-Town. The cycle confirms for the audience the possibility of joy and the validity of living in the world in order to strive towards heaven. The ending of the cycle asks the audience to take responsibility for fashioning the world and their

places in it, asks them to transform themselves and, by their imaginations, what they see around them. It puts them, in effect, inside the Christian cosmos as a pilgrim in the world, between heaven and hell.

In the most suitable genre for portraying human action, ritual drama, the cycles work to re-create the images of the audience and so their interactions with others in the world. The potency of ritual drama rests in its ability to define the transcendent in comprehensible human terms. Religious ritual has efficacy because it seems to transform the world by offering a glimpse of the world of the divine. Sacraments and cycles bring new possibilities to existence, integrate the mundane and the marvelous, open the possibility of joy (see Hansen 99). Thus the cycles have the power to change perceptions of the world by helping the audience to see beyond and behind the illusions of power and pain, to erode their earthly fears. Although the powers of earth dominate them, the power of heaven "empowers" them to perceive the world differently. If the cycles did not explore and highlight the earthly, they could not satisfy this human desire for transcendence. The desire for revelation of the other so is satisfied in the cycles, thus making life on earth more bearable, and the seemingly impossible possible. The dialectics of real and ideal, present and past, present and future, restore significance to the symbols of Christianity, help them to "mean," at the same time as they bestow significance on earthly signifiers, the actions of men and women in the world. Life becomes mysterious, wonderful, awesome as it evokes connections with the

transcendent. In the drama, every image is related to others and connected to concrete situations of everyday life. Thus, the symbolic vocabulary of the audience is enhanced: one image calls up many others; symbols become at once more concrete and more multiform, polysemous. "This" no longer means "that"--it means a whole narrative, a whole interrelated group of meanings and potential meanings. The mythic or ideal comes to earth in the re-creation of the drama, permeates everyday life, and so restores meaning to the world.

The ritual process of the cycle pictures life as a process moving towards something. Life, like drama, is performative, is a narrative of action and interaction with others and with God. N-Town opens to the audience the possibility of communitas, of loving and harmonious relations with others. In communitas, the Heavenly Jerusalem may be established on earth; earthly peace may mirror the peace of Heaven, which results from a reconciliation of opposites, and a unity of image and purpose--a God's-eye view of life. Augustine said it most clearly:

While this Heavenly City, therefore, is on pilgrimage in this world, she calls out citizens from all nations and so collects a society of aliens, speaking all languages. . . . Thus even the Heavenly City in her pilgrimage here on earth makes use of the earthly peace and defends and seeks the compromise between human wills . . . In fact, that City relates the earthly peace to the heavenly peace, which is so truly peaceful that it should be regarded as the only peace deserving the name, at least in respect of the rational creation; for this peace

is the perfectly ordered and completely harmonious fellowship in the enjoyment of God, and of each other in God. . . This peace the Heavenly City possesses in faith while on its pilgrimage, and it lives a life of righteousness, based on this faith, having the attainment of that peace in view in every good action it performs in relation to God, and in relation to a neighbour, since the life of a city is inevitably a social life (City XIX, 17).

Towards this peace N-Town moves its audience, towards this re-creation on earth of the communitas of the Heavenly City. There can be no more appropriate ritual and religious goal.

AFTERWARD

This study has approached the N-Town cycle as a re-creation of the events of salvation history that is a dramatic ritual mimetic of the process of coming to faith. The cycle has the potential to re-create its audience, to bring it through a process that results in Christian communitas. The value of approaching the cycles as Christian ritual processes is that it brings an analysis to the dramas that is consistent with their expressed intentions. Whether we now believe in the historicity of Scripture and ex opere operato efficacy of the sacraments or not, we may accept that faith is an emotional and ethical process, that religious belief may have personal, social and cultural results, may affect the ways in which people perceive themselves, others, and the roles of humankind in the cosmos. By beginning study with an analysis of the structure of a cycle in the context of the many possible structures of the process of coming to belief, we connect broad intention and result.

Those episodes of the cycles that introduce non-scriptural action, in this context, do more than offer "comic relief" or contemporaneity to the audience. As Auerbach argued in Mimesis, the texture of medieval works is to a great extent raised by the interpenetration of the sublime and the everyday, the "sacred" and the "profane." This interpenetration effects a sort of realism, too often nominated "grotesque realism," that seems foreign to modern scholars, or sacrilegious. The mix of fidelity to Scripture and license to embellish is what empowers these dramas to arouse the

audience and to effect change. In the context of his discussion of the Apocalypse and modern fictional endings, Frank Kermode has put forward the formulation that "myths are the agents of stability, fictions the agents of change" (Ending 39). Scripture confronts non-scripture, mythically charged images confront "real" medieval people, hence their power both to stabilize and to change the audience. The artistry of the N-Town cycle is one of manipulating this interpenetration, of introducing fictions into the myths. The effect of the confrontation of the transcendent and the temporal in the cycle is most often a dissonance, a moment of aporia. These moments of the drama have great potential to transform the audience into the image of the ideal, in part because the assumptions of everyday are confronted with the "facts" of the divine. From this confrontation flows much of the re-creative power of the N-Town cycle.

N-Town's process begins in violence and exile and moves to caritas and communitas. From the foundational moral experience, the integration of the self, it moves to the foundational spiritual experience, the balancing of reason and love. These "foundations" make possible imitatio Christi and integration into the community of believers, the mystical body of Christ, the City of God. The cycle is both linear and cyclical, incremental and recapitulative. Its re-creation of the Christian history of the world from Creation to Last Judgment suggests the structure of the soul's journey, the itinerarium mentis ad deum, and the audience may learn the "soul's reality." Thus the ritual process of the cycle offers at least five levels of re-creation: 1) it dramatically re-creates action on the

stage that 2) delights and entertains, is a re-creation. 3) The events dramatized represent the re-creation of mankind in God's image by Christ's intervention and sacrifice. 4) Such a dramatization may re-create the audience's experience and interpretation of the official rituals of the Church, rites that originally developed from Scriptural narrative. 5) By these re-creations, the cycle may re-create each member of the audience, and the community they constitute, in the divine image--may transform and conform actions to the ideals re-created. The play and game of the cycles, then, is a form of "deep play," in Geertz's terminology, in part because it encourages reflexivity:

A ritual leads to 'reflexivity' when the context of performance sustains different modes of ordering reality and accents upon these realities . . . Rituals move individuals through different positions (spatial and experiential) in relation to the ordering of act and symbol in the central events. A fundamental aspect of the ritual process, in the sense I suggest, is that it can shift the standpoint from which the individual interprets and experiences the meaning and the reality of the central events (Kapferer 203).

N-Town moves the audience through different spatial and experiential "positions" and shifts the standpoint of their interpretation from self to other, from limited earthly vision to the God's-eye view, thus making ethical action, an activity of the will, possible. Reflexivity is what allows the audience to internalize the external, to

act on images and actions modeled, to exercise the will and to make ethical judgments.

The process of acquiring the ability to interpret personal choices and actions from the viewpoint of the other, from a God's-eye view, is a process of turning from one conception of the world to another, a conversio. N-Town effects this turning in part by the ways in which it relates the earthly and the transcendent, the concrete; by putting earthly actions in transcendent contexts, the cycles may transform the audience. Hence the N-Town cycle satisfies the two criteria that John MacAloon has set out to distinguish ritual from other cultural performances:

Ritual is usually distinguished from other forms of ceremonial behavior in two ways. Ritual invokes and involves religious or sacred forces or, in Paul Tillich's phrase, the locus of a people's "ultimate concern." And ritual action effects social transitions or spiritual transformations; it does not merely mark or accompany them (MacAloon 250).

The ritual effect of the cycles is made possible because they are play, illusion, and so enabled to confront those "ultimate concerns." In dramatic action, play, spectacle, the cycles effect a revelation of what is to be taken as most concrete and real:

While spectacle takes the "realities" of life and defuses them by converting them into appearances to be played with like toys, then cast away, it simultaneously rescues "reality" from "mere appearance" and re-presents it in evocative form as the subject for new thought and action (MacAloon 275).

"New thought and action" is made possible by N-Town because the play says to the audience de te fabula and so encourages members to Christian performance in the theatrum vitae humanae, to live with a typological habit of mind, in the context of the past and future, salvation history and Christian prophecy. In the figure of Christ and in play, N-Town links Deus ludens with homo ludens. The lives of the audience are to extend and fulfill the play; they are to "perform" before God, to play a sacer ludens before the Magister Ludi, imitating in their lives the play of the cycle before God, represented on the high scaffold.

Approaching the cycles as a ritual process helps to focus attention on the patterns of significance woven into the cycles themselves, and to re-establish the connections between the drama and the lives of its audience, those who are to perform the drama of life in imitation of Christ. Further, it sketches an open framework within which observations about medieval contexts and culture may be used to discuss the dramatic art of the cycle, an art governed by an aesthetic of affect and reception. This work suggests the framework. The challenge is to begin to fill in the frame, to reveal the richness of the dramas without fracturing their own structures and significance. The task of interpreting our own experiences of these dramas, the critical pilgrimage, is undertaken on a narrow road between drama and context, text and reception. Two medieval reflections on interpretation challenge us, and these challenges complete our pilgrimage in N-Town's ritual process. First, we must follow the Cloud author and keep the cycles whole; second, with Augustine, we must share

our own truth, and recognize it as one of many truths about the drama:

we schul not so . . . drynke þat we schul breke þe cuppe
when we haue dronken (Cloud of Unknowing ch. 58).

But in the midst of so many truths which occur to the interpreters of these words (understood as they can be in different ways) which one of us can discover that single interpretation which warrants our saying confidently that Moses thought thus and that in this narrative he wishes this to be understood, as confidently as he would say that this is true, whether Moses thought the one or the other (Confessions, Book XII, 289).

This study is one drink from a very full cup, one re-creation of the ritual process that is the N-Town cycle, one critical pilgrimage.

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APPROVAL OF DISSERTATION

The following persons have read and approved the dissertation submitted by Elizabeth Jeanne Grupp El Itreby, entitled Re-creation, Ritual Process and the N-Town Cycle:

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Final copies have been examined by the director of the dissertation and the signature which appears below verifies that any necessary changes required by the committee have been incorporated, and that the content and form of the dissertation are now given final approval by the committee.

This dissertation is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

December 6, 1984
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