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Methods of Revision in Sixteenth-Century English Cycle Drama

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METHODS OF REVISION IN SIXTEENTH-CENTURY ENGLISH CYCLE DRAMA

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Faculty

of

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by

John Case Tompkins

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This dissertation is dedicated to my wife, Eden Francesca Bruce, RN. You have made this document possible in so many ways that it is difficult to imagine its existence without you. Your understanding, encouragement, and sacrifice have fostered this project on a grand scale, but I am also thankful for your many comments and questions posed during walks, dinners, shopping trips, plane rides, etc. During those conversations, you offered those rarest of scholarly commodities, sanity and sense, and I can only be grateful you chose to share your wisdom with so poor a student. For these things, and for many more besides, thank you.

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation contends that guilds-folk in sixteenth-century England made their own changes to the play-texts of civic drama and that these changes remain visible to us in the manuscripts which preserve the plays. Further, it argues that the actors and pageant-makers themselves often made these revisions, rather than the civic or ecclesial authorities traditionally credited for rewriting the pageants. These changes, introduced in production and transferred into the texts, helped keep the plays vibrant and successful throughout most of the sixteenth century and reflect the practical and local concerns of their participants. This work continues the historical investigations into pageant performance carried out by the numerous contributors to the Records of Early English Drama project. These scholars' efforts compiling, studying and publishing guild and city accounts of play production connect the performance of civic drama to the towns and cities wherein the plays were performed. By arguing that actors and pageant masters prepared their texts with the same care that historical records show they took with production and promotion, my dissertation offers a new way to read textual variance in the plays themselves. Read thusly, revisions in the plays clearly record a response to local concerns, economic change, or audience reception.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

When the cast of *Pyramus and Thisbe* meet for rehearsal, they have concerns. Among them is Pyramus' suicide with a sword and what effect such a violent scene might have on the ladies in the audience. "I have a device to make all well," claims Bottom:

Write me a prologue; and let the prologue seem to
say, we will do no harm with our swords, and that
Pyramus is not killed indeed; and, for the more
better assurance, tell them that I, Pyramus, am not
Pyramus, but Bottom the weaver: this will put them
out of fear. (3.1.15-21)¹

Peter Quince, the carpenter who has organized the production, agrees to write this speech, and the players move on to other issues. Bottom's proposed prologue shares in that ludicrous over-caution ("we will do no harm with our swords") characteristic of these tradesmen whom scholars call, following Puck's none too complimentary example, the "rude mechanicals" (3.2.9).² But I am interested here not so much in the content of his speech but in the confident, one might almost say cheerful, way Nick Bottom, weaver

¹ This and all subsequent *Dream* quotations taken from William Shakespeare, *The Arden Shakespeare: A Midsummer Night's Dream*, ed. Harold F. Brooks (London: Methuen, 1979; London: Thompson Learning, 2004), 53.

² Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 63.

and dramatist, suggests amending the text of the play. While much could be said about how this request for a prologue reveals his character, I argue that Bottom's action here demonstrates an approach to dramatic texts consistent with the practices of actual actors, both amateur and professional, of Shakespeare's day. More specifically, I contend that guilds-folk in sixteenth-century England made their own changes to the play-texts of civic drama, primarily the great biblical cycle drama staged in the streets of such towns as Coventry, York, Chester, and others. These changes remain visible to us in the manuscripts which preserve the plays. Further, I argue that the players and pageant-makers themselves often made these changes, rather than the civic or ecclesial authorities often credited with such revisions. The players probably revised their texts during the rehearsal or pre-performance stage of the production, and those changes reflect practical concerns of staging or local matters of lay piety more often than national religious controversy.³ These changes, introduced in production and transferred into the texts, helped keep the plays vibrant and successful throughout most of the sixteenth century and demonstrate the plays' participation in the popular religious culture of their participants.

³ This is not to say, of course, that the onset of the Reformation in England did not affect the texts of the plays. Copious and ample evidence exists of suppressed, altered, or simply censored plays from as early as the reign of Edward VI (1547-1553). This evidence, however, invites several different readings. Harold Gardiner's argument that "Reformation distaste for the religious culture of the past...stimulated and kept alive by the wishes of the government...brought about the final days of the great cycles" presents the starkest case for systematic suppression. See Harold Gardiner, *Mysteries' End* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1946), xiii. Recent studies, such as Paul Whitfield White's *Drama and Religion in English Provincial Society, 1485-1660* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2008), have shown that such sweeping claims ignore the complex relationship between traditional religion and a populace sometimes more and sometimes less interested in conforming to the new religion, but often very interested in maintaining the production of popular and financially successful drama. For a concise survey of current scholarship on the interactions between traditional drama and the English Reformation, see Peter Happé, "'Erased in the Booke': The Mystery Cycles and Reform," in *Tudor Drama Before Shakespeare, 1485-1590*, eds. Lloyd Kermode, Jason Scott-Warren, and Martine Van Elk (New York: Palgrave, 2004), 15-34. I do not seek in these pages to add further discussion to the role of religious change in the plays but rather to highlight those elements of practical performance and local interest I see affecting change in the text. Where religious conflict does affect the texts in question (especially in Chapters Four and Five), I have tried to emphasize the local qualities of these issues.

Although I am hardly the first to show the cycle plays' connection to their respective civic environments and histories, an explicit argument for the role of actors and pageant masters in revision has not been made elsewhere. But in turning to the players themselves as sources for textual change, we can gain new clues as to the sequence of revision or the ways that communities interpreted the essential biblical stories of the Christian faith.

My argument for revision in rehearsal draws on sources from the study of both early English and Renaissance English drama. In Chapter One, I begin with Shakespeare's "rude mechanicals" in his *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as a model (albeit satiric) of amateur revision. What Peter Quince, Bottom and their fellow players do with the text of *Pyramus and Thisbe* provides a window into a rehearsal process still common in Shakespeare's time. With this model of actor-revisers established, I examine representative play texts from early sixteenth-century Coventry and Chester to see how this approach to revision shapes understanding of evidence for change within those texts. In both places, local history and local religion provide significant motivating factors for changes of text and staging. Moving chronologically to the latter half of the century and geographically to Norwich, I consider the two texts ascribed to the Norwich Grocers' Guild for evidence that the actor-reviser model must have become (at least in some places) untenable during the reign of Elizabeth I. Finally, I turn to the curious text known to modern scholars as *The Stonyhurst Pageants* to show that in late, even antiquarian, examples of the genre, efforts towards accommodating the text (in this case the Douay-Rheims translation of the Bible) for both Catholics and Protestants can be seen at the level of composition.

Before I begin this discussion, however, I want here to briefly sketch out a history of revision in both medieval and Renaissance drama and why it might be necessary (as I have done) to draw on current research from scholars in both fields when considering the rehearsal space of civic drama. This leads in turn to another look at local production and presentation which so absorbs modern discussions of early English drama. Study of local history and records has done much to advance understanding of civic drama, but it has not yet fully explored the significance of the rehearsal space and the people therein.⁴ That significance leads to the final part of this introduction and to my own thoughts on how production-level change to play scripts ought to affect our appreciation of these plays as artistic works. In the interests of maintaining some organizing principle, I will first consider how the disparate approaches to revision taken by scholars of medieval and Elizabethan drama can inform each other and then address the larger implications of such a combined approach in the concluding section.

1.2 Theories of Revision

Convention dictates that I provide here a working definition of my terms, but the very word revision presents something of a difficulty since drama scholarship itself cannot seem to agree on a definition. What scholars of early English drama mean, not only by definition but by intention, when they speak of revision has, until recently, differed fundamentally from the traditional approach taken by scholars of the Elizabethan stage.

⁴ Although the Records of Early English Drama (REED) project has provided ample evidence of rehearsals, the primary sources for that evidence, civic and guild account books, provide only the minimal details one might expect from what were essentially financial documents. See Audrey W. Douglas and Sally-Beth MacLean, eds., introduction to *REED in Review*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 4-5 [3-20], for a discussion of the limitations of REED's source material. The most significant book on rehearsal in the early modern period is Tiffany Stern's *Rehearsal from Shakespeare to Sheridan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). Stern's book, with which I deal more completely in Chapter One, begins with a survey of sixteenth century rehearsal practice, but does not explore it as a site of revision.

Oddly enough, that difference results largely from attention directed at the same object: the person and work of William Shakespeare.

For early scholars of medieval drama, the Elizabethan playwright, and the world of London theater he represents, stood as the final product towards which adaptation in earlier drama inevitably progressed. What would become known as the evolutionary model of early theater can be found in literary surveys from the 18th and 19th centuries. Thomas Warton's 1774 *History of English Poetry* talks of the "dawnings of dramatic art...contain[ing] some rudiments of a plot, and [an] attempt to delineate characters, and to paint manners"⁵ in the plays he calls "Moralities." Where "licentious pleasantries" were introduced into these plays, Warton suggests "this might lead the way to subjects entirely profane, and to comedy..." Regarding the "Mysteries," Warton has little good to say; "they tamely represented stories according to the letter of scripture, or the respective legend," but he also notes that these, with the moralities, affected "a gradual transition to real historic personages." Warton's vocabulary suggests both progress ("lead the way," "gradual transition") but also, cleverly, the end of that progression by referencing the very genres we are to expect in Shakespeare: history, comedy, and on the same page a reference to the "tragical business" of the *Massacre of the Innocents* plays. The contrast between the early genres of miracle, mystery, and morality and the later genres of history, comedy, and tragedy is oblique, but present.

Also worth noting is Warton's association of artistic progress with secularization. When he speaks of "licentious pleasantries" he refers to those parts of the cycle plays featuring humorous characters like the stubborn wife of Chester's Noah, the distinctly

⁵ Thomas Warton, *The History of English Poetry, from the close of the eleventh to the commencement of the eighteenth century* ... (London, 1774; New York: Johnson Reprints, 1968), 1:242

English shepherds of various Nativity plays, or York's elderly Joseph complaining about the anxieties of marriage to a young, beautiful woman.⁶ Such scenes and characters, in the evolutionary model, result from the gradual development of Latin liturgical drama into the civic spectacle of the cycles in the fifteenth and sixteenth century. Though the two types of drama (civic and liturgical) were in fact contemporaneous, connecting secularization to artistic evolution places each on a continuum pointing toward the London stage and Shakespeare.

Where Warton implies this traditional progressive narrative, J. Payne Collier makes explicit its connection to the play texts in his 1831 *History or English Dramatic Poetry*:

An examination of the various Miracle-plays before enumerated
 ...supplies evidence, that at different periods they have been altered and
 interpolated; sometimes to render them more amusing, by adapting them
 on revival to existing manners, and sometimes for other causes, connected
 chiefly with the state of religion.⁷

Collier neatly encapsulates here both the popularizing impulse noted by Warton and the pressing question which would occupy so many scholars in the field throughout the twentieth century. How much had the texts changed as a result of the Reformation? The query is pertinent due to the nature of the texts under discussion. With a few exceptions

⁶ Warton, *History of English Poetry*, 243. Warton here inconsistently discusses the introduction of a "low buffoon" into the Massacre of the Innocents play, claiming "neither the writers nor the spectators saw any impropriety," yet a few lines later he justifies actors portraying Adam and Eve for appearing naked (!) on the medieval stage since "[i]t would have been absolute heresy to have departed from the sacred text." How this apparent contradiction may be reconciled in Warton's mind I cannot say, but in both cases he chalks up these decisions to the "simplicity" of the times.

⁷ J. Payne Collier, *The History of English Dramatic Poetry to the time of Shakespeare: and Annals of the stage to the Restoration*(London: J. Murray, 1831), 2:150.

(Coventry, York) the cycle plays that survive do so through the work of antiquarians and crypto-Catholics transcribing the texts after their abandonment in the latter half of the sixteenth century. Even those texts that remain from before the Reformation show signs of editing or attest to plays since removed for what most probably were religious reasons. How, and to what degree, religion motivated textual change remains a contested issue, but I wish here only to emphasize the sociological nature of the revising influences Collier identifies. When he argues, for instance, that the plays were changed “to render them more amusing,” he suggests obliquely the popular comedy theorem later so persuasively (if not coherently) articulated by Bakhtin as the carnivalesque; the rough and sometimes scandalous humor of the plays represents the inversion of official doctrine and hierarchy by the power of festive culture.⁸ Against, or perhaps beside, this folklorist’s argument for a kind of populist irreverence sits the idea (if not the reality) of the Reformation as an historical moment with enormous contemporary social consequences. The blatant Catholicism of the texts, along with clear textual evidence of Reformers’ hands in say, the second version of the Norwich *Grocers’ Play* or the Chester Late Banns (see Chapters Three and Four, respectively) demonstrate that religious change did have a clear and noticeable effect on the texts. Yet either viewpoint risks making the plays too malleable by making them sources rather than works (none too far removed from Tolkien’s allegory of *Beowulf* as a tower of multifarious stone) and for both social forces the plays become a kind of carbon-copy, recording the impressions of movements now lost to history.

⁸ “The miracle and morality plays acquired to a certain extent a carnivalesque nature. Laughter penetrated the mystery plays; the diableries which are part of these performances have an obvious carnivalesque character...” Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 15.

This revision-as-record approach to medieval drama comes most fully to fruition in E.K. Chambers' magisterial 1903 work, *The Medieval Stage*:

It must, of course, be borne in mind that the notion of authorship is only imperfectly applicable to the miracle-plays. The task of the playwrights was one less of original composition than of adaptation, of rewriting and rearranging existing texts so as to meet the needs of the particular performances in which they were interested. . . *On the whole the literary problem of the plays lies in tracing the evolution of a form rather than in appreciating individual work.* Even when written, the plays, if periodically performed, were subject to frequent revision, motivated partly by the literary instinct for furbishing up, partly by changing conditions, such as the existence of a varying number of craft-guilds ready to undertake the responsibility for a scene. Further alterations, on theological rather than literary grounds, were naturally called for at the Reformation. (italics mine)⁹

Chambers' "imperfectly applicable" idea of authorship may resonate strongly in the postmodern ear, but for Chambers it confirms his evolutionary approach to texts that cannot receive individual appreciation because they cannot claim individual creation. Revision then, for Chambers, must be exactly as he describes: the reflection of social, economic, or religious change upon an unstable text permanent (because un-authorial) only in its instability.

⁹ E.K. Chambers, *The Mediaeval Stage* (London: Oxford University Press, 1903; Mineola, NY: Dover, 1996), 2:145-46.

While Chambers' carefully constructed and convincing model of theatrical evolution has endured significant revision of its own in the one hundred and ten years after its publication, the principle of revision as social reflection continues to work itself out across the larger scholarly inquiry into early English drama.¹⁰ That working out has produced not only important studies on the subjects of popular religion, civic life, economic forces and early music, but also those immense efforts of archival research and collation, the volumes of the Records of Early English Drama (REED) which collect evidence of musical and dramatic entertainment from guild and city records from the Middle Ages to 1642.¹¹ By granting access to historic records, the REED volumes have fostered inquiry into the social world that produced the plays. Those inquiries in return have revealed a larger and more diverse scope of dramatic endeavor in late medieval and early modern England than the surviving texts may account for. The modern student of early English drama quickly learns that those texts represent only fortunate survivals of a vast and furious sea of dramatic activity in provincial England of the time. Although the present study takes its existence from the enormous body of knowledge created by these endeavors, it begins with the problem of authorship articulated by Chambers and still in

¹⁰ Perhaps the most cogent arguments against the evolutionary model were put forth by V.A. Kolve in his 1966 *The Play Called Corpus Christi* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966), Glynne Wickham in his *Early English Stages 1300-1660*, 3 vols. (London: Routledge, 1959–1981), and Lawrence M. Clopper in *Drama, Play, and Game* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001). Kolve accepts the idea of development, but dismisses Chambers' connection of medieval drama in an unbroken (and largely unprovable) line to classical drama by way of early medieval *scop* and *mimi* traditions. Kolve seeks to connect the cycles more closely to medieval lay religion and theology, seeing the Feast of Corpus Christi as the genesis of the great cycles. Wickham's larger project focuses primarily on staging and while he does not question the evolutionary model, his detailed examination of spectacle and stagecraft refutes older conceptions of the medieval plays as primitive and amateurish. (See Volume 1, especially Chapter IV.) Clopper perhaps closes the book on Chambers' thesis by demonstrating that the slow reintroduction of classical drama tropes into medieval liturgy badly misunderstands the way that medieval clerics and citizens thought about the plays and pageants they presented.

¹¹ Descriptions of REED's present and forthcoming volumes can be found at their website: <http://www.reed.utoronto.ca/>.

some ways unanswered by the work of historical recovery by REED and its scholars: the problem of the text.

This is not to say, of course, that the text remains unexplored. Any examination of the modern EETS versions of the extant texts demonstrates the considerable work done with the texts themselves. Nonetheless, the focus on guild and civic participation and performance has in some ways diminished the value of the plays as historical records.

David Mills, in his study of the changing contexts of the Chester cycle noted:

The emergence of the socio-political study of medieval drama has, if anything, reinforced Chambers's [sic] prioritizing of the social and economic facts. Performance thereby becomes part of the larger issue of how societies functioned in the Middle Ages and beyond. The text, by such priorities, recedes in importance and the solidifying of social identity becomes its primary function.¹²

To be sure, those texts, given their often antiquarian origin, create their own set of problems, not the least of which is variation within the texts themselves.¹³ In their elucidation of their own editorial procedures for creating the EETS edition of the *Chester Mystery Cycle*, R.M. Lumiansky and David Mills acknowledge: “‘the Chester cycle’ is a convenient abstraction; there is no reconstructable definitive form of the cycle, but a text

¹² David Mills, *Recycling the Cycle: The City of Chester and Its Whitsun Plays* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 15.

¹³ I use the word antiquarian here in the sense that scholars of early English drama have used it to describe those men who, living in the late sixteenth, the seventeenth, eighteenth, and early nineteenth centuries and motivated by either a sense of historical preservation or crypto-Catholic nostalgia, took it upon themselves to transcribe, in part or in whole, the scripts of the biblical cycles after their suppression. See Clopper, *Drama, Play, and Game*, 171–185 for an enumeration of these issues.

that perhaps from the outset incorporated a number of different possibilities...”¹⁴ And for Lumiansky and Mills, choosing between those possibilities rests with the civic authorities.

I am not here concerned with what those authorities might have chosen but with the choices they had before them. Tiffany Stern notes that plays were “rehearsed” before the mayor and aldermen of a city privately before being allowed a public performance, and that “their [the performances’] purpose was primarily a textual one: it was the words of the play and not its production that had to be approved.”¹⁵ She argues that texts at this rehearsal might be changed, and while I find no reason to disagree with her, it does not necessarily follow that a mayor and his council were the primary agents of change. A description of such a proceeding from the Chester Assembly Book on the Whitsun plays exemplifies such evidence:

At whiche Assembly yt was Ordered Concluded and Agreed vpon by the
said Maior Aldermen Sheriffes and Comon Counsaile of the said Citie
That the plaies Comonly Called the Whitson plaies At Midsomer next
Comynge shalbe sett furth and plaied in such orderly maner and sorte as
the same haue ben Accostomed with such correction and amendement as shalbe
thought Convenient by the said Maior And all Charges of the said plaies to be
supported and borne by th inhabitantes of the said Citie as haue ben heretofore
vsed.¹⁶

¹⁴ R.M Lumiansky and David Mills, *The Chester Mystery Cycle: Essays and Documents* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983), 41.

¹⁵ Tiffany Stern, *Rehearsal From Shakespeare to Sheridan* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000), 27.

¹⁶ Elizabeth Baldwin, Lawrence M. Clopper, and David Mills, eds., *Records of Early English Drama: Cheshire, Including Chester* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 1:159,

Certainly mayors and city councils made decisions about what corrections and amendments they deemed convenient, but the language of entries like this emphasize their role as overseers rather than creators or re-creators. If, as Clopper suggests, the civic authorities involved themselves in pageant production at the prompting of late medieval lay piety, then their role would be largely that of patronage.¹⁷

If mayors and alderman simply approved or chose between those “adapted, rewritten, and rearranged” (to paraphrase Chambers) sections that make tasks like editing the various manuscripts of the Chester cycle such difficult work, then my question, ultimately, is one of locality. Where were these alternate texts written and who wrote them? With one possible exception (Robert Croo and Coventry, see Chapter Two), the documentary evidence thus far collected cannot tell us. Developments in the study of Shakespeare and the Renaissance stage, however, provide an alternate model for finding out.

Early editors of Shakespeare sought to explain away textual variance in his canon. This process began quite early on when publishers of the First Folio made claims about unauthorized printings of the plays, as well as encomiums that the playwright had no need for drafts, that later critics took to heart. In her 1991 book *Revising Shakespeare*, Grace Ioppolo notes two resultant claims about the Folio:

...first, that the Folio texts represent the single “best” extant copies of the plays...only to be corrected by Quarto texts in passages with obvious

¹⁷ Clopper, *Drama, Play, and Game*, 159.

corruptions; and second, that Shakespeare was a natural and spontaneous writer who wrote out a play once and only once...”¹⁸

These claims, Ioppolo argues “shifted the emphasis on revision from that of an integral factor in the authorial process to a tangential by-product of the printing process.”¹⁹ Yet, as she goes on to discuss, the sheer difficulty of collating a definitive version of the plays from existing print copies resulted in not one but two competing schools of revision based, to some extent, on whether one viewed the plays as a collection of old and new material gathered somewhat haphazardly by the playwright or as potential evidence for the creative process of play production.²⁰

Although Ioppolo credits eighteenth-century editor Edmond Malone with establishing the precedent for this latter school, modern explorations in this vein can be traced to those scholars called, sometimes derisively, the new revisionists. By examining the variant texts of *King Lear*, *Hamlet*, and *Henry V*, Stanley Wells, Gary Taylor and the other new revisionists reintroduced the idea of Shakespeare as a reviser of his own work, arguing against critics (including, interestingly enough, E.K. Chambers) who viewed such inquiries as destructive to the shape of the canon.²¹ The new revisionists have succeeded in opening inquiry into Shakespeare’s process by abandoning the search, long and exhaustively conducted, for Shakespeare in his purest form. Defense of an editorially clean canon has given way to an acknowledgement (still in some places grudging) that he

¹⁸ Grace Ioppolo, *Revising Shakespeare* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 8.

¹⁹ Ioppolo, *Revising Shakespeare*, 10.

²⁰ The chapter entitled “Theories of Revision, 1623-1990” (19-43) from Ioppolo’s book provides a fascinating overview of the way these two views have developed over the centuries.

²¹ See E.K. Chambers, *The Disintegration of Shakespeare* (London: Oxford University Press, 1924) for an example of this opinion. Crucial texts of the new revisionists include: Gary Taylor and Michael Warren, eds. *The Division of the Kingdoms: Shakespeare’s Two Versions of King Lear* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986) and Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor, *Modernizing Shakespeare’s Spelling, with Three Studies in the Text of “Henry V”* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979).

rewrote his own works, sometimes more than once.²² Revision in Shakespeare becomes pertinent to the present discussion with the work of the new revisionists to understand his process. By abandoning the search for an authorial text, scholars like Wells and Taylor, as well as Simon Palfrey and Tiffany Stern, have been free to explore the complicated interplay between the playwright, his company, his theater and his audience.

In some cases, seeing this interplay involves simply looking at plays in a new light. Wells and Taylor, in their introduction to *William Shakespeare: A Textual Companion*, remind us that the original texts from Shakespeare's pen were not public documents in any sense of the word:

the manuscripts of Shakespeare's plays were not written for that consortium of readers called 'the general public'; they were written instead to be read by a particular group of actors, his professional colleagues and personal friends, who would in turn communicate the plays through performance to a wider public.²³

²² Most discussions about variation in the Shakespearean canon begin with the authoritative claims of the 1623 Folio and the differences between it and other versions. These differences are traditionally seen as corruptions, and the tension between this view and the possibility that Shakespeare himself was responsible for some of these differences underlies any discussion of Shakespeare as reviser, especially as it concerns producing editions of his plays. Wells and Taylor put it thusly: "...we can and indeed must assume that any play included in the 1623 collection was written in whole, or at least substantial part, by Shakespeare, and any such work must be represented in a responsible edition of his complete works. When the Folio speaks, we must echo it; but when the Folio is silent, its silence cannot be so confidently interpreted or obeyed." Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor, et al, *William Shakespeare: A Textual Companion* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997), 71. Opposing viewpoints to this broader interpretation charge, as does David Bevington's review of Wells and Taylor's own edition of Shakespeare, that it further muddies already murky waters for teachers, students, and researchers ("Determining the Indeterminate: The Oxford Shakespeare," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 38, no. 4 (1987): 501-03). That the this contention can occasionally flair into acrimony can be seen in the defensive tone taken by Wells and Taylor in their General Introduction to the *Textual Companion* (see especially the initial paragraph).

²³ Wells and Taylor, *William Shakespeare: A Textual Companion*, 2.

These manuscripts took a variety of forms, from plots to parts to prompt-books, of which few from the period survive, and none of Shakespeare's.²⁴ Yet the fact of their existence draws attention away from the oracular author and towards the professional community they imply.

Since Shakespeare wrote first for his actors, the texts he produced must have been informed by his relationships with those most familiar to and with him. Though the texts themselves do not survive, that familiarity leaves an impression on the text as it moves forward through versions and revisions toward performance and toward print. The lack of stage directions in the typical Elizabethan play provides a negative example of such familiarity. In contrast to the “precise and prescriptive” scripts of modern drama, Wells and Taylor point out that “their Renaissance counterparts...relied to a far greater extent upon authorial presence—not the fictive ‘presence’ implicit in any text, but the corporeal presence of the author, as a living appendage to his text.”²⁵ The theatrical troupe has little need for precise directions with the playwright nearby to provide those directions in person.

Part-scripts serve as a positive example of this kind of troupe-level influence. These parts were loose sheets of paper containing no more than a single actor's lines for his role or roles, preceded by the last couple of words from the lines of the character speaking directly before him to serve as a cue. Palfrey and Stern's *Shakespeare in Parts* explores this concept thoroughly by examining the actor's part as Shakespeare's primary medium of composition:

²⁴ Wells and Taylor, *William Shakespeare: A Textual Companion*, 9-19.

²⁵ Wells and Taylor, *William Shakespeare: A Textual Companion*, 3.

Our text sets out, then, to examine Shakespeare's writing from the perspective he anticipated: of actor's parts that were in many ways 'the text', not only as possessed and used by the practitioners, but as worked upon and revised by the playwright or company.²⁶

Palfrey and Stern's project, which emphasizes collaboration, places the business of the acting company at the center of play production. Palfrey and Stern advance the part as the primary medium wherein Shakespeare learned and innovated, showing how the playwright uses cues not only to present and reinforce characterization but also to establish or disturb power dynamics, create tension, and slow or speed perceived time. Actors anticipated their own lines, but also knew how to play off cues, innovate with emphasis, or revise within part while keeping the cue identical. At this level of composition, Palfrey and Stern note that the "direction of the influence doesn't matter" but rather "the years of experience, of working in each others' pockets, that ensures repetition and difference..."²⁷ Thus Shakespeare's composition process, they suggest, depended not so much on solitary inspiration but on the give-and-take reciprocity necessary to all theatrical production.

Although Palfrey and Stern say little of theatrical practice outside Elizabethan drama, they do note that the few lines of what was probably a Passion play preserved in the Ashmole fragment contains similar cues.²⁸ While I do not seek to repeat their exploration of what they call the "cue-space," Palfrey and Stern's emphasis on the play-

²⁶ Simon Palfrey and Tiffany Stern, *Shakespeare in Parts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 2-3.

²⁷ Palfrey and Stern, *Shakespeare in Parts*, 6.

²⁸ Palfrey and Stern, *Shakespeare in Parts*, 16-20. The Ashmole Fragment preserves a single speech from what may have been a fifteenth-century cycle play. See Norman Davis, ed., *Non-Cycle Plays and Fragments* Early English Text Society Supplementary Series 1 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), cxviii-xx, 120.

production process of parts distribution, rehearsal, and memorization as a site of composition and revision proves applicable outside late sixteenth-century London. I argue in Chapter One that the Elizabethan and provincial stages share a common rehearsal practice and that Shakespeare provides a glimpse of that process. If that rehearsal practice presents a site of collaboration, a sort of lab, from which came the play texts we read today, then it deserves the same critical exploration in early English drama as it now enjoys in the Elizabethan stage.

By reconsidering play texts as the products of theatrical production, Shakespeare scholars open up the rehearsal space as a location wherein revision can take place. But due to the nature of their subject necessitates a continued focus on the playwright. Whatever the direction of influence, understanding the author at work in his world remains the goal. Re-orienting this examination of rehearsal towards civic drama asks us to look at collaboration not between playwright and player but between players and text without Wells and Taylor's "living appendage" of the author. Actors in these dramas collaborated not with a playwright, but with an inherited text, one with which they were already made familiar by the regular performances they had witnessed or participated in throughout their lives. Thus it is to their concerns as citizens, guildsmen, and church members that we should turn first when examining textual evidence of change. By employing the same kinds of inquiries into early English drama texts that the new revisionists have used so profitably in the study of Shakespeare, I hope to provide a new perspective on the way these plays were shaped by the performers themselves.

1.3 Reading for Revision

Just as the new revisionists re-classified textual variance in Shakespeare as purposeful rather than problematic, so must an acknowledgement of revision in rehearsal change the way we read the extant texts of early English drama. Read in this way, changes within the text can be a response to dramatic impulses from within or without the production as the players seek to improve audience reception, to make the performance successful, to make it work better. Revision can, in this sense, be said to have made the corpus of early English drama as surely as the anonymous original authors who wrote the first versions of the plays or the antiquarian scribes who transcribed the extant texts—texts often littered with changes, repetitions, deletions, adjustments and marginal annotations. If these textual difficulties can provide evidence for revisions made with successful performance in mind then those difficulties begin to look less like obfuscations of some original text and more like evidence for production decisions remaining in the texts we have today.

Part of this different way of viewing involves moving beyond the concept of author, scribe, or authorizer as an organizing force. Lumiansky and Mills acknowledge the existence of alternate passages in the Chester Cycle, but conclude only that civic authority figures would have been responsible for choosing particular plays or passages from among the alternates.²⁹ Clopper questions the sometimes random insertions or repetitions of the Wakefield Master, as well as the motives for his insertions of liturgical parody into his works, yet asserts that they are ultimately "somehow associated with one

²⁹ See Lumiansky and Mills, *Essays and Documents*, 13-21.

another."³⁰ All three scholars recognize a cogent unity among their texts, but cannot square that unity with the insertions, repetitions and alternates that litter those texts. But those inconsistencies can point towards player-involvement in the process. As Garry Wills says of Shakespeare's writing, "the process began with the actors" who chose, owned, and made publication decisions concerning the text.³¹ If Shakespeare wrote for his actors, making decisions on characters and relationships based on his available troupe, as both Wills and Palfrey and Stern claim, how much more might the guilds of Chester or Coventry take ownership over the texts of their pageants? Including the actors who performed the scripts into the list of hands responsible for the text allows inconsistencies to be examined as performance-related adaptation and provides a source for alternate passages that can be examined in terms of staging decisions rather than questions of unity or authorial consistency.

This change in viewpoint offers three valuable advantages. First, it acknowledges the text as a source for evidence of performance. Modern, REED-based studies in early English drama use historical background, related literature, and popular imagery to enhance understanding of the plays and the historical and cultural moment which surrounded their performances.³² But there is no reason to consider the numerous individual details that make up these accounts—provisions of food and drink, repair bills, borrowed and made items, payments and fines for actors, etc.—have no corresponding detail in the texts as recorded. Scholars have long acknowledged what Peter Happé calls

³⁰ Clopper, *Drama, Play, and Game*, 176-181.

³¹ Garry Wills, *Verdi's Shakespeare* (New York: Viking, 2011), 5.

³² Pamela M. King describes this process as "filling in the torus," based on her conception of historical material as matter which surrounds and thereby defines a void: contemporary performance. See *The York Mystery Cycle and the Worship of the City* (Rochester, NY: Boydell & Brewer, 2006), 4.

“the strong possibility that the individual cycles were the products of diverse acts of composition.”³³ But if alternate passages or additions result not only from learned authors but from experienced actors, then reading these passages with an eye to the necessities of staging can illuminate why a guild might wish to replace one passage with another or why they might deviate from an accepted story without apparent reason.

Second, acting texts are supple texts, and this flexibility shows itself in reaction to changing (or unchanging) tastes in the audiences for which they are written. A recent article by Paul Whitfield White on the staging of the Chester Weavers’ *Last Judgment* play argues that despite a conservative script (references to purgatory, a saved pope), the play was probably performed in its entirety, or close to it, during the penultimate summer of the cycle in 1572.³⁴ His findings are consonant with Theresa Coletti and Gail Gibson’s arguments that the audience of the cycle plays in Chester and other cities were more heterodox in their faith than the learned religious polemic of the period would suggest.³⁵

What Coletti, Gibson, and White find (or fail to find) in response to so conservative a play provides a test of my hypothesis. The presence of a saved pope in the text of a show fostered by civic authorities to exalt and enhance their city suggests a confidence in its reception born of familiarity with the local audience, even if, as White suggests, a bishop might have been substituted for the pope. “Even without the pope,” White nonetheless contends, “*The Last Judgment* is a pretty conservative play, and if

³³ Peter Happé, “‘Erased in the Booke’”, 24.

³⁴ Paul Whitfield White, “The Chester Cycle and Early Elizabethan Religion,” *The Chester Cycle in Context, 1555–1575* Studies in Performance and Early Modern Drama, eds. Jessica Dell, David Klausner, and Helen Ostovich (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012), 111-132.

³⁵ Theresa Coletti and Gail McMurray Gibson, “The Tudor Origins of Medieval Drama,” in *A Companion to Tudor Literature* ed. Kent Cartwright (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 228-45.

performed in 1572, must have been approved by the Weaver's guild."³⁶ If a guild felt no need to change the text of a Catholic play in Elizabethan England, then changes that can be detected in such texts must be examined with a special consideration for performance. An addition or deletion passed on into the texts that survive may therefore indicate a proven trick, a crowd-pleasing speech, or a necessary abridgment of an unsuccessful section. The guildsmen who produced the plays knew they or their younger guild-mates would be doing so again, and if something worked (or if it didn't) they could only aid their guild by passing down a change for the better. Rather than altered originals, it might be well to think of these texts as gradual accretions of practical staging decisions: the script is less a plagiarized essay and more a crowdsourced document.

Finally, putting the pens, so to speak, in the hands of the actors sets the text firmly into the realm of popular piety. Eamon Duffy speaks of the cycle performances as evidence of the thriving Catholic culture of sixteenth-century England, but it might be instructive to think also of his descriptions of late medieval chanceries, tombs, and saint's images adorned with the gifts and bequests of the parishioners who left cherished jewelry, clothes, and best bed sheets to cover or adorn their patrons or collected offerings to purchase candles for altars or dedicated priests to sing for the souls of departed parish members.³⁷ Putting on the cycle plays cannot be divorced from the vibrant religious

³⁶ White, "The Chester Cycle and Early Elizabethan Religion," 127.

³⁷ Much of the first half of Duffy's monumental work would provide sufficient evidence of late medieval lay religious culture, but a more substantial excerpt may serve as an example: "The maintenance of the church and the provision of its furniture and ornaments became the principal expression of [the laity's] mortuary piety, and in the two centuries before the Reformation, individuals, groups, and the collectivity of the parish poured into the equipping of their churches a rising flood of [money and goods]....Most churches, for example, had three to five sets of vestments, rather than the one required by law, and some churches had a dozen or more. Once the basics were procured for the church the laity set themselves to provide ever more elaborate and profuse services, equipment, and ornaments. Altars, vestments, vessels, and images proliferated. Before the altars and images lights were set, and the maintenance of these lights, especially during times of service, became the single most popular expression in the wills of late medieval laity. So

culture of late medieval England that birthed and maintained them. Records of guild expenditures on the wagons of the plays indicate that the same preoccupation with adornment that so encrusted churches with altars and statues with jewelry covered guild wagons with the finest goods of each respective trade. Seeing the actors' hands on the script simply places the text in the same field of pious and particular adaptation as the rest of a guild's endeavors. Alteration can therefore be seen as a response to a favorite local saint or a local understanding or response to a biblical story.

1.4 A Word on Text Selection

I have limited my inquiry into selected texts from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries for several reasons. In choosing Coventry, Chester, and Norwich, I have focused on plays with clear localities to examine. Since neither the N-Town nor the Towneley can be so confidently connected to a specific place, I have left them out of the present discussion. The other great site of cycle production, York, had the main text of its cycle in place by around 1467 and while evidence exists for the same kind of change occurring in York during the sixteenth century, it is the register of the late fifteenth century alone which has survived to the present and thus the evidence for change is insufficient. I include the pageants found at Stonyhurst to demonstrate the persistence of the impulse towards localization past the traditional date of the cycles' demise. Decisions for individual play texts under consideration appear in their respective chapters.

great was the proliferation that testators were sometimes hard put to find an object which the church was in need of or had room to keep." Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), 133-34.

CHAPTER 2. ACTING LESSONS FROM BOTTOM

Quince. You, Nick Bottom, are set down for Pyramus.

Bottom. What is Pyramus? A lover, or a tyrant?

Quince. A lover, that kills himself most gallant for love.

Bottom. That will ask some tears in the true performing of it. If I do it, let the audience look to their eyes: I will move storms, I will condole in some measure. To the rest—yet my chief humour is for a tyrant. I could play Ercles rarely, or a part to tear a cat in, to make all split

The raging rocks,
 And shivering shocks,
 Shall break the locks
 Of prison-gates;
 And Phibbus' car
 Shall shine from far
 And make and mar
 The foolish fates.

This was lofty. Now name the rest of the players. This is Ercles' vein, a tyrant's vein: a lover is more condoling. (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 1.2, 18-37)¹

What can Nick Bottom the weaver really teach us about the business of theater? Certainly he is willing to give advice, or at least auditions, at the drop of a hat when he and his fellows first appear on stage in Act One, Scene Two of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. He claims to know how to cause tears ("If I do it, let the audience look to their eyes"), play a tyrant ("This is Ercles' vein, a tyrant's vein" 1.2.36), a fair damsel ("I'll speak in a monstrous little voice" 1.2.48), and even a lion ("I will roar, and I will do any man's heart good to hear me" 1.2.66-67). Save for Peter Quince's stout insistence that Bottom play Pyramus and only Pyramus, the little group's play might well have turned into a one-man show. His fellows seem overawed by the weaver's sheer braggadocio or perhaps they are simply amused by him. Whatever the reason, they say nothing to Bottom, addressing the concerns they have to Quince instead. Whatever theatrical secrets the weaver possesses, and they may be few indeed, his companions seem content to ignore him.

Peter Quince the carpenter does capture their attention because it is he who has organized (and perhaps even instigated) the group's *raison d'être*: a play called *Pyramus and Thisbe* which will be played during the final act of Shakespeare's comedy. Quince and his companions—Snug the joiner, Francis Flute the bellows-mender, Tom Snout the tinker, Robin Starveling the tailor and the incomparable Nick Bottom—comprise the mechanicals, and putting on their play motivates the action of their subplot and, thanks to

¹ Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 21–22.

fairy magic, entangles them in the romance of Athenian youths and silvan demigods that comprises the rest of the play. Actors playing actors in a play-within-a-play can of course be found in other Shakespeare plays: the *Murder of Gonzago/Mouse-Trap* in *Hamlet*, the play of the Nine Worthies in *Love's Labour's Lost*, or stretching the definition a bit, almost the entirety of *The Taming of the Shrew*. What makes the rude mechanicals subplot of the *Dream* so germane to a discussion of practical theater can be found in the extract above: Shakespeare gives us not simply the play itself, but the production as well. Peter Quince has gathered the group together to cast them.

But Shakespeare gave these parts to his clowns, and any casting done in the scene must be understudy to its comedy. Quince is a straight man and Bottom is a fool: preening, roaring, and ass-headed (even before he's enchanted). His own buffoonery enhances his companions' as they each paint their own swatch of the ridiculous around him. Flute whines about getting the woman's role, pleading a new-grown beard. Snout worries about learning all the lines for a lion who does nothing but roar, and all of them are sure that frightening Athenian ladies is a hanging offence.

When we stay in the audience laughing at them, however, we place ourselves in the same position as the Athenian nobility who so enjoy mocking the mechanicals during their performance in Act Five of the *Dream*. Although witnessing that masterpiece of bad theater, *Pyramus and Thisbe*, truly is enjoyable and hilarious, Shakespeare's text gives us not simply the performance but the production. Three scenes (not counting Bottom's scenes with Titania) throughout the play are dedicated to the mechanicals as they rehearse the play we see in the final act. These scenes disturb the audience's role as spectators by inviting them backstage, so to speak, to witness the creation of the play

itself. Comedy remains an integral part of these scenes, of course, but the presence of those scenes in the larger text of the *Dream* changes the nature of the laughter by giving us access to the constituent amusements that together create the enormous joke at the end. To use a modern analogy, it is like being provided with director commentary on a television episode instead of a laugh track. Bottom and company, in multiple senses of the phrase, make fools of themselves, but they do so in the process of presenting on stage something so unique that laughter comes close to obscuring it: a troupe of English actors engaged in producing a play. And a significant part of that production involves revising the text of that play.

I argue here that the mechanicals understand textual revision to be an essential part of bringing a play to the stage and that Shakespeare wrote this understanding into the characters from his own experience. This understanding betrays the mechanicals' familiarity with the production process despite their comic ignorance and lack of talent. That they revise poorly is not nearly so important to theatrical history as the fact that they revise at all. Significantly, the mechanicals are tradesmen, and their trades connect them to the great craft guilds of medieval and early modern England. Those guilds were responsible for much of dramatic entertainment available to the general public during the sixteenth century; from moralities to pageants.² Guild masters and mayors provided spectacles seen by far more eyes than the refined dramas of the court and, as Anne

² Craft and merchant guilds were responsible not only for the great royal processions that used the geography of the city itself as a stage, but also for the hall plays and entertainments at annual guild feasts and other such celebrations. For a discussion of the development of civic pageants, see Glynne Wickham, *Early English Stages 1300 to 1660: Volume One 1300 to 1576* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 51-111. An exploration of plays in the craft guildhalls can be found in Anne Lancashire's *London Civic Theatre* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 69-117.

Lancashire notes so succinctly, “Shakespeare was not the product of the court theatre.”³ Shakespeare knew popular theater well, well enough to satirize its practices, and his portrayal of the mechanicals’ play production gives us a glimpse (however exaggerated for comedic effect) into the otherwise unrecorded process of rehearsal. That this should also provide a clear example of play-makers’ attempts to revise play-texts suggests a common practice which results in a play if not better, then at least more recognizable to the characters performing it. Bottom, it turns out, does indeed know something about theater. But we can only learn it if we pay close attention to what he says and what he does, especially as it concerns the production of *Pyramus and Thisbe*.

2.1 Bottom and Bottoms

Paying attention to Bottom in this way requires almost a decoupling of the mechanicals subplot from the rest of Shakespeare’s play.⁴ Criticism of him (and by extension the rest of the mechanicals) often focuses not on who Bottom is but on what he represents, be it ignorant amateur or Bakhtinian subversive. The amateur clown-Bottom can be broadly described as the traditional reading, with the subversive or carnivalesque-Bottom receiving more attention in recent studies. An example of the former can be found in Kenneth Muir’s investigation of Shakespeare’s sources for *Pyramus and Thisbe*. His speculations on the reason for including the mechanicals’ interlude are worth quoting here in full:

One purpose, no doubt, of the performance of Quince’s company was to show that lovers cannot rely on the intervention of Oberon and Puck to

³ Lancashire, *London Civic Theatre*, 5.

⁴ Doing so has some precedence: a droll (comic sketch) called *The Merry Conceited Humours of Bottom the Weaver* was published in 1661. See Shakespeare, William, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, edited by Jacqueline S. Bratton and Trevor Griffiths (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 9.

save them from the consequences of their irrationality. A second purpose was to arouse hearty laughter by exhibiting the absurdities of amateur actors. A third purpose was to show intelligent members of the audience that *Romeo and Juliet*, written about the same time, was an unsatisfactory tragedy because it depended too much on a series of accidents. A fourth purpose...was to amuse a sophisticated audience by the contrast between burlesque and the original. A fifth purpose, for which almost any play would have served, was to provide occasion for various reflections on the relation of life to art, actors being shadows and life a dream.⁵

Muir's list of reasons (commentary on *Romeo and Juliet*, consequences of irrational actions, relation of life to art, etc.) addresses the final performance of *Pyramus and Thisbe* which has the curious effect of truncating the stage presence of the mechanicals into their final appearance in Act Five. The various practical dramatic uses for the play-within-a-play do certainly explain the performance, but say little about the rehearsal scenes which have come before. Muir's use of the word "burlesque" is telling, the mechanicals provide a view of the romantic theme seen through a mirror not darkly but doltishly.

Harold Brooks takes up the same term in his discussion of Bottom, a discussion he divides between Bottom's chief comic quality of "imperturbability" which allows him to operate confidently even where he does not fit throughout the *Dream* and the ultimate showcase of that imperturbable persona in his romantic burlesque in the final act.⁶ Both Muir and Brooks focus on Bottom's comic potential as a foil, whether to Titania or to the

⁵ Kenneth Muir, *The Sources of Shakespeare's Plays* (London: Methuen, 1977), 77.

⁶ Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, cxiv-cxx.

Athenian lovers. However well the character may fit this role, defining Bottom by his absurd self-importance makes his comedy only articulate as parody. He can only reflect the more refined comedy of the Athenian youths and he can only be laughed at with a sneer.

The revisionist reaction to this aristocratic reading is best described by Annabel Patterson:

Like the stage history, the tradition of privileging this Thesean aesthetic as the locus of Shakespeare's intentions had the effect of making the Dream an 'airy nothing', unaccountable to social or political realism, while at the same time giving to Theseus an exegetical authority that his own behavior scarcely justifies.⁷

Rather than the amusing underlings of an indulgent Theseus, this reading sees the mechanicals as representatives of Bakhtinian festive theory and social inversion, turning the tables on the noble characters and exposing them to the bodily humor of the lower stratum (both socially and physically). C.L. Barber provided one of the first such readings in his exploration of English folk ritual and holiday celebrations in the plays of Shakespeare, finding in the mechanicals' play "the naïveté of folk dramatics...as a final variant of imaginative aberration."⁸ The ass-headed Bottom, Barber argues, brings in "the element of grotesque fantasy" from mummings and may dances into the courtly festivities of the Athenians and the fairies.⁹ Jan Kott goes further, arguing that Bottom's transformation goes beyond festive inversion and into the mystic and even spiritual level

⁷ Annabel Patterson, *Shakespeare and the Popular Voice* (Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 53.

⁸ C.L. Barber, *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959), 151.

⁹ Barber, *Festive Comedy*, 154.

where the ass tops (in many senses) the fairy queen: an incarnation of the idiot.¹⁰

Patterson restricts herself to the political, highlighting important connections between the mechanicals' seemingly excessive fears and reports of social unrest contemporary in Shakespeare's time. In Bottom's proposal of a prologue in 3.1, for instance, she sees anxiety over being perceived as violent peasants by the nobility ("This will put them out of fear" 3.1.20). The concern is comedic, yet artisans and workers in early 1590s London rioted several times, and those disturbances could have been in Shakespeare's mind when he penned the *Dream* in c. 1596.¹¹ For her, the mechanicals allow Shakespeare to work out social tension through laughter with a play "that could cross class boundaries without obscuring them, and by those crossings imagine the social body whole again."¹² Bottom, for Patterson, both subverts the social order in being caressed by a queen and supports it by being the ass that bears the body politic. (Patterson definitely intends the pun.)

Most recently, Albright's work on Shakespeare and music takes the process even one step further, proposing not so much a socio- but a cosmicomical reading of the text. Cosmicomedy, a neologism Albright borrows from Italo Calvino, describes "a class of comic literature that articulates cosmic mechanisms for random distribution."¹³ For Albright's reading of the *Dream*, the cosmic mechanism is Cupid, the god of love whose chaotic influence is felt everywhere in the play, and even though the lovers are united happily at the end, the performance of *Pyramus and Thisbe* questions the success of order restored by making a mush of language in general and dramatic language in particular. "Shakespeare," claims Albright, "is calling attention to the fact that neither quality of

¹⁰ Jan Kott, *The Bottom Translation: Marlowe and Shakespeare and the Carnival Tradition* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1987), 29-68.

¹¹ Patterson, *Shakespeare and the Popular Voice*, 57.

¹² Patterson, *Shakespeare and the Popular Voice*, 69.

¹³ Daniel Albright, *Musicking Shakespeare* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2007), 107.

thought nor quality of feeling can be proved through an examination of the rhetoric employed: the fool and the wise man use the same devices, say the same things.”¹⁴ Just as the *Dream* has dealt with the misfortunes of love, so also does *Pyramus and Thisbe*, but as the mechanicals mangle their script in a nevertheless sincere attempt to present successful drama, they call into question the sincerity and reality of the Athenians’ romances. Thus Theseus’ line “The best in this kind are but shadows; and the worst no worse, if imagination amend them” (5.1.211-12) addresses both the value of the *Dream* and *Pyramus* at the same time.¹⁵ Albright’s identifies the *Dream* as a cosmicomedy in order to address Benjamin Britten’s 1967 opera of the same name, an opera which begins with “a musical snore,” presumably that of the sleeping Bottom within whose dreaming brain the entire opera seems to exist.¹⁶

Bottom the Green Man. Bottom the Satyr. Bottom the Everyman. Bottom the Dreaming God. Certainly these readings offer an anodyne for the condescension of the “Thesean aesthetic,” but even as they contend with that aesthetic they necessarily share locations with it: scenes where Bottom, with or without his company, appear to the aristocratic eye. To change one’s view of Bottom requires, of course, that one have him in view. But it is curious that all these interpretations deal with Bottom when he is on-stage, whether before a fairy queen or a Duke of Athens. Even though Patterson takes special note of the mechanicals’ fears about upsetting the nobility as they revise their play, her attention, as with the others, tends to focus on the final performance of *Pyramus and Thisbe* in Act Five and/or the interactions between the ass-headed Bottom and the

¹⁴ Albright, *Musicking Shakespeare*, 224.

¹⁵ Albright, *Musicking Shakespeare*, 228.

¹⁶ Albright, *Musicking Shakespeare*, 268 and ff.

enchanted Titania.¹⁷ I hesitate to suggest a flaw in these readings, but it seems necessary to acknowledge that whatever role Bottom plays, from Clown to Green Man to God, he does play them, as before an audience, just as an actor in turn plays him. If Bottom did not wear so many hats in scholarly circles, this point would be merely fatuous. I do not intend to argue against one or another of these Bottoms, but merely to highlight the way they depend on the character as he appears playing a role. All of this attention on Bottom and his roles, much as it would no doubt please him, downplays the activity undertaken by all the mechanicals in their rehearsal scenes. They are themselves focused on their performance, and so it is no wonder that critical attention follows the gaze, so to speak, of the players towards the final act. But Shakespeare's inclusion of these initial scenes between the mechanicals themselves, without the presence of an acknowledged audience (either of nobles or fairies,) gives us a view of these characters as they see themselves, and they refer to themselves by their professions. Indeed, it is precisely here that listening to Bottom can be most useful since Shakespeare has the character himself tell us who he is: “tell them that I, Pyramus, am not Pyramus, but Bottom the weaver.”

2.2 Weavers and Pageants

Scholars have connected Bottom and company to their contemporary counterparts in English society before. Clifford Davidson's 1987 article connects the description of the mechanicals to the biblical drama still presented in places like Coventry and Chester in Shakespeare's boyhood but by the time of the *Dream*'s debut, suppressed in most of England for a decade or more. Davidson points out sufficient historical correspondences between the mechanicals' rehearsals and the extant records of civic drama to make a

¹⁷ Patterson, *Shakespeare and the Popular Voice*, 57.

compelling case for viewing these characters as guildsmen. Yet, when it comes to evaluate the importance of this connection, Davidson, like Muir, seems to feel that Shakespeare ultimately sides with the Athenians:

The “enterlude” of the “hempen home-spuns”...serves by its burlesque of amateur actors to set apart their play-within-a-play from the main actions of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and hence to provide a comment on the role of imagination in the theater itself—a theater which Shakespeare’s company represented at its professional best.¹⁸

Davidson does qualify this judgment by arguing that in light of the expense and effort put into the cycle productions by towns like Chester, York, and Coventry, Shakespeare’s “negative view” of amateur actors is “misleading in the extreme.”¹⁹

Tiffany Stern provides a more nuanced analysis of this negative view in her *Rehearsal from Shakespeare to Sheridan*. Stern argues that the concept of the amateur did not exist in Shakespeare’s time and that the disdain for the mechanicals is directed at their status: “this is social criticism, not theatrical criticism.”²⁰ More importantly, Stern shows that the process of rehearsal shown in the mechanicals’ production scenes (1.2 and 3.1) resembles strongly the records for rehearsals in provincial theater. For Shakespeare’s purposes, “[t]here is no reason why their rehearsal should not be regarded as broadly true-to-life, so far as it needs to be so.”²¹ Thus what occurs in these scenes, when all

¹⁸ Clifford Davidson, “‘What hempen home-spuns have we swagg’ring here?’ Amateur Actors in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and the Coventry Civic Plays and Pageants,” *Shakespeare Studies* 19 (1987): 95.

¹⁹ Davidson, “‘What hempen homespuns,’” 96.

²⁰ Tiffany Stern, *Rehearsal from Shakespeare to Sheridan* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007), 29.

²¹ Stern, *Rehearsal*, 31.

allowances have been made for parody and comedic exaggeration, must look like historical reality.

The mechanicals walk into their first scene with a purpose. When we first meet them in Act One, Scene Two, we learn from Peter Quince that:

Here is the scroll of every man's name which is thought fit through all Athens to play in our interlude before the Duke and the Duchess on his wedding day at night. (1.2.4-7)

Improbable though the claim itself may be, the scene follows standard provincial acting practice: the players gather, receive their prompt-books, and part with the intention of memorizing their lines and cues before meeting the next day for rehearsal.²² Peter Quince handles the duties of the pageant master or producer, as he assigns the actor's parts with dispatch and purpose.²³ Despite grandstanding from Bottom, reluctance from Flute, and concern from Snug, he succeeds in handing out all the parts of the play to the company, enduring their worries and enthusiasm with equanimity. He also arranges a place and time for them to rehearse ("...tomorrow night, and meet me in the palace wood a mile without town by moonlight." [1.2.91-93]), and volunteers to create the props list ("In the meantime I will draw a bill of properties such as our play wants" [1.2.93-94]). Whatever else he is, Quince shows signs that he is an experienced stage manager.

Other clues that these characters can be considered experienced actors are scattered throughout the scene. Flute's reluctance to play Thisbe ("Nay, faith, let not me play a woman. I have a beard coming" 1.2.41-42) can be read as a young actor's desire to

²² Stern, *Rehearsal*, 31.

²³ Stern, *Rehearsal*, 33.

move on from his former type to masculine roles.²⁴ Snug's worry about learning his lines "...for I am slow of study" (1.2.60), suggest a man familiar from experience with his own theatrical limitations. Bottom seems to know what parts he's best suited for ("my chief humour is for a tyrant" 1.2.24), and, not content with telling his companions, he launches into a monologue:

The raging rocks,
 And shivering shocks,
 Shall break the locks
 Of prison-gates;
 And Phibbus' car
 Shall shine from far
 And make and mar
 The foolish fates.

"This is Ercles' vein, a tyrant's vein" (1.2.27-35)

Bottom's invocation of the tyrant role before and after this little speech deserves some consideration. The lines themselves are doggerel and meant to sound that way.

Shakespeare might have borrowed or adapted bad translations of Latin verse when composing them.²⁵ The connection to Latin drama may only be covert, but Shakespeare clearly marks them out as the lines of a tyrant. Connecting Bottom to the stage-tyrant role

²⁴ Boys with the talent and voice to play female roles were a rare commodity for Shakespeare: one of the reasons women's parts make up such a minority. For a description of the boy actor on the Elizabethan stage see Garry Wills, *Verdi's Shakespeare*, 7-10. The mechanicals, as has already been noted, conform more to the image of the guild hall players of the Tudor period. These troupes tended to avoid or minimize female roles because they could not be certain of having a juvenile apprentice to take on the role. See David Bevington, *From Mankind to Marlowe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962), 74-79.

²⁵ Possibly John Studley's translation of Seneca. See the note in the Arden Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 21.

associates him with that most famous of such characters: Herod. Bottom certainly seems like one of the roaring fellows who played the outrageous, over-the-top King of the Jews found strutting and bellowing through the nativity plays of the great cycles. The N-Town Herod even shares verse form with Bottom's remembered Ercles:

I xal hem craue
 What they haue.
 Iff they raue
 Or waxyn wood,
 I xal hem reve,
 Here wyttys deve,
 Here hedys cleve,
 And schedyn here blood!²⁶

Different words, but the same thunderous delivery; it's no wonder Hamlet, with the scholar's disdain for histrionics, begs the players to avoid it (*Hamlet* 3.2.14). The speech and the repeated word tyrant would have made a connection for Shakespeare's audience. Bottom is that type of actor; a player of tyrants. This characterization helps to set up the joke that is Pyramus in Act Five, but it does so by showing Bottom's familiarity with a certain kind of dramatic tradition.

The mechanicals also show familiarity with the materials of theater. To Flute's objection to playing a woman because of his new beard, Quince responds, "That's all one: you shall play it in a mask; and you shall speak as small as you will" (1.2.43). Masks were crucial equipment for identifying characters in civic drama, and the ease of

²⁶ Stephen Spector, ed., *The N-Town Play*, Early English Text Society Special Series 11 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 1:174.

Quince's rejoinder suggests that his character is familiar with mask-work.²⁷ Later, Bottom discusses different beard colors, "I will discharge it in either your straw-colour beard, your orange-tawny beard, your purple-in-grain beard, or your French-crown-colour beard, your perfect yellow" (1.2.86-89). The list of beard props by color may or may not begin the "bill of properties" (1.2.98) Quince promises to compile at the end of the scene, but Bottom's familiarity with specific colors serves as a reminder of his profession and the types of props for which he might normally be responsible.²⁸

The mechanicals' familiarity with masks and beards reinforce the perception that they have done this before. Yet the scene as a whole gives not the impression of experience but incompetence. Bottom's restlessness, Flute's reluctance, Snug's doubts and Peter Quince's fears ("if we meet in the city we shall be dogged by company and our devices known" 1.2.92-93) together create a sense of naiveté and caution. The scene can only be played as a comic, and the mechanicals' awkward approach to their play furnishes plenty of hilarity, but how does this connect to their casual familiarity with dramatic practice?

I believe the answer lies not with the players but with the play. "Marry, our play is The Most Lamentable Comedy and Most Cruel Death of Pyramus and Thisbe" (1.2.11-12) says Peter Quince and his recitation of the title suggests some uncertainty. The line sounds almost as if he's reading the title on one of those elaborate title pages from the

²⁷ See Janette Dillon, *The Cambridge Introduction to Early English Theatre* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 51-52, 99-100. Curiously, Brooks claims in the Arden edition of *MSND* that the mask Quince suggests to Flute is "not, for Thisbe, disguise; normal outdoor wear for women careful of their complexions," and refers the reader to a similar use in *Two Gentlemen of Verona* (Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 22). That line ("But since she did neglect her looking-glass/ And threw her sun-expelling mask away" 4.4.143-44) does indeed refer to a lady's cosmetic accessory, but its relevance to the *Dream* line seems uncertain. Certainly Thisbe as a character might wear such a mask, but Quince's line specifically addresses Flute's concern about his beard by suggesting it be hidden behind it. The mask is meant clearly to identify Thisbe and conceal the gender of the actor who plays her.

²⁸ Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 24.

early days of printing. When Hamlet speaks to the players who've arrived at Elsinore, he asks if they can play "The Murder of Gonzago" (*Hamlet* 2.2.497). The player who lists his plays for Sir Thomas More in Munday's play is similarly brief:

the Cradle of Securitie

hit the nayle o'th head, impacient pouertie,

the play of foure Pees, diues and Lazarus

Lustie Iuuentus, and the mariage of witt and wisdom. (919b-922)²⁹

Even if Shakespeare meant the title to lampoon Thomas Preston's *Cambyses*, he has Quince deliver the title with a sense of unfamiliarity, giving the entire title as if saying it for the first time.³⁰

The feeling is there again when he describes Pyramus as, "A lover, that kills himself, most gallant, for love" (1.2.20), or again as "a sweet-faced man; a proper man as one shall see in a summer's day, a most lovely, gentlemanlike man" (1.2.76-78). He speaks partly to convince Bottom, but partly also, I think to puzzle out the text in front of him. Bottom himself claims to know the play, calling it a "very good piece of work" (1.2.13), but his complaint at the beginning of 3.1 suggests he has never read the play before. Quince's fumbling over his description of Pyramus (lover/gallant/sweet-faced/proper/lovely/gentleman-like), like someone who has had but moments to scan a new and difficult text, suggest the nature of the mechanicals' difficulty; they are provincial players faced with a text outside their experience. They might feel comfortable with moralities, biblical stories, mummings or even certain classical tales of heroes

²⁹ W.W. Greg, ed. *The Book of Sir Thomas More* Malone Society Reprints (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), 31.

³⁰ See note in Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 20.

(Bottom's Ercles), but the entire matter of this Ovidian legend eludes them.³¹ It contains neither the personified abstractions of allegory nor the broadly mythological characters of the Bible or the heroic age. There's no comedy in the tale of the doomed lovers, though thanks to these men there soon will be, and little clear moral to propound. The mechanicals' fumbling initial reception of their play has an element of consternation to it. What are they to do with this strange piece of theater they are to perform?

The mechanicals' response to their difficulties with the text is wholesale and unapologetic revision; a process that begins during their rehearsal in Act Three, Scene Two of the *Dream*. This scene begins with the mechanicals entering their practice site in the woods. Their rehearsal is eventually interrupted by Bottom's transformation at Puck's hands, which transfers the action to fairyland as the weaver's fellows flee from magic and Titania's enchantment-addled brain controls the action that follows. Before that can happen, however, Shakespeare provides us with a rehearsal scene that looks less like practice and more like textual assault.

The scene begins by reaffirming the mechanicals' theatrical experience. Though Bottom calls the group to order, ("Are we all met?" 3.1.1), it is Peter Quince who again serves as organizer:

³¹ Peter Holland notes that no documentary evidence for this particular combination of performers and play is nonexistent. Plays on classical subjects would have been performed by university students. "[The mechanicals'] trespass is part of the comedy: nothing like a bunch of workers attempting their own adaptation of a play on 'Pyramus and Thisbe' had ever been seen in England." See William Shakespeare *The Oxford William Shakespeare: A Midsummer Night's Dream*, edited by Peter Holland (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 92. This support's Stern's claim that the mechanicals present "elements of the drama of Shakespeare's youth muddled in with elements of contemporary Elizabethan practice" (Stern, *Rehearsal*, 30). This blending helps explain why Bottom gives his Ercles speech, especially if guild hall plays, which could feature classical stories, are included in the mix. See Anne Lancashire's list of common guild entertainments *London Civic Theatre*, 104-108.

Pat, pat; and here's a marvelous convenient place for our rehearsal. This green plot shall be our stage, this hawthorn-brake our tiring-house, and we will do it in action as we will do it before the Duke. (3.1.2-5)

Quince's language and the disposition of his imaginary stage re-establishes him as an comfortable with the process of play-making.

Before he can begin the rehearsal, however, Bottom and his companions interrupt him with a series of humorous objections to the play. Bottom begins by complaining that "...Pyramus must draw a sword and kill himself, which the ladies cannot abide" (3.1.9-10), followed shortly by Snout's renewal of the objections against the lion (1.25), this in turn is followed by Peter Quince's concerns about bringing moonlight and a wall into the Duke's chamber (1.43-45). The players address each of these concerns by adapting or revising their play and if this process resembles anything like reality, it deserves careful attention.

Bottom proposes the first addition to the text with the fix for Pyramus' suicide and which heads the introduction to this dissertation. His demand is worth quoting again here in full:

Bot....I have a device to make all well. Write me a prologue, and let the prologue seem to say we will do no harm with our swords, and that Pyramus is not killed indeed; and for the more better assurance, tell them that I, Pyramus, am not Pyramus, but Bottom the weaver. This will put them out of fear.

Quin. Well, we will have such a prologue; and it shall be written in eight and six.

Bot. No, make it two more; let it be written in eight and eight. (3.1.15-25)

Regardless of the reasons for caution, and however comic the subject, the exchange between Bottom and Quince functions dramaturgically in three important ways: 1) Bottom the actor recognizes in the text a problem for the performance, 2) he proposes a solution to his fellow actor/stage manager (who accepts it) and, 3) that solution is an addition to the text of the play: a revision.

The same response occurs at each of the other objections. To Bottom's concern over the lion, Snout replies, "Therefore another prologue must tell he is not a lion" (3.1.33). Bottom rejects that and proposes that Snug introduce himself from beneath the lion costume (3.1.35-44). Quince agrees and then brings up the staging problems of a wall and moonshine. The mechanicals consider actual moonshine through a window, but then Quince suggests that "...one must come in with a bush of thorns and a lantern, and say he comes to disfigure or present the person of Moonshine" (3.1.55-57). To the problem of the wall, Bottom suggests:

Some man or other must present Wall; and let him have some plaster, or some loam, or some roughcast about him, to signify wall: and let him hold his fingers thus, and through that cranny shall Pyramus and Thisbe whisper. (3.1.63-67)

Quince agrees, and the rehearsal begins in earnest. Each additional speech proposal enhances the humor of the scene, but the consistency is more than merely humorous. Each objection receives a response from one or another of the players and for each objection the accepted solution is to change the text.

Here it is vital to remember that Shakespeare has already presented these characters as actors with (limited) experience, dealing with an unfamiliar type of play. Having established them as such, he now brings them back on stage having learned their script and has them deal with that script in the way in which they are accustomed to dealing with plays. That custom, to judge by this scene, involves a collaborative effort on the part of the actors to revise the script to their own specifications. The mechanicals spend the initial period of rehearsal entirely on revision: they add two prologues, create two new characters (each of whom will need lines written for them), and silently remove three parent characters.³² The script now must look nothing like the original parts handed out by Quince.

The degree to which this process corresponds with reality depends, to one degree or another, on taking Bottom at his word by viewing him as an experienced actor. Doing so reveals some interesting correspondences between the changes the mechanicals make and those noted by scholars in the Biblical cycle plays of late medieval and early modern England. The mechanicals' changes to their text divide roughly into those that concern audience reception (Pyramus' death by sword, the lion), and those that concern staging (moonshine, the wall). Adding a seemingly redundant prologue for Quince to speak makes more sense when considered in relation to characters like the Expositor from the Chester cycle. Bottom seeks to identify himself as an actor and so contextualize the violence on stage. Similarly, the Expositor interprets the action of the play so that the audience take from it the correct religious significance. In the Chester Barbers' play, Abraham brings a sacrifice of food to Melchizedek, a familiar type of the Last Supper for

³² Robin Starveling, who was to play Thisbe's mother (1.2.56) will play Moonshine in 5.1. Tom Snout, who will be Wall, was originally cast as Pyramus' father (1.2.59) and Quince will play the Prologue even though he was originally to play Thisbe's father (1.2.60).

anyone familiar with medieval biblical legend.³³ Not content to let the symbol speak on its own, the Expositor comes forth to deliver a short lesson:

Lordinges, what may this signifye

I will expound yt appertly-

the unlearned standinge herebye

maye knowe what this may bee.

This present, I say veramente,

signifieth the newe testamente

that now is used with good intente

throughout all Christianitye.

In the owld lawe, without leasinge,

when these too good men were livinge,

of beastes were there offeringe

and eke there sacramente.

But synce Christe dyed one roode-tree,

in bred and wyne his death remember wee;

and at his laste supper our mandee

was his commandemente.³⁴

This seems to belabor the obvious, yet the line that the bread and wine of the last supper allow us to “remember” Christ’s death gives a distinctly Protestant spin to the dramatic

³³ The connection is drawn from numerous patristic sources and repeated in such places as the English *Stanzaic Life of Christ* and the Sarum Rite. See R.M. Lumiansky and David Mills, *The Chester Mystery Cycle*, Early English Text Society Supplementary Series 9 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 2:47, 50-51.

³⁴ Lumiansky and Mills, *The Chester Mystery Cycle*, 1:62.

scene. Heather Hill-Vásquez, along with many others, has noted that the Expositor “serves as a model for the proper approach to the plays that will...illustrate how the plays align with Protestant thought.”³⁵ She further speculates that this character was added to make the plays appealing to the new religion by “advocates of the cycle.”³⁶

Peter Quince’s concerns about moonlight and walls are technical rather than semantic, but the solution of adding characters to cover these difficulties can also be seen in the cycles. From the same Barbers’ play in Chester the first speech is delivered by a character who serves as nothing more than a stopgap:

All peace, lordinges that bine presente,
 and herken mee with good intente,
 howe Noe awaye from us hee went
 and all his companye;
 and Abraham through Godes grace,
 he is commen into this place,
 and yee will geeve us rowme and space
 to tell you thys storye.

This playe, forsothe, begynne shall hee
 in worshippe of the Trynitie
 that yee may all here and see
 that shalbe donne todaye.

My name is Goobett-on-the-Greene.

³⁵ Heather Hill-Vásquez, *Sacred Players: The Politics of Response in the Middle English Religious Drama* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 27.

³⁶ Heather Hill-Vásquez, *Sacred Players*, 29.

With you I may no longer beene.
 Farwell, my lordinges, all bydene
 for lettynge of [your] playe.³⁷

Characters like Gobbet-on-the-Green, who hail the audience and tell them what comes next, seem to be inserted in their relative cycles not only to convey information but to cover technical difficulties. Chester's Gobbet seems designed to cover the removal of the large and elaborate set of the Noah pageant in a bit of theatrical misdirection. Peter Quince's new-minted characters of Wall and Moonshine perform the same function: stop-gap additions to the drama covering troubles of staging or action.

With the actual performance of the play in Act Five, we see the results of the mechanicals' revision. The revisions do not match those proposed, but that matters less than does the nature of those changes. As Prologue, Peter Quince takes the role of Expositor to an apogee of banal explication:

Gentles, perchance you wonder at this show;
 But wonder on, til truth make all things plain.
 This man is Pyramus, if you would know;
 This beauteous lady Thisbe is certain.
 This man, with lime and rough-cast, doth present
 Wall, that vile wall which did these lovers sunder;
 And through Wall's chink, poor souls, they are content
 To whisper. At the which let no man wonder.
 This man, with lantern, dog, and bush of thorn,

³⁷ Lumiasnky and Mills, *Chester Mystery Plays*, 2:56-57. For a discussion of the character's functional role, see relevant note in 2:45.

Presenteth Moonshine; for, if you will know,
 By moonshine did these lovers think no scorn
 To meet at Ninus' tomb there, there, to woo.
 This grisly beast, which Lion hight by name,
 The trusty Thisbe, coming first by night,
 Did scare away, or rather did affright... (5.1.126-40)

Quince's speech continues another ten lines, laying out fully the action of the play.

Snout's turn as well is not simply a dumb-show, but a speaking character:

In this same interlude it doth befall
 That I, one Snout by name, present a wall... (5.1.154-55)

And the Lion assures the ladies:

...know that I as Snug the joiner am
 A lion fell, nor else no lion's dam... (5.1. 218-19)

Though actors announcing themselves as actors is clearly part of the joke, there is some precedent for characters describing themselves. Barber has noted that these self-descriptions resemble older dramatic forms.³⁸ He cites the sixteenth-century *Leicester Christmas Play*:

I am the King of England,
 As you may plainly see;
 These are my soldiers standing by me.³⁹

But there are plenty of examples of similar language in the cycles as important characters describe themselves to the audience. The York Hosers' play gives Pharaoh these lines:

³⁸ Barber, *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy*, 151.

³⁹ John Matthews Manly, *Specimens of the Pre-Shakespearean Drama* (Boston: Ginn, 1900), 1:293.

Kyng Pharo my fadir was,
 And led þe lordshippe of this lande,
 I am his hayre, as elde will asse,
 Euere in his steede to styrre and stande.⁴⁰

And God, of course leaves no doubt about who he is. The Chester Drapers' play begins:

I, God, moste of majesty;
 In whom begininge none may bee;
 Enlesse alsoe, moste of postee,
 I am and have binne ever.⁴¹

If the mechanicals are anything like the guildsmen who produced the pageants at Chester and York, then this sort of self-description fits their acting style. Again and again, Shakespeare gives Bottom and his companions lines that echo or parody the language of the cycle plays. He creates with the mechanicals a consistent approach to drama, then stymies that approach with a play from a dramatic tradition outside their experience. A good deal of the comedy comes from watching them work out their tradition across the text of another and the resultant chaos that comes from that process.

From an Athenian, or Thesean, aesthetic, that chaos is certainly a failure, though it seems to have a kind of success. In the midst of all the mockery and ridicule, Hippolyta, watching Bottom's Pyramus bewail his supposedly devoured Thisbe, utters the unwilling assent, "Beshrew my heart, but I pity the man" (5.1.284). Her admission seems not only unwilling but almost unconscious, and it comes right after one of Bottom's impassioned speeches:

⁴⁰ Richard Beadle, ed. *The York Plays*, Early English Text Society Supplementary Series. 23 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 66.

⁴¹ Lumiansky and Mills, *Chester Mystery Cycle*, 1:13-14.

But stay! O spite!

But mark, poor knight,

What dreadful dole is here?

Eyes do you see?

How can it be?

O dainty duck! O dear!

Thy mantle good ,

What! Stain'd with blood?

Approach, ye Furies fell!

O Fates, come, come,

Cut thread and thrum

Quail, crush, conclude, and quell. (5.1.265-76)

Hippolyta, hardly pleased throughout the entire play, is not the least interested in seeing what the mechanicals have brought to the feast: “I love not to see wretchedness o’ercharged, and duty in his service perishing” (5.1.85-86). Every other comment she makes upon the performance (including her comments which follow her admission of pity) flows through the same vein of condescension and mockery found in the Athenian youths’ commentary. But when Hippolyta admits to being moved by the bathos before her, she reacts to Bottom at exactly the moment where the weaver is most on his own ground. His great histrionics over Thisbe’s bloodstained mantle come nearest to the overacting necessary for the characters Bottom is best at; tyrants like Herod or his own beloved Ercles. Furthermore, in the last line of his speech we see two old English words, both lingo of the weaver’s trade, joined by tripping consonants (Can there be an

enjambement alliteration?) to classical mythology.⁴² Such a linguistic oddity surely sounds, from a weaver's lips, like a weaver's flourish and carries all the colloquial connections of Welsh shepherds in Nativity plays, alewives in Hell, and all of the other local touches that so heavily mark the texts of the cycle plays. Hippolyta shakes it off, of course. But, for a moment she was with the weaver, willing to believe the emotion of his performance, and that moment was precisely when Bottom would be at his most comfortable.

Even if Hippolyta is moved, she is but one amongst many in the audience, and her empathy is a momentary flicker. The play seems yet to fail, or at least not to rouse any feeling than bemused tolerance. "The best of these kind are but shadows, and the worst are no worse if imagination amend them" (5.1.210-11), says Theseus, seeming to confirm the reading. But we must remember that the Duke has already given his credentials for the success of the play and they are not terribly high: "For never anything can be amiss when simpleness and duty tender it" (5.1.82-83). He is in the mood to be amused and only direct insult to his station will offend him. And he, along with the rest of the Athenians, is amused if only condescendingly so, and is as content to see a dance to end the evening as the second half of the play.

Yet to have brought these characters on stage and to lavish so much attention on their work, only to at last dismiss it with an indulgent smile seems in some ways to undercut the detail of the earlier scenes. If taking acting lessons from Bottom is more than simply the long set-up to a joke, it must be found in the divide between the text the mechanicals receive and the one they present. True, their attempts to reform that text mostly fail, but they fail not through lack of effort but perhaps through a certain

⁴² "Thread" descends from the old German þrad, while thrum (OE þrum), the OED informs us is "each of the ends of the warp-threads left unwoven and remaining attached to the loom when the web is cut off." *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. "thrum" <http://www.oed.com/> (accessed January 16, 2013).

inflexibility in the material they have to work with. The oft-referenced scatological humor of Snout as Wall with Pyramus and Thisbe forced to kiss between his legs can be played with a serious ignorance of the scene's implications. Yet the cycle plays contain numerous examples of obscene humor placed cheek by jowl with scenes of horror or high reverence; the various innocents' plays come readily to mind. The pageant plays, if worked on regularly by committed revisers like Bottom and his crew, represent layers upon layers of revised text; a palimpsest comfortable as an old shirt. 'Pyramus and Thisbe,' seems to lack that quality despite, or perhaps because of, its intended audience, a fact of which Shakespeare must have been well aware and which indeed he may have included the mechanicals' in the *Dream* precisely to highlight.

2.3 *Dream and Reality*

No matter how unwieldy the original text of *Pyramus and Thisbe*, the Bottom-as-actor reading reverses perspectives on that text by deliberately obscuring it. Shakespeare never gives us *Pyramus and Thisbe* save through the medium of the mechanicals' production. The imaginary original, perhaps like the first draft of any play, can never be recovered. Instead, Shakespeare presents the acting text with the actors' concerns writ so large upon it that they take over the original, invisible shape of the original. We must read the mechanicals' *Pyramus and Thisbe*. It is the only one there is.

What this may say about the larger text of the *Dream*, I leave to another, wiser head. But if Shakespeare's picture of guildsmen-players at their craft reflects actual practice, then returning to the texts of the cycle plays from the perspective of the players gives us a different way to see those texts. It asks us to look beyond the text as antiquarian collection or haphazard survival and ask questions about formation that

prioritize production, not authorial inspiration, as the birthplace of dramatic texts. What parts of a given play would cause an actor concern? What would he see as important or irrelevant? How would he change the play, and why? And how can we see those changes in the documents that come down to us?

The following chapters present several exercises in this mode. By considering plays from the perspective of an actor or pageant master most concerned with the process of staging a successful play, I hope to show that where change is detectable in the text, a consideration of the play in production can often provide reasons for that change and sometimes an idea of how and when that change occurred. If, in other words, we give Bottom the kind of text he likes, what would he change first?

CHAPTER 3. PETER QUINCE GATHERS HIS PROPERTIES

In this chapter I intend to focus on a remarkable play, the Coventry *Shearmen and Taylors' Pageant*, and the remarkable man, Robert Croo (sometimes called Robert Crowe), who wrote it, or at least wrote it down. My title, therefore, is somewhat misleading, for I will say very little of the mechanicals' carpenter here. But Quince is a man of many parts--writer, director, actor, set designer--and so I invoke him as fictional stand-in for Croo, who seems to have held many similar jobs himself in his long career. Quince leaves the first meeting of the mechanicals with a promise to "draw a list of properties/such as our play wants" (1.2.104-05), and while he means physical props, there is a sense in which he and Robert Croo gather their texts, like properties, from a list. Playwright might indeed be the most fitting word for both men, for they seem not so much to conceive plays but to assemble them as if from bits (it might be unkindly said) lying about a workroom floor. I have devoted the chapter that follows to Croo and one of his texts for two reasons: first, Robert Croo represents the closest possible example of an identifiable historical person (or persons) filling a position like that of Peter Quince, and Croo's work revising the pageant demonstrates his concern with production. Second, the evidence of revision in the *Shearmen and Taylors' Pageant* points not only towards theatrical acumen on the part of the reviser(s), but also knowledge of and attention to the

performance history of the city in the character of Isaiah the Prophet: a figure from Coventry's past that would have inspired pride and nostalgia in a city mired in economic recession.

3.1 The Corpus of Coventry

The study of early drama always wants for primary sources, but the Coventry Corpus Christi plays are an almost perfect storm of evidence and absence. Out of what must at one time have been more than ten plays, only two survive to the present day. The first of these, the *Shearmen and Taylors' Pageant*, exists only in the transcription of Coventry antiquarian Thomas Sharp. The manuscript itself, along with irreplaceable guild and town documents from Coventry's history, burned in the Birmingham Free Library fire of 1879. Contrastingly, the *Weavers' Pageant* descends to the present not only in manuscript form, but as an autograph of its copyist and reviser, Robert Croo, who helpfully identified his role in colophons appended to both plays. What the cycle lacks in extant texts, it makes up for in the copious records and historical documents related to play production despite the Birmingham fire. The city and guild record books give enough detail to confirm a sizeable cycle and circumstantial evidence connecting guilds to plays.

Also clear from the historical documents is the ugly reality of the depression under which Coventry labored from the end of the fifteenth century until the latter half of the sixteenth. Charles Phythian-Adams' meticulously reconstructs this crisis from guild rental documents and city censuses in his *Desolation of a City*. From a prosperous and populous city founded on the cloth and dye industry of English wool, Coventry had sunk from the height of its medieval population of about 10,000 in 1434 to somewhat over half

that in the 1520s.¹ The collapse of the cloth industry to competing European markets combined with plague, poor harvests, and the financial burdens placed on the country by the king's involvement with conflicts on the continent led to a depopulation of the city so severe that by 1523 the city had close to six hundred vacant houses within its walls--the population equivalent of 20 medieval villages.² Then came the Reformation:

If Coventry's role as a major distributional centre for scarce products was thus reduced, that process was undoubtedly hastened by the events of the Reformation. Those that had visited it as pilgrims, as supplicants in its ecclesiastical courts, as dependents on the priory's far-flung manors, as spectators of the city's ceremonies and as brothers of its guilds, no longer had to do so. Such interdependence as there had been with regard to the supply of wool by established monastic economies was decisively snapped.³

Scholarly consensus views the extant play texts as "redactions...explained as efforts at accommodation to changing guild resources."⁴ But such an assessment fails to capture the full impact of decades-long recession and depopulation on the civic pride and morale of a city, to say nothing of its ability to present the lavish spectacle of its cycle plays. That the plays continued to be produced at all during this time is testament to the Coventrians' extraordinary dedication to their pageant traditions. Town records from the early

¹ Charles Phythian-Adams, *Desolation of a City: Coventry and the Urban Crisis of the Late Middle Ages* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 12.

² Phythian-Adams, *Desolation of a City*, 51-67, 189-98.

³ Phythian-Adams, *Desolation of a City*, 218.

⁴ Pamela M. King and Clifford Davidson, eds. *The Coventry Corpus Christi Plays* Early Drama, Art, and Music Monograph Series 27 (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute, 2000), 3

sixteenth century contain many ordinances for one guild to assist another financially in support of the pageants.⁵ Certainly the prolonged depression in Coventry and the shuffling of fiscal responsibility between the guilds explains the shape of these pageants as composites of previously separate plays.

But unlike redacted or revised texts in the cycles of other cities, the surviving Coventry plays provide those identifying colophons mentioned above. The *Shearmen and Taylors' Pageant* ends with these lines:

T<h>ys matter
 nevly correcte be Robart Croo
 the xiiijth dey of Marche
 fenysschid in the yere of owre Lorde God
 MCCCCC & xxxiiijth
 then being mayre mastur Palmar
 also mastris of the seyd fellyschipp Hev Corbett
 Randull Pynkard and
 John Baggeley.⁶

Who is Robart (or Robert) Croo? Why had he “correcte” the pageant above this colophon?

What did it look like before he corrected it? Answers to these questions remain

⁵ A typical example, from 1526 reads: “Item it is enacted that all Carvers *within* this Citie fromehensfurth shalbe associat *with* the Craft of peyntoures and that euery Carver shall pay yeirelie to the peyntoures towards the Charges of ther pagiaunt xij d *without* contradiction vpon peyn for euery default to forfeit vj s viij d to the seid Craft of peyntoures and that the seid Carvers fromehensfurth shalbe dismyssed & discharged from the Craft of Carpenters and that Richard Tenwynter shall pay suche arrerages to the Carpenters as he oweth theme for the xij d which he shuld haue payed theme yeirelie in tymes past” R.W. Ingram, ed., *Records of Early English Drama: Coventry* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), 125.

⁶ This and all following quotations from the Coventry pageants taken from King and Davidson, *Coventry Corpus Christi Plays*, 109.

maddeningly vague, and Robert Croo's involvement with the pageants at Coventry simultaneously illustrates the rewards and limitations contained in the documentary evidence surrounding civic drama.

Robert Croo's identity will, in all likelihood, never be fully known. His life can be traced across the official documents of Coventry, but as with many such figures active in the livelihood of their towns, he appears only in records or accounts as this or that official body recognizes or reimburses him. Of Croo the man, there is little to say save that, as St Matthew said of prophets, we may know him by his fruits. Those fruits reveal a rare talent for multiple aspects of dramatic production which kept him steadily employed in the production of pageants throughout the sixteenth century.⁷

A man named Robert Croo was admitted to the Cappers in 1510, paid off his dues approximately five years later, and by 1520 was a guildmaster admitting members himself.⁸ In 1525, he took part in a guild dramatic production of some sort during the Cappers' celebration of Candlemas.⁹ There is little certain about this entertainment, though it seems safe to assume that like other such guild shows it was staged inside the guildhall. We know only that Croo was paid for "the Goldenflecc," whether that was a text or an item is hard to say, but it is hard to resist the mythological inference of the name. No further Cappers' records refer to Croo, but he does not vanish from pageant-making in Coventry. His name appears on the *Shearman and Taylors' Pageant* and the

⁷ More detailed summaries of Croo's career can be found in R.W. Ingram, "'To find the players and all that longeth therto': Notes on the Production of Medieval Drama in Coventry," in *The Elizabethan Theatre V*, ed, G.R. Hibbard (Hamden, CT: Archon, 1975), 25-29; and King and Davidson, *Coventry Corpus Christi Plays*, 52-53.

⁸ Ingram, *REED: Coventry*, 116, 452, 562. The record here is hard to follow due to a linguistic idiom regarding how one "makes brothers" in the guild. See Elizabeth Baldwin, "Some Suggested Emendations to *REED: Coventry*," *REED Newsletter* 16, no. 2 (1991): 9.

⁹ Ingram, *REED: Coventry*, 123.

Weavers Pageant mentioned above, both revised in 1535.¹⁰ No records of Croo's activities survive from the 1540s and '50s, but he seems to have become involved in performances of the now-lost Drapers' Pageant. That play, probably focusing on the Last Judgment, included a model of the globe to be burned on stage during the play ("Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away." Mat 24:35). Croo made three such globes for the Drapers in 1561, '63, and '66.¹¹ He also played God for the Drapers in '62 and '66, and performed other pageant-related tasks.¹²

The scholar's blood fairly sings when confronted with such a character, and it is not without reason that Ingram concludes (soberly, and with reasonable practicality) that the surviving records present us with two or even three men with the same name, instead of a civic drama polymath.¹³ The chance of one person being so active for so long in civic drama is very small. The Robert Croo who entered the Cappers' guild in 1510 would at that time have been aged between 12 and 15 years. By the time he strode across the stage as God in the Drapers' Doomsday pageant, he would have been in his late seventies or early eighties; a more than respectable age for any actor, and certainly less than statistically probable for any man of the sixteenth century. I confess to a romantic attachment to the idea of an indefatigable figure involved in nearly seven decades of Coventrian drama, but my concern with the man Robert Croo (whichever man he is) rests with the claims he makes in the inscription above. Unlike nearly every other change

¹⁰ The colophon at the close of the Weavers' pageant reads "T<h>ys matter nevly translate be Robart Croo/ in the year of owre Lord God Mlvcxxxiiijte./ then beyng meyre Mastur Palmar, Beddar,/ and Rychard Smythe an<d> <> Pyxley,/ masturs of the Weywars. Thys boke yendide/ the seycond dey of Marche in yere above seyde." King and Davidson, *Coventry Corpus Christi Plays*, 148.

¹¹ Ingram, *REED: Coventry*, 217, 224, 237.

¹² Ingram, *REED: Coventry*, 221, 237. Croo also seems to have made other sundries for the guild including hats, gloves, and giants for the Midsummer Show. See reference to King and Davidson in Note 81, above.

¹³ See Ingram, "'To find the players,'" 28-29.

detectable in the corpus of biblical cycle drama, this text, along with the Coventry Weaver's Pageant, provides us with a name. Indeed, the text of the Weavers' Pageant is in Croo's own hand.¹⁴

Even this evidence, however, leaves itself open to interpretation. Croo claims that the text is "corrected" and whether that may mean correct dogma or correct for the situation of the guild is unclear, but I want to consider that word at its most prosaic meaning: "to set right, amend (a thing); to substitute what is right for the errors or faults in (a writing, etc.)."¹⁵ Chaucer uses the word in this sense when he chastises his scribe for the carelessness of his copying, and the dynamic between the two men may tell us something about the nature of Croo's work for the Shearmen and Taylors.¹⁶ If, as I argue in Chapter One, guildsmen could and would revise the texts of their plays, then Croo's responsibility may not have been to revise the plays but to record revisions suggested or already completed by the guildsmen, to "write the prologue" for the Bottoms, Snouts, and Starvelings of Coventry, whoever they might be. On the other hand, the language in colophon at the end of the *Weavers' Pageant* ("translate"), according to King and Davidson "[mean] that he had performed some revisions and changes rather than serving as a mere copyist."¹⁷

Did Croo do more for the Weavers' play than he did for the Shearmen and Taylors'? It is impossible to say. What is clear is that Croo's redacted texts show so marked and careful

¹⁴ King and Davidson, *Coventry Corpus Christi Plays*, 24.

¹⁵ *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. "correct" <http://www.oed.com/> (accessed October 23, 2012).

¹⁶ The line is from "Chaucers Wordes Unto Adam, His Owne Scriveyn:" "So ofte adaye I mot thy werk renewe,/ It to correcte and eke to rubbe and scrape,/ And al is through thy negligence and rape." See Larry D. Benson, ed., *The Riverside Chaucer* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), 650.

¹⁷ King and Davidson, *Coventry Corpus Christi Plays*, 24.

propensity for theatricality that performance seems to subsume all other concerns. This can be seen most clearly in the constituent materials that make up the text Croo delivered to the Shearmen and Taylors in March of 1535.

3.2 The Shearmen and Taylors' Isaiah

The Shearmen and Taylors' Pageant is a collection of carefully chosen parts. The play begins with Isaiah (1-42), who invites the audience into the pre-Incarnational world of Adam's sin. He speaks his prophecy of the Virgin and Child then makes way for the first scene: the Annunciation (43-93). Gabriel's message to Mary and her response to the angel is followed by Joseph's complaint as the older husband of a young and attractive wife (94-133). He is rebuked by an angel, and obediently escorts Mary to Bethlehem (134-167). Arriving in the city of David, Joseph leaves Mary to look for help in the town (168-191) and the scene shifts to the shepherds and their encounter with the angel (192-263). Joseph returns to Mary, followed by the Shepherds, and they and the angels sing the praise of the Virgin and the new-born Savior (264-312). Two prophets enter at this point and discuss the meaning of what has just occurred (313-424). They in turn are replaced by a Nuncius who welcomes Herod to the stage (425-435). Herod rages and then exits (436-489) to make way for the three Kings who meet on stage and agree to journey together (490-548). The kings encounter Herod and then trek to Bethlehem (549-643), pay their respects to the Christ-child and head home at the instructions of an angel (644-712). Herod enters again to rage and order his soldiers to Bethlehem (713-763). Focus shifts back to Bethlehem as the angel warns Mary and Joseph to flee to Egypt (764-775). The women of Bethlehem enter on their heels and are accosted by Herod's soldiers and

their children killed (776-829). The soldiers return to Herod and the play ends with Herod vowing to pursue the fleeing Holy Family into Egypt (830-846).

The Chester and York cycles each take five plays to tell the same story, and even in an abbreviated synopsis like the one above, the sheer amount of narrative ground covered seems significant.¹⁸ The other cycles divide their plays along the divisions in action seen above. The York plays, for instance, run: 1) *The Annunciation and the Visitation*, 2) *Joseph's Trouble about Mary*, 3) *The Nativity*, 4) *The Shepherds*, and 5) *Herod*. The correspondence between cycles makes it easy to see redaction at work in the Coventry play; each section of Croo's text looks like a bare-bones remnant of a larger work now lost to the Coventry record, the shape of which may be guessed at from those cycles which preserve them intact. This explanation certainly seems logical and there is no need here to dispute it, save for the two sections of the Coventry text which do not find easy correlations in the Birth-of-Christ sections in other cycles: Isaiah and the prophets' dialogue. Here it may be possible that although some pieces of Croo's text have correspondence in similar cycles, sources for other sections may be found closer to home.

Robert Croo may have redacted more than plays into the two pageants that bear his name. Both the *Shearmen and Taylors' Pageant* and the *Weavers' Pageant* have music appended to their texts for performance by the cast at appropriate times in the play. Some songs, like the angels' chorus to the shepherds, are Latin antiphons from the liturgy. Others, like the famous carol of the mothers of Bethlehem to their slaughtered infants, were probably traditional. Many cycles borrow from sacred and secular sources.

¹⁸ King and Davidson provide a much more extensive scene-by-scene analysis in the introduction to their edition, see 15-20.

Chester's famous alewife from *The Harrowing of Hell* seems to have been a character from a midsummer entertainment, and Eamon Duffy notes the conflation of civic welcome with liturgical welcome in the York plays.¹⁹ Croo's plays, especially the *Shearmen and Taylors' Pageant*, are perhaps more notorious for being patchwork, and the songs appended to the pageant suggest a larger range of texts might have been used to create the 1535 pageants than the now-vanished play texts that lie behind the different sections of the pageant as it stands.

Like the carols, the Isaiah prologue may derive from sources other than earlier plays. This Old Testament prophet appears at the beginning of the pageant to prophesy the coming of the Savior. Other cycle plays present Messianic prophecy from Old Testament figures (Isaiah and others), and the Coventry Isaiah has been assumed to originate from a similar source, now lost. However, the records of Coventry provide a documented history for an Isaiah character outside of the pageants proper, yet still involved in the spectacle history of the city, specifically in the royal entries of the fifteenth century. How the entry Isaiah may have formed the basis for Croo's Isaiah provides an example of production-focused revision and will serve as the focus for the remainder of this chapter.

When Isaiah the Prophet walks onto the stage to begin the Coventry *Shearmen and Taylors' Pageant*, the character (not to mention the actor) has several roles to play. His first job, to judge by his opening stanza, is that of a prologue

The Sofferent that seethe evere seycrette,

He saue you all and make you perfett and stronge,

¹⁹ Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, 26.

And gevenus grace with his merce forto mete.
 For now in grett mesere mankind ys bownd,
 The serpent hathe gevin vs soo mortall a wonde
 That no creature ys abull vs for to reyles
 Tyll thye right vncion of Jvda dothe seyse.

Isaiah greets his audience with the language of Christianity in the first three lines (“[God] saue you all,” “gevenus grace,” “merce”), establishing their common identity in the pseudo-anachronistic language so common to the cycles. But he moves quickly to locate his listeners in the theatrical moment in which his pageant begins: the pre-Incarnational age wherein the power of sin still holds humans “bownd” in death. He then moves into his role of prophet of the coming Messiah which will occupy the next stanza.

Then schall moche myrthe and joie increse,
 And the right rote in Isaraell sprynge
 Thatt shall bring forthe the greyne off wholeness;
 And owt of danger he schall vs bring
 Into thatt reygeon where he ys kyng
 Wyche abowe all othur far dothe abownde,
 And thatt cruell Sathan he schall confownde.

Isaiah as prophet sets the stage for the Nativity which will follow and fulfill his words, using the familiar lines of biblical prophecy.

Wherefore I cum here apon this grownde
 To comforde eyuere creature off birthe,
 For I, Isaye the profet, hathe fownde

Many swete matters whereof we ma make myrth

On this same wyse,

For thogh that Adam be demid to deythe

With all his childur asse Abell and Seythe,

Yet “Ecce virgo consepeet,”

Loo, where a reymede schall ryse.

Prophecy mixes here with statements of purpose (“wherefore I cum upon this grownde”) and exhortations to rejoice (“whereof we ma make myrth”) that continue as the prophet explicates his passage.

Beholde, a mayde schall conseyve a childe

And get vs more grace than eyuer men had,

And hir meydinhod nothing defylid.

Sche ys deputyd to beare the sun, almyghte God.

Loo, sufferntis, now ma you be glad,

For of this meydin all we ma be fayne;

For Adam þat now lyis in sorrois full sade

Hir gloreose birth schall reydeme hym ageyn

From bondage and thrall.

Now be myrre, eyure monn,

For this dede bryffly in Isaraell schal be done

And before the Fathur in trone

That schall glade vs all.

More of this matter fayne wolde I meve,
 But lengur tyme I haue not here for to dwell.
 That Lorde þat ys marcefull his marce soo in vs ma preve
 For to sawe owre sollis from the darknes of hell,
 And to his blys he vs bring asse he ys bothe Lord and King
 And schal be eyuerlastyng in secula seculorum. Amen.

These last lines, part flourish, part benediction, usher the prophet from the stage for the Anunciation, but his presence lingers in the mind, if only for the consummate rhetorical skill of his part. In addition to the prophecy of the annunciation, we have almost a master of ceremonies, encouraging the audience to make merry, connecting them again and again with the pre-Incarnational world only to promist that the looked-for salvation is just around the corner. And in point of fact it is, and Isaiah rushes to make room for it. Like a circus ringmaster, he very nearly doffs a hat to his audience: “And now ladies and gentlemen, without further ado, I give you” It’s almost as if the Old Testament prophet has been on stage before.

In this case, he very likely has. Most scholars assume that Croo’s Isaiah originates, like the other pieces of the pageant, in a now-lost play. King and Davidson claim that: “Isaiah is here ultimately derived from the traditional *Ordo Prophetarum* or Prophets’ play that linked Old Testament and New Testament events.”²⁰ Their statement, however, deserves some unpacking as it elides two different dramatic phenomena.

The “Prophets’ play” which “links” the testaments does occur in several of the cycle plays. The Towneley MS contains a *Processus Prophetarum* in which appear

²⁰ King and Davidson, *Coventry Corpus Christi*, 15-16.

Moses, David, Daniel, and the pagan Sibyl.²¹ The N-Town cycle contains a similar play called *Jesse Root* with a much larger cast and the *Spicers' Play* from the York cycle begins with a Doctor character who discusses the Old Testament prophecies (focusing mostly on Isaiah). These plays present a series of Old Testament prophets and patriarchs who foretell the coming of the Messiah and in so doing prepare the audience for the action of the forthcoming nativity plays. Isaiah's role in both the York and N-Town cycles resemble his role in Coventry.²² The actual *Ordo Prophetarum* to which King and Davidson refer is a part of Latin liturgical drama from the Advent or Christmas season. In the *Ordo*, a series of calls and responses are used to excoriate the recalcitrant Jews for their unbelief by using the words of their own prophets to claim Christ as their promised Messiah.²³

Though the connection between the Latin *Ordo* and the vernacular prophets' plays is nowhere explicit, the similarities between them are sufficient to justify King and Davidson's eliding the distinction. That elision is important to the study of Coventry's dramatic history because Gordon Kipling makes the same omission in his study of royal entries in medieval and early modern Europe. "The *Ordo Prophetarum*," Kipling claims, "provided the civic triumph with an especially valuable source of inspiration...borrowed from symbolic characters and dramatic strategies [of] liturgical Nativity dramas."²⁴ This Coventry did in the 1456 visit of Queen Margaret of Anjou and the young Prince Edward

²¹ Martin Stevens and A.C. Cawley, eds., *The Towneley Plays*, Early English Text Society, Special Series 13, 14 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 1:64-71.

²² The York Isaiah appears only by reference. The Doctor character refers to and quotes from Isaiah, but the Prophet never appears on stage. See Beadle, *The York Plays*, 1:79.

²³ For examples and a more detailed discussion see Karl Young, "Ordo Prophetarum," *Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts, and Letters: Transactions* 20 (1922), 1-82.

²⁴ Gordon Kipling, *Enter the King: Theatre, Liturgy, and Ritual in the Medieval Civic Triumph* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), 61.

to their city. When the Lancastrian queen approached the city with the three year old son of Henry VI, she was greeted with a spectacle: “at Bablake there was made a Iesse ouer the yate right well and there were shewed too speches, as foloweth.”²⁵ The “Iesse” referred to here is the lineage of Mary from the house of David familiar in medieval legendry and illumination, and the two prophets who speak from that tree are Isaiah and Jeremiah. Isaiah speaks first and his lines are worth full consideration:

Princes most excellent born of blode riall
 Chosen queen of this region conforte to all hus
 Wordes to your magnificens woll I say thus
 I ysay replete with þe spirite propheticall
 Like as mankynde was gladdid by the birght of Ihesus
 So shall þis empire ioy the birth of your bodye
 The knightly curage of prince Edward all men shall ioy to se.²⁶

Kipling reads this speech as attempting a delicate balance between acknowledging Margaret’s power as queen while hailing her son as future king. Indeed, the entire entry orbits around these poles of regent and sovereign. Kings, saints, and personified Virtues exhort Edward to be a wise and just ruler when he comes into his own while expressing present obedience to Queen Margaret.²⁷ Isaiah’s speech takes part in this diplomatic negotiation by co-opting his own prophecy of the Virgin and Child as a model of the English queen and her young son.

²⁵ Ingram, *REED: Coventry*, 29-30.

²⁶ Ingram, *REED: Coventry*, 30.

²⁷ Ingram, *REED: Coventry*, 31-34.

Before discussing the relationship (if any) between the entry Isaiah and the pageant Isaiah, it's worth considering for a moment the nature of the relationship between these vernacular Isaiahs and the Isaiah of the *Ordo*. Both Kipling and King and Davidson assume a relationship between the Latin and the English prophets. Staging instructions for the various *Ordo* dramas indicating dramatic presentation, especially regarding Balaam and Balak and Nebuchadnezzar's treatment of Daniel and his companions, support such a reading.²⁸ Yet the connection between liturgical drama and popular drama remains vague. Young declines to draw any line of correlation between the two types of prophetic drama and mentions only a speculation about the matter found in his French source.²⁹ Nor does Young provide a single example of the *Ordo* from anywhere in England. The *Ordo* or the pseudo-Augustinian sermon on which it was based could have made its way into the sermon books of English priests, but any dramatic borrowing which may have occurred seems much more likely from the Balaam/Balak portion of the liturgy.³⁰ Isaiah's contribution in the *Ordo* is no greater than the Messianic prophecy which justified his inclusion in the *processus* to begin with.

Locating the source for both the entry Isaiah and the pageant Isaiah in a lost copy of the *Ordo* play makes good deductive sense, but the practice of that location complicates the deduction. The lines from the missing *Ordo* which would have served as inspiration were either derived from Isaiah 7:14 ("Ecce virgo concipiet et pariet filium, et vocabitur nomen ejus Hemanuhel, quod est interpretatum: Nobiscum Deus,") or 11: 1

²⁸ Young, *Ordo Prophetarum*, 65–66.

²⁹ That source is one Marius Sepet whose work on the *Ordo* appeared in 1868. Of his conjectures, Young says "He...reasons that some...episodes detached themselves from the procession, and persisted as independent plays. ...[T]hese independent plays reunited in the form of Old Testament dramatic cycles, such as we find in several of the vernaculars of Western Europe," pp. 81–82.

³⁰ Young, *Ordo Prophetarum*, 47.

(‘Est necesse virgam Jesse de radice provehi flos deinde surget inde qui est spiritus Dei’) depending on the source.³¹ The entry Isaiah uses neither in his address to the queen; he simply references Jesus and the Virgin. The pageant Isaiah manages to bring in both verses:

Then shall moche myrthe and joie in-cresse;
 And the right rote in Israell sprynge,
 That schall bryng for the the greyne off whollenes;
 --
 Yett *Ecce virgo consepeet*,--
 Loo, where a reymede schall ryse!
 Be-holde, a mayde schall conseyve a childe (ll. 8-10, 22-25)

Yet it is the entry Isaiah who stands amidst the Jesse tree, embodying if not proclaiming his biblical prophecy, and it is he who makes the Virgin/Child analogy to the queen and her young son. Since the Latin liturgies use but one or the other of the above verses, the derivation for either the entry or the pageant lines remains unclear. Did the author of either work base his script on one or the other and include the additional verse from his own scriptural knowledge? Or are the two scripts based on a modified liturgy which included both verses? It seems safe to say only that the two Isaiahs share similarities with their Latin counterpart.

³¹ Young, *Ordo Prophetarum*, 33. The KJV translates these verses as: “Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel” (Isaiah 7:14, and “And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots” (Isaiah 11:1). These are the verses as adapted in the original *lectio* and what Young calls ‘The ordo of Limoges’: both are types of the Latin liturgical drama.

Similarity, however, need not predicate a lineage. While an *Ordo*/Pageant relationship seems undeniable, describing the latter as a derivation of the former implies an unnecessary chronology between what may also be considered two artifacts of the same culture: late medieval Catholicism. Indeed, assuming a source requires a relationship of unknown degree between the two extant scripts and a lost original or originals. Of the two, the pageant Isaiah seems most proximal; his speech includes the key verses and resembles the prophets of other plays. The entry Isaiah, by contrast, seems simply a borrowed figure, useful only as his role of Messianic prophet and fulfilling the larger metaphor of the entire entry. The iteration of this relationship, while compelling, remains speculative and obscures a more established connection between entry and pageant: their use of the same character as introduction in the same town.

Reprioritizing local history above broad religious culture creates its own set of problems, however. Nearly eighty years (not to mention the conclusion of the Wars of the Roses) had passed between the time when Coventry greeted its presumptive heir to the throne with Isaiah atop the Bablake Gate and Robert Croo's revised play. No living memory could have recalled in the 1530s a royal visit from the 1450s and surely any costume created for the event must have been long lost to the ravages of time, unsuitable for re-use in the pageant. But reorienting the relationship between the two Isaiahs around the city rather than their source serves as a reminder that although the records exist chronologically, the performance of entry and pageant occurred concurrently. If there was once a prophets' play of which Isaiah is the lone survivor in Croo's text, then the entry producers could have borrowed the entire pageant paraphernalia: character, costume, mask, even the Jesse tree.

Circumstantial evidence also points to another entry which may have used the Isaiah character. In 1474, when Coventry again opened its gates for an Edward (this time Edward IV, the young Yorkist prince), another spectacular entry pageant greeted him just as it had greeted his Lancastrian counterpart eighteen years before. This time, however, an actor portraying King Richard greets the prince at Bablake Gate. He is surrounded by “xiiij other arrayed Lyke as Dukes Markises Erles Viscouns and Barons & lordis” and his greeting to Edward pays an elaborate compliment to royalty:

Welcom full high and nobull prince//to vs right special
 To this your chaumbre / so called of Antiquite
 The presens of your noble person reioyseth your hartes all
 We all mowe blesse the tyme / of your Natiuitie
 The right lyne of the Royall blode / ys now as itt schulde be
 Wherefore god of his goodness / preserue you in bodily helth
 To vs and your tenautes here perpetuall ioy / and to all the londis welth.³²

Notably more secular and politically canny (“The right lyne of the Royall blode / ys now as itt schuld be”), this speech concerns itself less with prophecy or metaphor and more with the practical business of recognition and submission to authority, despite the fact that Edward V was only about three years old at the time. Beyond the gate, however, Coventry reclaims the biblical symbolism absent without: “iij Patriarkes” along with “Jacobus xij sonnes” wait at the next stop to hail Edward as divinely ordained as King Richard’s speech acknowledged his lineage:

O god most glorious / [And] grounder and gyder of all grace

³² Ingram, *REED: Coventry*, 53.

To vs iij Patriarkes thou promised / as scripture maketh rehersall
 That of oure stok lynially / schuld procede and passe
 A prynce of most nobull blode and kynges sonne Imperiall
 The wich was full fylled in god / and nowe referre itt we schall
 Vnto this nobull prynce / that is here present
 Wich entreth to this his Chaumber / as prynce full reuerent.³³

No Jesse tree is mentioned in the description, but the Edward/Jesus correlation is made here as well, though with more subtlety and a touch of what today we would call metacommentary (“referre itt we schall vnto this nobull prince”). Isaiah as a character is not named or given a speech in this entry, but he may not be entirely absent. At the fourth station, “the Cross in the Croschepyng,” the record tells us there “were iij prophettes standing at the Crosse Seynsyng and vpon the Crosse a boven were Childer of Issarell syngyng and casting out Whete obles & ffloures and iij pypis rennyng wyne.”³⁴ The Crosscheaping, in the market square of Coventry, seems to have been the final station of the entry and along with the spectacle at the cross itself featured a play of the knights of Cologne and one of St. George. No names are given for the prophets, but it is hard to imagine a selection of Old Testament prophets that would not include Isaiah. Regardless of their identity, they are voiceless characters, intended only to provide a part of the sensuous tableau around the cross. If Isaiah is indeed here, he has come a long way from the Bablake gate.

³³ Ingram, *REED: Coventry*, 53-54.

³⁴ Ingram, *REED: Coventry*, 54.

Kipling does not spend significant time on this entry, but a straightforward reading is fairly simple. The '74 entry uses many of the same elements as the '56 entry, but repurposes them completely. Rather than invoke the Virgin and Child, the '74 entry emphasizes patriarchy in an historical and spiritual sense, and brought the historical aspect to the fore. St. George, not St. Margaret, slays the dragon and prophecy is made to fit reality rather than predict the future by analogy and we might well understand the Coventry leadership's reluctance to give a character words to speak to a York who eighteen years before had so warmly greeted a Lancaster.

“A prophet is not without honor,” Christ said, “but in his own country, among his own kin, and in his own house.” But whose prophet is Isaiah? Does he belong to the *Ordo* plays, the royal entries or the pageants? Derivation hardly seems important to such an adaptable figure, and the Isaiah-character's home in the Latin liturgy is not nearly so comfortable as his place in the civic spectacle scene of late medieval Coventrians; they're familiar enough with him to sideline him.

This familiarity suggests an alternate connection between Coventry's dramatic history and the pageants of 1535 and helps explain the showmanship of the Isaiah presented in the opening lines of the pageant. While I see no need to challenge critical consensus on the origin of the plays, emphasizing the fifteenth century appearances of Isaiah in Coventry's dramatic record puts a different perspective on sixteenth century pageant revision. Certainly Croo had access to previous versions of the plays during the revising process, and probably several other documents as well. If Croo's Isaiah was meant to evoke the entry Isaiah of Coventry's past, it helps explain why his role as prophet has been conflated with that taken on by a Nuncius in other cycles. For the

people of Coventry, Isaiah would have been a reminder of the glories of the past, and their response to such a symbol in the midst of a dark time for the city would have been stronger than to the appearance of a nameless prologue. Indeed, Croo's job, and his genius, might have been this kind of collation: a gathering together the most important bits of dramatic flotsam bobbing about Coventry's dramatic history.

Other pageants, songs, figures, costumes--every part of the *Shearmen and Taylors'* *Pageant* could have been a part of this flotsam. The songs are traditional, and thus probably known to anyone in the audience. The two prophets who cover the change of scene from Bethlehem to Herod's palace, though unnamed, recall the three unnamed prophets already mentioned in the 1474 entry. Angels appear before Prince Arthur in 1498 "sensyng and syngyng," and though only two angel speaking parts appear in the pageant, a larger group could have done the same sensing and singing of the *Gloria in excelsis deo*.³⁵ Mary Dormier Harris made a tentative connection between the "childer of Israel" mentioned in the 1474 entry and the Slaughter of the Innocents scenes which closes this play. The scene could only gain in significance for the citizens of the town if the children who suffer Herod's wrath at the end of the play could be made to resemble those who sang before the English king in the presence of the very prophet whose words began the pageant. Regarding this "collage," Kling and Davidson have noted that the text "is quite readable, but it remains eminently playable."³⁶ Their assessment is borne out not only in the pageants redacted into Croo's text, each distilled down to its most dramatic, most important, or most crowd-pleasing scene, but also in the moments of recollection

³⁵ King and Davidson, *Coventry Corpus Christi Plays*, 164.

³⁶ King and Davidson, *Coventry Corpus Christi Plays*, 15

and remembrance occasioned by these nods to the past. Looking for Coventry's spectacle history in the pageant recasts the entire play as an evocation of powerful moments in the city's past; a kind of "Coventry's Greatest Hits."

Whether as collator or as coordinator, Robert Croo worked in parts, scrapbooking Coventry's past glories into the economic realities of his present. Little stage direction exists for *The Shearmen and Taylors' Pageant*, but if multiple wagons were used to provide stages for the various scenes of the play (perhaps set up in the Crosscheaping plaza where the royal entries often ended), then Croo or someone like him would have needed to stitch together not simply text, but scenes, props, guild resources, and personnel. Coventry's example confirms this assessment and further suggests in the context of the Isaiah-character civic history had a significant role in determining what sections were added or retained when other forces necessitated a change. But the evidence from Coventry is largely negative, a reduction occasioned by difficult times. How does the text of a play respond to good fortune or success? To answer that, let us turn to the city of Chester and the success of the Cappers' Play.

CHAPTER 4. A WALL WITH CHINK, AND MOONSHINE

No personified masonry or celestial bodies exist in the texts of the cycle plays, but Snout and Starveling's additional characters, written into *Pyramus and Thisbe* with little regard for precedent or sense, combine a certain rationality of staging with bewilderment of purpose in a way similar to some aspects of early English drama texts. Like the tinker and the tailor's odd personifications, scenes, characters, and lines accrete around these plays in ways that do not avail themselves of easy explanation. This chapter deals with two such accretions: the lopsided and uneven *Barbours' Playe* and the intra-guild tension that may have influenced its form, and the *Cappers' Playe* with its text altered apparently due to the popularity of its central figures--Balaam and his ass.

Investigation of sixteenth-century cycle drama, especially when concerned with revision, requires a continual interrogation of manuscript evidence. Scholars of early drama have come to acknowledge that the large cycle texts, like those associated with York and Chester, must represent at best official versions of the cycle plays with similarities (more or less) to play scripts often compiled after play production ceased.¹ Yet even these manuscripts demonstrate variance suggestive of the changes at work beneath the surface of the document, like the experience of looking at a fish through the

¹ For York, this is the reorganized text compiled between 1463 and 1477 and recorded in British Library Additional MS 35290. For Chester, eight manuscripts of the plays are known, of them the cyclic versions are the Huntington Manuscript 2 (1591), British Museum Additional 10305 (1592), Harley 2013 (1600), Bodley 175 (1604), and Harley 2124 (1607). See respective EETS editions (Beadle, 2009 and Lumiansky & Mills, 1974) for further descriptions.

deceptive lens of lake water. As Profs. Lumiansky and Mills put it; “What emerges from a study of the manuscripts is a sense of flexibility and an awareness of the responsibility that lay with both the civic authorities and the guild producers for determining the cycle-form from one performance to the next.”¹¹⁷ *The Barbours’ Playe*, fourth in the Chester Cycle, hints at significant changes incorporated into the text prior to its inclusion in the manuscripts, while its immediate sequel in the order of the cycle, *The Cappers’ Playe*, shows what two versions of the same play can tell us about how and why guilds made changes to their plays. I will here examine such hints and in so doing highlight the challenges still facing us as we attempt to understand these flexible works of dramatic art.

4.1 Abraham and the Barbers

The *Barbours’ Playe* gives three episodes in the life of Abraham; his triumph over four enemy kings and his rescue of his nephew Lot, his offering to Melchizedek and the sacrifice of Isaac. The last of these episodes has traditionally garnered the most critical attention, stemming in part from the typological significance of Isaac’s sacrifice and the considerable pathos medieval playwrights invested in expanding the sparse narrative found in Genesis.¹¹⁸ We find this pathos reflected in the way that other drama manuscripts, including York, N-Town, the Towneley MS, and the Book of Brome tell the story of the Akedah.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ R.M. Lumiansky and David Mills, *Essays and Documents*, 86.

¹¹⁸ See Rosemary Woolf, “The Effect of Typology on the English Mediaeval Plays of Abraham and Isaac,” *Speculum* 32, no. 4 (1957): 805-25, and John R. Elliott, Jr., “The Sacrifice of Isaac as Comedy and Tragedy,” *Studies in Philology* 66, no. 1 (1969): 35-59.

¹¹⁹ York’s *Parchemyners and Bokebynders Play* details the events of Genesis 22, see Richard Beadle, *The York Plays*, 55–65. The N-Town “Abraham and Isaac” can be found in Stephen Spector, *The N-Town Play*, 50–58. The Towneley MS “Abraham” is in Martin Stevens and A.C. Cawley, *The Towneley Plays*, 48–57. *Abraham and Isaac* from the “Book of Brome” is found in Norman Davis, ed. *Non-Cycle Plays*, 43-57.

Brome's connection to Chester has received perhaps the most attention, due to a striking similarity between the two.¹²⁰ Debate over the relationship of the similar passages, specifically, whether the Brome playwright had borrowed the Chester text or vice versa, has by now reached a consensus with Prof. Severs' view of the Chester play as a corrupted version of the Brome text and further inquiries into this connection are stymied by the uncertain provenance of the Brome play.¹²¹ Though the Brome/Chester connection compels attention, its notoriety can distract from evidence for change elsewhere in the text. The Lot and Melchizedek episodes which begin the play contain such evidence and I will focus my attention on this section, first by briefly considering the Expositor.

This character separates the Lot and Melchizedek episodes from the Sacrifice of Isaac episode. He enters on horseback and explains the preceding dramatic action for the in the audience, detailing the difference between the Old Law and the New Testament and the roles of Abraham and Melchizedek as types of God and the priest before the altar:

Lordinges, what may this signifye
 I will expound yt appertly--
 the unlearned standinge herebye
 may knowe what this may bee.
 This present, I saye veramente,
 signifieth the newe testamente

¹²⁰ See J. Burke Severs, "The Relationship Between the Brome and Chester Plays of 'Abraham and Isaac,'" *Modern Philology* 42, no. 3 (1945): 137–51.

¹²¹ For a summary of the initial controversy, see Margaret Dancy Fort, "The Metres of the Brome and Chester Abraham and Isaac Plays," *Publications of the Modern Language Association* 41, no. 4 (1926): 832–39. The history of the controversy and the still-accepted view on the issue are detailed by editor Norman Davis in *Non-Cycle Plays*, lviii.

that nowe is used with good intente
throughout all Christianitye

In the owld lawe, without leasinge,
when these too good men were livinge,
of beastes were there offeringe
and eke their sacramente.

But synce Christe dyed one roode-tree,
in bred and wyne his death remeber wee;
and at his laste supper our mandee
was his commandemente. (113-128)¹²²

How exactly the audience is to take the Expositor's reading of this scene is the subject of some debate.¹²³ I will here draw attention only to the modern critical view that the character was born in the cycle revisions of the early sixteenth century, and note his similarity to another set of interpretive figures: the two prophets of the Coventry *Shearmen and Taylors' Pageant*.¹²⁴

¹²² This and all further examples from the play taken from R.M. Lumiansky and David Mills, *The Chester Mystery Cycle*, 1:62.

¹²³ David Mills sees the Expositor as an interpreter of signs: "Using the linking character of Abraham and the device of sign, the playwright has drawn together the Eucharist and Baptism--the two sacraments instituted by Christ--and the Passion of the Christ, the event which confirms their efficacy. The structuring impulse is at a remove from the surface subject and the events require informed interpretation before they can be rightly understood." See *Recycling the Cycle*, 163. Heather Hill-Vasquez offers a more heterodox reading of the Expositor character whom she sees as offering "an alternative process of response that interrupts the participatory atmosphere" created by the plays. See *Sacred Players*, 36. Paul White ultimately finds no evidence for the hand of "a theologically trained Protestant" on the text to effect such a calculated step away from papism. See *Drama and Religion*, 91-92.

¹²⁴ For a summary of this view see Michelle M. Butler, "The Borrowed Expositor," *Early Theatre* 9, no. 2 (2006): 73-92.

These characters enter that play after the angels' appearance to the shepherds and engage in what Pamela King calls "an object lesson in the age-old debate between fideistic theology and the methods of Aristotelian logic" before relinquishing the stage to King Herod and his court.¹²⁵ King notes that the two prophets share a role with the Chester Expositor: "to expound hidden meaning to the audience."¹²⁶ But they may share other roles, as well. King again: "The section referred to as 'the prophets' dialogue' is part of a final rewriting of the 1530s, thinly disguising the join between the two chief units of dramatic action."¹²⁷ The Chester Expositor seems to join the Abraham-Lot-Melchizedek section to the Sacrifice of Isaac episode in something like the way the two prophets in Coventry join the Shepherd and Herod sections. Prof. King points out the practical advantages of having a figure or figures address the audience during scene changes, but if there is joining being done here, what things are being connected?

Prof. Travis has argued that (here I quote from Butler): "the Expositor figures were incorporated into plays in which the reviser also included material from *A Stanzaic Life of Christ*," but the example of Coventry suggests something more.¹²⁸ We can see in the Coventry pageants the clear stamp of redaction: many plays combining into one. It is certainly possible that the material which begins the Chester *Barbours' Playe* was added by a reviser around the time that the plays moved from Corpus Christi to Whitsun

¹²⁵ Pamela M. King, "Faith, Reason and the Prophets' Dialogue in the Coventry Pageant of the Shearmen and Taylors," in *Drama and Philosophy*, ed. James Redmond, 37–46 (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ King, "Faith, Reason and the Prophets' Dialogue," 37.

¹²⁸ Michelle M. Butler, "The Borrowed Expositor," 75.

(probably no later than 1531).¹²⁹ However, several curiosities in the first hundred lines or so of this play suggest contraction rather than an addition.

The play begins with another mediating figure, an announcer who calls himself, somewhat mysteriously, Gobet-on-the-Green. He directs attention away from the departing Noah pageant and toward the coming story of Abraham:

All peace, lordinges that bine presente,
 and herken mee with good intente,
 how Noe awaye from us hee went
 and all his companye;
 and Abraham through Godes grace,
 he is commen into this place,
 and yee will geeve us rowme and space
 to tell you thys storye

This playe, forsothe, begynne shall hee
 in worshippe of the Trynitie
 that yee may all here and see
 that shalbe donne todaye.

My name is Goobett-on-the-Greene.

With you I may no longer beene.

Farewell, my lordinges, all bydene

for lettynge of [your] playe. (1-16)¹³⁰

¹²⁹ Lumiansky and Mills, *Essays and Documents*, 182.

This character certainly serves as a distraction from the removal of what was surely a highly complicated set, but Lumiansky and Mills note another function: “. . . the prologue identifies Abraham, who is apparently not distinguished by costume, and is not mentioned by name before [line] 41 [in] contrast to the usual early identification of characters on entry.”¹³¹

God has begun both previous plays by introducing himself, and in the Cappers’ play which follows the Barbers’ he speaks first, identifying Moses by name, as he also does in the first lines of the Sacrifice of Isaac section of this play. Two introductions of the God character, complete with golden mask, would be more than enough to fix him in the minds of the audience, and his identification of mortal characters establishes their importance to the audience. His absence here when contrasted with his (forgive the theological pun) omnipresence in the first lines of the other Old Testament plays certainly seems noticeable, and makes poor Gobet-on-the-Green look suspiciously like a stopgap.

Surrounding the somewhat out-of-place Gobet are equally incongruous stage directions that point toward an absence in the text. Dealing with such evidence can be tricky as stage directions often contradict the actions necessitated by the script, but as corroborating evidence, they are suggestive, if ephemeral. The heading for the play itself presents a quandary: “Incipit Quarta Pagina qualiter reversus est a cede quatuor regum. Occurrit rex Salim etc. equitando et Lothe; et dicat Abraham,” “Here begins the fourth page concerning the return after killing the four kings. Meeting the king of Salem, etc.

¹³⁰ Lumiansky and Mills, *Chester Mystery Cycle*, 1:56–57.

¹³¹ Lumiansky and Mills *Chester Mystery Cycle*, 2:45.

riding with Lot: and Abraham speaks” (translation mine).¹³² This heading makes quite clear the importance of Lot and Melchizedek, but it lacks any reference to the typological sacrifice of Isaac which most clearly connects with the coming of Christ and delivers the best drama (or at least pathos) of the play. When viewing the Barbers’ play as a whole, this seems like a preview of *High Noon* that somehow forgets to reference a gunfight. As Lumiansky and Mills point out, “In no manuscript does the play-heading indicate that the play consists of three episodes; all refer only to the first.”¹³³

Added to this is the curious last line of the heading: “et dicat Abraham.” Since the Messenger’s lines immediately follow this direction, we must assume that either those lines are to be spoken by Abraham (which seems unlikely given their content), or that there were once lines for Abraham to speak that have been replaced by the Messenger’s speech. Since Abraham’s actual first lines in the play are a prayer of thanksgiving to God for his victory over the four kings, then the lost lines, if there were any, must provide further details on the nature of that conflict.

What then is the nature of this first half of the *Barbours’ Playe*? The introductory speech looks dissimilar from the beginnings of the plays around it. The text heading mentions the initial action and ignores the crucial sacrifice scene. Stage directions suggest a lost speech at the least and at the close of the episode the distracting figure of the Expositor covers a change of scene. It certainly seems possible that the play received new sections based on popular literature in the 1520s, but the action of this section itself,

¹³² Lumiansky and Mills *Chester Mystery Cycle*, 1:56. The H MS reads: “Pagina Quarta de Abrahamo et Melchisedech et Loth, qualiter Abraham reversus est de caede 4 regum; et occurret ei Melchisedech equitando, et erit Loth cum Abrahamo,” “The fourth page concerning Abraham and Melchizedek and Lot. How Abraham returned from killing the four kings and met Melchizedek riding, and Lot was with Abraham.”

¹³³ Lumiansky and Mills, *Chester Mystery Cycle*, 2:44.

with its prayer of thanksgiving for victory in a battle never seen which leads in to a proto-eucharistic celebration with the King of Salem looks less like the dramatization of new material but the combination of separate dramatic works.

Could there have been a play detailing Abraham's rescue of Lot and subsequent meeting with Melchizedek? Though this tale remains un-dramatized in England outside of Chester, there are certainly grounds for speculation. A dramatic work which detailed the elements found in the heading could be of sufficient length to warrant a separate play. Furthermore, Abraham's initial prayer of thanksgiving seems adrift without a glimpse of the preceding action it describes. The stage direction, "Abraham, having restored his brother Loth into his owne place, doth first of all begin the play" gives yet another place for beginning the play and hints at actions which could have comprised another entire section.

Finally, the presence of Melchizedek in the middle of the action strikes a discordant note. Clopper contends that Melchizedek was incorporated into the play during Henry VIII's 1530s Reformation as a dramatic type of the king as head of church and state.¹³⁴ Mills, however, shows in his *Recycling the Cycle* that Melchizedek figures significantly in the *Stanzaic Life* upon which Chester draws, and his character must be expected in a scene which prefigures the Lord's Supper, especially given Melchizedek's place in the English Sarum Rite.¹³⁵ The dramatic action of the Mass, modern or medieval, leads up to the consecration of the host which Melchizedek's offering of bread and wine is shown to prefigure. As the final scene in a play, this prefiguration invests itself with

¹³⁴ Clopper, *Drama, Play, and Game*, 185.

¹³⁵ Mills, *Recycling the Cycle*, 163.

some echo of the priest's elevation of the host. Placed in the middle of the action, the climax becomes merely an episode. Certainly the Expositor, if he is meant to take the audience "out of the scene" here helps to diffuse this dramatic moment, and the problematic nature of such a Catholic climax. Such diffusion would have become necessary after Edward banned the Mass in 1547, and the presence of the Expositor may date from his reign.

Documentary evidence seems only to occlude the matter further. No evidence of a missing play presents itself in guild or city records, but several peculiarities regarding the Barbers' guild do present themselves. The first of these is anachronistic, but telling: in 1613 or -14 the Tallow-Chandlers sent a letter of grievance to Mayor William Aldersay against their fellow guildmates, the Barbers. Among other things, they mention that the Barbers do not stand attendance with them before the mayor on holy days and "leaves vs. beinge few in nomber, to our greate greiffe."¹³⁶ Although the date of this complaint makes any connection to cycle revision anachronistic, it does provide insight into the internal relations of the guild who produced this play.

In point of fact, the only documentary evidence for the Melchizedek portion of this play occurs in the late Banns.¹³⁷ The White Book record from c. 1539 lists the Barbers and Chandlers assigned to "Abram & Isack," and those banns only mention this portion of the play.¹³⁸ The 1500 list of guilds in procession mentions the barbers, but the

¹³⁶ Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills, *REED: Cheshire*, 1:394.

¹³⁷ "In decent sorte sett out, the story is fine/The offering of Melchesadecke of bread & wine." Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills, *REED: Cheshire*, 1:335.

¹³⁸ "The barbers and wax chaundlers also that day/Of the patriarche you shall play/Abraham that putt wa to Assay/To sley Isack his sonne." Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills, *REED: Cheshire*, 1:83.

chandlers not at all.¹³⁹ Economic necessity could have forced these two guilds to combine, and if the chandlers' situation at the beginning of the seventeenth century resembles at all their status at the beginning of the sixteenth, then we may see in them the poor cousins to the barbers: tolerated but not equal.

At this point the questions begin to proliferate. If the Chandlers joined the Barbers for economic reasons when did it happen? Did they bring with them a dramatic work the remnants of which were attached to the Barbers' Abraham and Isaac play? What effect, if any, did the 1538 injunctions forbidding candles before images have on the fortunes of the Chester Chandlers' guild?¹⁴⁰ What made the composer of the post-Reformation banns include mention of Melchizedek where the previous banns omit it? Further inquiry would require a closer inspection of the Barbers' Company Book, now in the Chester archives. Understanding the fortunes of this guild and its two constituent trades over the course of the sixteenth century may shed further light on the composite nature of their cycle play. Whether or not the light of history might illuminate the genealogy of this patchwork play, its constituent nature resembles that of the Coventry *Shearmen and Taylors Pageant* without the benefit of the masterful editor that play so clearly enjoyed. An Akedah needlessly lengthened by material from another Abraham and Isaac play; the insertion of mediating figures Expositor and Gobet-on-the-Green; stage directions that reference missing scenes or absent characters; the theologically important Melchizedek dealt with hastily and his significance mediated through an interpreter--the only organizing principle

¹³⁹ Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills, *REED: Cheshire*, 1:65.

¹⁴⁰ Duffy: "The Injunctions of 1538 are...dismissive of the traditional cultus. The people were to be exhorted to works of charity, mercy, and faith, which alone are prescribed in scripture, 'and not to repose their trust and affiance in any other works devised by men's phantasies beside Scripture; as in wandering to pilgrimages, offering of money, candles or tapers to images or relics, or kissing or licking the same, saying over a number of beads, not understood or minded on.'" *The Stripping of the Altars*, 407.

under which this play operates seems to be that of proximity. Whatever hand guided the careful selection of parts at Coventry seems to be absent here and if we cannot know the level of discord within the Chandlers' and Barbers' guild, their text seems to be at war with itself.

4.2 Balaam and the Cappers

If discord, or at least poor editorial control of revision, marks the fourth play in the cycle, the fifth suggests changes resulting from the popularity of Balaam and his ass as theatrical characters. The Cappers' play, existing as it does in two different versions with alternate passages, should provide an excellent case study in revision, but such a study is hampered by our lack of concrete dating for much of the relevant textual evidence. Each version of the play comes from the great antiquarian collections which preserved the cycle at the turn of the seventeenth century, making it close to impossible to determine which version follows the other. Nonetheless, when examined in reference to the civic records provided by REED, the form of these plays give some clear ideas about what kind of may have gone on during the life of the play.

The play of the Cappers and Pinner, called in Rogers' Breviary "King Balack and Balaam with Moyses," appears in each of the five cyclic manuscripts containing the Chester plays.¹⁴¹ The play itself deals first with God's giving of the Ten Commandments to Moses and then moves on to the story (unique in the extant English cycles) of King Balak of Moab's attempt to defeat the Israelites by having the prophet Balaam curse them as related in Numbers 22-23. Four of these manuscripts (what Lumiansky and Mills call

¹⁴¹ These are traditionally designated 1) *Hm*: Huntington MS 2, 2) *A*: British Museum Additional 10305, 3) *R*: Harley 2013, 4) *B*: Bodley 175, and 5) *H*: Harley 2124.

“the Group”) contain a roughly similar version of this play, but H contains something different.¹⁴² Philip McCaffrey explains the differences thus:

The two versions of Chester V are almost the same length (448 vs. 455 lines) but each includes 176 lines, about 40 percent, that are not duplicated in the other. The most obvious difference between the two versions occurs in their third sections. In both versions the first part of the pageant concerns Moses' Giving of the Law while the second part presents the story of the prophet Balaam. But in the third section of one version (call it the Historical Version), the story of Balaam is continued into its sequel in chronological order. In the other version (the Prophets Version), Old Testament prophets appear in succession and predict New Testament events.¹⁴³

What McCaffrey calls the Historical Version appears in the larger number of manuscripts and ends with Balaam's advice to Balak, after the former fails to curse the Israelites, that the Moabite king:

Send forth woomen of thy contrye—
 Namely, those that bewtyfull bee—
 And to thy enimyys let them drawe nye,
 As stales to stand them before. (352-55)¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² Lumiansky and Mills, *Essays and Documents*, 11.

¹⁴³ Philip McCaffrey, “Chester's ‘Balaam and Balak’: An Example of Responsible Revision,” *Ball State University Forum* 24, no. 4 (Fall 1983), 55-56.

¹⁴⁴ Lumiansky and Mills, *Chester Mystery Cycle*, 1:93.

A “Doctor” appears, narrating the results of this stratagem and then announcing to the audience the contents of the next pageant in the cycle. The other version, what McCaffrey calls the Prophets version, ends not with Balaam’s stratagem but with his prophecy of the Messiah, followed by an English *processus prophetarum* with each Old Testament figure accompanied by an expositor who expounds the meaning of each prophecy in turn. A further difference between the two texts lies in Balack’s first speech. The Group MSS contain an additional section of about 40 lines which, Lumiansky and Mills feel, represents an alternate speech for the Moabite king.¹⁴⁵

These differences in organization correspond, Mills argues, with differences of theme and action with the Historical version focusing on obedience highlighted by ridicule of the central characters while the Prophets version emphasizes revelation with the comic catastrophe (or euchatastrophe, to quote Tolkien) of Balaam and his ass leading to his embrace of the role of true prophet of God.¹⁴⁶ McCaffrey sees both versions of the play developing the same theme “Israel’s moral greatness and the success of God’s Old Testament plan” with different emphasis: the Prophets version “underscores the spiritual prosperity of the Israelites” while the Historical version focuses on their “moral vulnerability” and their “spiritual accomplishment” in surviving (not unscathed) the temptation of the Moabites.¹⁴⁷ While these assessments help to illuminate the place of the Cappers’ play (in either incarnation) in the larger context of the cycle manuscript, I

¹⁴⁵ Lumiansky and Mills, *Essays and Documents*, 16-17.

¹⁴⁶ David Mills, “The Two Versions of Chester Play V: *Balaam and Balak*,” in *Chaucer and Middle English Studies in Honor of Russell Hope Robbins*, ed. Beryl Rowland (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1974), 366–71.

¹⁴⁷ McCaffrey, “Responsible Revision,” 59-60.

would like here to examine the differences in the text in light of what we know about the history of the Cappers' relationship with civic drama in sixteenth-century Chester.

The first mention of the Cappers' play comes from a petition by that guild to Mayor David Middleton in 1523-24. In that document the Cappers claim that they by "the right worshipfull Thomas Smythe in tyme of hys Mairealtie were onerated & charged to brynge forthe A play concernynge the store of kyng balak and Balam the proffet."¹⁴⁸ Since, as Lumiansky and Mills note, Smith served as mayor in 1504-5, 1511-12, 1515-16, 1520-21, and 1521-22, it seems fair to say that the Cappers first received their play in the first two decades of the sixteenth century.¹⁴⁹ While we cannot be sure, the language of the petition ("brynge forthe A play concernynge") suggests that this was a new play added to an already existing cycle, and while other guilds have records indicating their involvement in civic drama dating to the early 15th century, some change in fortunes or position must have put the Cappers in the position to produce their own play.

If the Cappers created their own play, what did it look like? Since neither version can be identified as first, we must rely on the evidence of the records. In this case, our two closest records in time are the aforementioned petition of 1523-24 and the text of the early banns which date from sometime before 1521. Referring to this play the banns instruct:

The Cappers and Pynners forth shall bring

Balack, that fears and mightie kyng,

¹⁴⁸ Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills, *REED: Cheshire*, 1:69–70.

¹⁴⁹ Lumiansky and Mills, *Essays and Documents*, 171–72.

And Balam on an asse sytting;

Look that this be done.

These instructions raise a discrepancy and a similitude. First, whereas the banns list both the Ccappers and the Pinnerers as responsible for the play, the later petition does not mention the Pinnerers at all. This may be the result of the Pinnerers suffering less from the Mercers' monopoly than their Capper brethren, but it also could indicate that the Cappers bore the lion's share of responsibility (and expense) for producing the play. What is similar about the two records of the play is the focus on the two characters of Balaam and Balak. The point may be obvious, but in a play whose text includes Moses receiving the Ten Commandments and, in one version, a procession of famous Old Testament prophets, an absence of reference is worth noting. Moses and the Decalogue, easily a more theologically important episode in Old Testament history and exegesis, merits not even a mention in either of these early documents: both announcement and petition identify the play by two main characteristics: the connection to the Cappers and the presence of the two characters who form its central episode.

The language of the Banns is most telling. Lumiansky and Mills have noted that the language of the early banns focuses on the "selling points" of the coming shows:

[T]he fundamental purpose of the exercise was to create high expectations for the coming performance among the people gathered to hear the banns.

Thus in the main body of the document (lines 17-147) the reciter

emphasizes what the author considered the most attractive and appealing aspects of each guild's coming performance.¹⁵⁰

What seems “attractive and appealing” about the Cappers’ play can be seen in this description of coming attractions. Balak is described as a “fears and mightie king” suggesting a nature akin to the famous raging Herod. If we take that character’s example, then a histrionic performance of Balak must have been a crowd-pleaser, one best filled by the alternative second speech in the Group MSS:

But yet I truste venged to bee
 With dynte of sword or pollicye
 On these false losells, leaves mee.
 LEEVE this withowten dowbte,
 For to bee wroken is mt desyre;
 My heart brennys as whott as fyre
 For vervent anger and for ire,
 Till this bee brought abowte. (v.124-31)¹⁵¹

Such language asks for an overblown performance and would have answered aptly the banns’ request for a fierce and mighty king. The alternate passage, presented alone in H but present in the other MSS, offers a very different Balak:

Therefore how I will wroken bee
 I am bethought, as mote I thee:

¹⁵⁰ Lumiansky and Mills, *Essays and Documents*, 179.

¹⁵¹ Lumiansky and Mills, *Chester Mystery Cycle*, 1:84.

Balaham shall come to mee,
That people for to curse.

Noe knife nor sworde maye not avayle
That ylke people to assayle.
That foundes to fight, hee shall fayle,
For sycker yt is noe boote. (v. 108-15)¹⁵²

This Balak is a thinker and a plotter, not a strutting tyrant, and it seems fair to guess that whatever else was included in the Cappers' first version of their play, it included more of the former type of the Moabite king than the latter. If this is the case, the thinking Balak lines must be a later addition. The late banns support this assumption, though only negatively, for they make no mention of Balak's nature:

Cappers and Lynen-drapers see that ye forthe bringe
In well decked order that worthie storye
Of Balaam and his Asse and of Balaacke the kinge.
Make the Asse to speake, and sett hit out lyvelye. (85-88)¹⁵³

Where the early banns present the two "attractions" on an equal footing (the fierce Balak and Balaam on his ass), this text mentions the king almost in passing: the focus is on Balaam and the speaking ass. The popularity of these characters was such that they appeared, with other famous characters from the cycles, in the Midsummer Show.¹⁵⁴

Such popularity suggests that during the years between the inception of the Cappers' play

¹⁵² Lumiansky and Mills, *Chester Mystery Cycle*, 1:83.

¹⁵³ Lumiansky and Mills, *Essays and Documents*, 288-89.

¹⁵⁴ Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills, *REED: Cheshire*, 1:281.

at the beginning of the sixteenth century and the final performance of the cycle in 1575, the Cappers must have realized that their biggest draw was Balaam and his ass and consequently focused most of their attention on it. This could explain the presence of the two Balak speeches: the first presenting a raging Balak modeled on the raging Herod the Cappers would have seen in the Goldsmith's play, the second reducing the choler of the Balak character so as not to draw attention away from the "stars" of the show.¹⁵⁵

If Balaam and Balak began and remained the main attraction of the Cappers' play, the other sections of the play remain more mysterious. Of these sections, the Moses section is present, though not identical in both versions. We know that God's presentation of the Ten Commandments to Moses was a part of the cycle once it changed from a one-day performance on Whitsunday to a three-day performance on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday of the following week thanks to the *Breviary* of Robert Rogers, Archdeacon of St. Werburgh's in Chester. The *Breviary* dates late (Rogers died in 1595 and his son David collected and added to his work some 15 to 20 years later), but it does mention the lists of guilds and their plays, ascribing to the "Cappers, Wyerdrawers, and Pynners" a play called King Balack and Balaam with Moyses."¹⁵⁶ This echoes the language of an undated guild list from the mid-sixteenth century, so it seems reasonable to believe that the "Moyses" section was part of the play from at least the change of dates, and possibly before. The language of these references is interesting in two ways. First, the equal treatment given to both Balaam and Balak echoes that given to the characters in the early banns. (The late banns, by contrast, focus mostly on Balaam.) Second, both documents

¹⁵⁵ The Goldsmiths seem to have had their play of Herod and the slaughter of the innocents before 1500 (see Lumiansky and Mills, *Essays and Documents*, 174).

¹⁵⁶ Lumiansky and Mills, *Essays and Documents*, 264.

include Moses in the same way: almost as an afterthought. The language might be coincidental if the text of the play itself did not undercut the story of Moses in a similar way.

Both versions of the Cappers' play spend less than a hundred lines on the story of Moses, but they do so in slightly different ways. The Group version begins with God's address to Moses and the Israelites, followed by a presentation of the Ten Commandments. Moses thanks God and presents the Decalogue to the Israelites. At this point a Doctor steps in and relates how Moses broke the tablets because the people "honored mawmentrye" (v.54). God appears and commands Moses to carve the tablets again. Moses does so and then addresses the Israelites with a short meditation on the third commandment and tithing before yielding the stage to King Balak.

The H version begins similarly, but instead of Moses, the first to speak after God delivers the Commandments is a character called Princeps Synagogae, voicing the people's fear of God. Moses tells the people not to fear and shows them the Commandments. Princeps expresses wonder at Moses' changed countenance (from the presence of God) and Moses provides the meditation which ends his section of the Group play. At this point, an Expositor character steps in and finishes the story. Both versions express a direct connection to the audience. God's first words address Moses and the Israelites:

Moyses , my servant leeffe and dere,
 And all my people that bine here,
 Yee wotten in Egipte when ye weare
 Out of thraldome I you brought. (1-4)¹⁵⁷

God's reference to "all my people that bine here" was probably directed to the audience, thus identifying them with the Israelites waiting at the base of Mount Sinai. The Balaam and Balak section of the play maintains this connection as Balak shows the reluctant prophet the encampment of the Israelites

Lo, Balaham, now thow seest here
 Godes people all in feare.
 Citty, castle, and ryvere—
 Looke now. How lykes thee? (272-75)¹⁵⁸

Balak's description trades on locality, pointing out the most prominent geographical features of medieval Chester (its castle, town, and the river Dee) in place of the tents of the traveling Israelites. Such anachronism is a trademark of the cycle plays, of course, but the contiguous designation of the audience across both sections works to harmonize them, as do the Latin stage directions which orient the characters around the *mons* which seems to have been the central feature of the Cappers' wagon.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷ Lumiansky and Mills, *Chester Mystery Cycle*, 1:79.

¹⁵⁸ Lumiansky and Mills, *Chester Mystery Cycle*, 1:90.

¹⁵⁹ Moses, of course, addresses his people *in monte* (v.32+SD) as well as hewing the stone tablets from it (v.80+SD), but Balak is supposed to enter and ride up to the mountain (v.95+SD), presumably on horse through the audience, and Balaam prophesies from its northern face (v.303+SD).

These harmonizing features do much to bridge what feels like a fissure in the text. The doctor/expositor character in the Moses section specifically calls attention to a gap in the story being portrayed on stage:

Lordings, this commandement
 Was the firste lawe that ever God sent;
 X poyntes there bine—takes intent—
 That moste effecte ys in.
 But all that storye for to fonge
 To playe this moneth yt were to longe.
 Therefore most fruitfull ever amonge
 Shortly wee shall myn. (41-48)¹⁶⁰

The language in the H text is not much different, and the apologetic tone makes an excuse to an audience expecting more. This feeling is reinforced by the beginning of the play which simply starts into the giving of the Ten Commandments with no real prologue to speak of. As in play iv, discussed above, what could have been the central moment of a story has been reduced here to a preparatory to the main action of Balaam and Balak. Despite the fact that at least some of the MSS (HmAR) specifically designate the play “*de Moyses et de lege sibi data.*”

If at some point the fifth play did deal exclusively with Moses and the Law, then it seems likely that the Cappers either inherited a Moses play (perhaps from the Pinners or Linendrawers) which they truncated into their own play. The centrality of the mountain-stage may even denote the re-use of older properties as the Cappers worked

¹⁶⁰ Lumiansky and Mills, *Chester Mystery Cycle*, 1:81

stitched their new play onto the materials (both textual and physical) already on hand. This would explain both the misleading designation in the majority of manuscripts and the necessity of an explanation from an expositor. The Moses tale seems to have been a part, at least of the text, until the very end of the cycles, since Christopher Goodman's one complaint against the play seems to reference the Moses section.¹⁶¹ But, what once might have been a play evenly divided in two may have gradually become more lopsided as the popularity of the Balaam/Balak episode increased. It may be that in the differences in the Group and H versions of this section we can detect two layers of this truncation with the Group manuscripts presenting Moses' return to the mountain for a second time, an action merely narrated by the Expositor in the H version.¹⁶²

Where the Moses section of the Cappers' play suggests a connection to earlier versions of the Chester plays, the final section of each version points towards development after the plays changed to a three-day performance in the 1520s. Both versions end with an expositor informing the audience of plays to come, but the Group expositor is the more specific:

And by this prophecye, leeve yee mee,
 Three kings, as yee shall played see,
 Honored at his nativitye

¹⁶¹ Goodman objects to "The Ark called a Shrine" which seems to reference the Group-expositor's line concerning the Tables of the Law: "The which tables shryned were/after, as God can Moyses leare; /and that shryne to him was deare/ thereafter evermore" (See Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills, *REED: Cheshire*, 1:147 and Lumiansky and Mills, *Chester Mystery Plays*, 1:81).

¹⁶² See lines 73-88 in the H text, Lumiansky and Mills, *Chester Mystery Cycle*, 1: 468. The Princeps Synagogae character may also reflect a later addition to the text. His lines, intended as guides for the feelings of the audience/Israelites, stress repeatedly the majesty and sovereignty of God: an important element of Protestant theology. Yet the nature of the character as a "Prince of the Synagogue," while not overtly Roman, certainly may have suggested such a connection with costuming that would have been troublesome in the late performances.

Christe when hee was borne.
 Now, worthye syrs both great and smale,
 Here have wee shewed this storye before;
 And yf hit bee pleasinge to you all,
 Tomorrow nexte yee shall have more

By contrast, the H Expositor only details the next play:

And by these prophecies leave you me,
 Three kings, as you shall played see,
 Presented at his Nativitye
 Christ when he was borne.

The Group-version explicitly indicates a multi-day performance where the H-version does not, implying a post-1520 date for the Group-version text. This does not, however, completely resolve the matter. The use of the word “prophecye” (singular in the Group-version, plural in H) must, in context refer to a prophecy of the Nativity. Balaam does indeed prophesy the coming of the Messiah in the Group-version, but that occurs before the story of the Moabite women nearly a hundred lines previous. The “prophecies” spoken of in the H-version have just occurred as Balaam seems to summon the Old Testament prophets to appear before King Balak to speak of the coming Christ.¹⁶³ On comparison, the Group-version mention of prophecy looks disconnected and nonsensical.

¹⁶³ How the other prophets appear is not completely clear, but a Latin stage direction instructs the Balaam-actor: “Tunc Balaam ad caelum respiciens prophetando.” Balaam’s messianic prophecy follows and from thence to Isaiah and the others with each prophet followed by a brief interpretation from the Expositor. If the instruction to Balaam to return his gaze “ad caelum” is any indication, then the prophets probably appeared on the upper stage level; the “heaven” from whence God usually speaks, with the Expositor on the middle stage or possibly the platea before the cart.

Since the entire Balaam/Balack story deals with prophecy, the inclusion of other prophets is consonant with the theme and would have been a logical inclusion for a group trying to pad out a play suddenly granted extra time by spreading the plays out over three days. It's possible that the guild over-reached itself with this additional spectacle; it would certainly help explain the 1523 petition. This reading makes the Moabite-women episode look very much like a patch over a section removed in years when the guild could not collect sufficient actors (or, as the petition suggests, funds) to present the succession of prophets called for in the H-version. If so, these two texts could have existed contemporaneously, each retrieved, altered, and performed as that year's resources permitted. This would also explain the discrepancy between compilers as different antiquarians got hold of one or the other versions to include in their cycle texts.

What emerges, therefore, in a study of these two versions is the impression of multiple influences rather than a single reviser. As Balak's role (or the actor playing him) changed, his speeches changed as well. The play shrunk or expanded as the pageant-master found men and funds to perform it. Where Mills and McCaffrey want to see an individual reviser pursuing specific thematic or theological goals, it seems more likely that the differences seen in these texts represent the work of many hands and minds returning again and again to a popular piece of drama they attempted to produce in the best way they could.

CHAPTER 5. LET ME NOT PLAY A WOMAN

Copious evidence in guild and city account books points to men or boys taking the female roles in the cycle plays, but there are female roles and female roles. While the comic women like Noah's wife or biblical characters like the mothers of the Innocents seem to have survived the coming of the Reformation intact, those aspects of the plays dealing with Mary, especially in her apocryphal role as Mother of the Church, did not fare so well. The Chester Wives' Guild had a play called *The Assumption of the Virgin* that seems to have completely disappeared sometime in the middle of the century. The city of Norwich, as far as we can tell, never had an Assumption play, but it did have a play about the fall of man with, as will be shown below, a very different view of Eve than the corresponding plays in other cycles. This chapter considers that play, with special attention paid to the first of the two surviving play texts and the changes that seem to have affected it. The Norwich Eve appears in a play about the Fall of Man that goes out of its way to elevate and exonerate her, re-writing the traditional story of Genesis to do so. The Norwich play is an example of how different a play can become and how that difference challenges efforts at revision, especially as they relate to religious change.

In his 2008 work, *Drama and Religion in English Provincial Society, 1485-1660*, Paul Whitfield White calls attention to the ways in which "Text A (1533) and Text B

(1565) of the [Norwich] Grocers' pageant provide an extraordinary example of how an English cycle play underwent revision along reformed lines."¹ Citing especially Text B's appeals to the Bible as its source, focus on Adam and Eve's conjugal relationship, and resemblance to contemporary Protestant interludes, White concludes that "Text B turns the traditionally tragic story of the Fall into a marriage-affirming comedy of sin and redemption."²

While I agree with White's assessment of the differences between the two texts, I argue here that those differences are of such magnitude as to justify viewing the 1565 text not as a revision but as an entirely new play. A close examination of the fragmentary A text, which, as far as I can tell has never been attempted, shows a pageant much like others in this study: strata of composition indicative of multiple writers or revisers. Text B, on the other hand, presents a play unified in theme, almost certainly the work of a single mind, with a clearly Protestant message and a capacity to stand on its own outside of the cycle format. The two surviving Norwich Grocers' pageants, therefore, represent a kind of high-water mark for the process of revision. As has been shown, revision at the guild level could accommodate changes in economy, in guild fortunes, in popular taste, even (as has been argued with the Chester Expositor) in religion. For towns like Norwich, there seems to have been a point past which revision simply could not sufficiently change a pageant to meet the tastes of its civic audience or the needs of its producers. Sometime between 1533 and 1565, the Grocers decided that their old play was no longer viable and substituted a new one complete with its own constructed history. What exactly was the

¹ Paul Whitfield White, *Drama and Religion in English Provincial Society, 1485-1660*, 83.

² White, *Drama and Religion*, 88.

problem with the old play? Speculation can be dangerous, but several aspects of the old Grocers' play resonate so strongly with the religious life of late medieval Norwich that Protestant sensibilities must have required a more categorical change than could be accomplished with textual revision. The Norwich A-text was, at some level, simply too medieval to exist in Reformation England, and evidence in the text suggests that the producers of the play had a hand in making it so.

The assertion that the two Grocers' plays from Norwich are in fact two versions of the same play has been a part of the (admittedly small) literature on the works since their discovery. Our lack of an extant manuscript complicates matters considerably.³ According to Osborn Waterhouse, Davis' editorial predecessor on the plays, the texts were taken from the now lost *Grocers' Book* begun in 1533. Waterhouse, who had access only to a transcript from that book, refers to "the version of the play in use in 1533" directly following the opening of the book, and "the second version of the play," on the sixth folio and following.⁴ Whether the first and second texts abut each other or were separated by intervening material cannot be known, the connection between the two texts

³ For a history of the now-vanished MS, see Norman Davis, *Non-Cycle Plays and Fragments*, xxii-vi.³

⁴ Davis, *Non-Cycle Plays and Fragments*, xxiv. According to Davis, Waterhouse used an eighteenth-century transcript housed at the Muniment room at Norwich Castle and first noticed missing when the Records Office moved from that room to the Norwich Central Library in 1962. Davis records a note from the Norwich archivist (he neglects to mention a name) sent to him that same year in response to Davis' inquiry:

The eighteenth-century transcript of the medieval Norwich Grocers' Play was never *officially* in the Muniment Room at the Castle Museum. In the early years of this century this Muniment Room was quite a rendezvous for Norfolk antiquarians, and no doubt they produced manuscripts to show each other. It is known that this transcript was in the possession of the antiquarian Robert Fitch who edited it in an early number of *Norfolk Archaeology*. The Castle Museum at present has possession of the 'Robert Fitch Collection' and I am satisfied that this transcript is not among the collection today. The 'Walter Rye Collection' is in the Norwich Public Library, it is fully listed and calendared and I can assure you that the transcript is not in this collection either. (Davis, xxiii)

Davis' edition of the text is based on his collation of Waterhouse's edition with that of Fitch.

seems immediate and obvious. Grammatical features also suggest a similarity, though rhyme schemes differ between the two texts.⁵ For most scholars, however, proximity of space and subject has led to the reasonable conclusion that the two texts are as close genetically as they appear to have been codicologically; that is, the anonymous transcriber of the two texts simply recorded the two plays as they appeared in the manuscript and that the second play was built up, as it were, atop the ruins of the first.⁶ I call that conclusion into question here not to advance a new nomenclature of these two plays but to highlight certain textual differences between the two which seem to have been overlooked. Reading the two texts as successive versions of the same play creates a temporal relationship heightened by their apparent religious affiliations. If instead we approach these texts as two treatments of the same story by different authors, their incompatibility becomes readily apparent.

5.1 Word and Wisdom

Text A of the Norwich Grocers' Play begins with a curious prescript: "The Story of the Creacion of Eve, with the expellyng of Adam and Eve out of Paradyce." Why Eve? The lost MS makes it impossible to tell if the description dates with the play or represents the addition of a later scribe. How much later is also a matter of guesswork, though the

⁵ "The two texts differ in the metrical structure of their lines. Text A is written in lines of the 'fifteenth-century heroic' type . . . Text B in its first prologue apparently begins in the same metre; but from the second stanza the lines become longer and move as rough alexandrines . . . This metre continues in the second prologue and throughout the play except for the song at the end." Davis, *Non-Cycle Plays and Fragments*, xxxvi and ff.

⁶ As of this writing, the genetic connection between the two texts is often assumed. In addition to White's discussion of the two versions mentioned above, the connection can be seen in anthologies and articles written in the past twenty years. Discussing the play in *Early English Drama: An Anthology*, Coldewey speaks of the "two versions of the text" preserved by the transcription, and Maureen Fries' 2002 article on the various Eves of medieval drama (like White, Fries concerns herself primarily with the second text) also calls the two texts "versions." See John C. Coldewey, ed. *Early English Drama: An Anthology* (New York: Garland, 1993), 151; and Maureen Fries, "The Evolution of Eve in Medieval French and English Religious Drama," *Studies in Philology* 99, no. 1 (Winter, 2002), 15.

spelling of "creacion" and "paradyce" conform to pre-17th century examples in the Oxford English Dictionary.⁷ Regardless of the date, the nomenclature is singular. A play-heading to the corresponding Chester pageant reads "Pagina Secunda de Creatione Mundi et Adam et Eva, be eorumque Tentatione," recording the main action of the play ("the creation of the world and Adam and Eve, and the temptation of the same," translation mine) in the neat summary spirit of the antiquary who prepared the text (in this case the H manuscript).⁸ The N-town MS has no headings, but begins with the creation of the world as Chester does. York's five plays covering the creation of the world, the creation of Adam and Eve, their introduction to Eden, Fall, and subsequent expulsion have but two prescripts (on the Eden play and the Expulsion play): notes from the scribe delineating the status of the texts as reginals.⁹ No other play specifically marks itself as an Eve-creation story in this way and the unusual nature of this classification is even more pronounced when set beside the prescript for the second Grocers' text:

The Storye of the Temptacion of Man in Paradyce, being therin placyd, and the expellynge of Man and Woman from thence, newly renvid and accordynge unto the Skripture, begun thys yere Anno 1565, Anno 7. Eliz.¹⁰

The grammar of this second summary neatly reverses that of the first, prioritizing temptation over creation and man (as in "Man and Woman") over Eve (as in "Adam and Eve"). Here too lies the clearest impetus towards viewing text B as a revision of A: the word "renvid." Again I appeal to the construction of the sentence to note that this

⁷ *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. "paradise" <http://www.oed.com/> (accessed February 20, 2013).

⁸ R.M. Lumiansky and David Mills, *Chester Mystery Cycle*, 1:13.

⁹ Richard Beadle, *The York Plays*, 19, 29.

¹⁰ Davis, *Non-Cycle Plays and Fragments*, 11.

summary tells us that the “story” is the thing renewed and that, “according to the Scripture.” From what we shall see below, it is quite possible that the Protestant playwright who wrote B did see himself as renewing the story, in the sense of returning it to its Biblical roots.

There are, in fact, two curious parts to this prescript, the first of which is the prepositional phrase that makes up its latter half. The word "with" may denote the redaction of what was once two now-lost plays: one on the creation of Eve and another on the fall and expulsion on a scale closer to York's minute divisions. Since only 90 lines of this text survive and the historic documents in Norwich are yet forthcoming from REED, determining the likelihood of two plays is difficult. Indeed, there may not have been two plays at all, but perhaps a play in conjunction with a dumb-show pageant featuring a tableau of the expulsion from Paradise. I see no reason to doubt Joanna Dutka's argument that the pageants divvied up by the St. Luke's Guild in 1527 consisted of both plays proper and pageants in the sense of non-dramatic spectacles.¹¹ If, as Dutka suggests, the Grocers had the option of either adopting an old script or writing a new one, then the one they entered in their records in 1533 may have been a combination of new and old material or new drama based on old spectacle. The pageant which the list from *Old Free Book* calls "Paradyce," may thus have combined together different parts of the creation story represented either in plays or pageants in earlier processions sponsored by the St. Luke's Guild.

¹¹ Joanna Dutka, "Mystery Plays at Norwich: Their Formation and Development," *Leeds Studies in English* 10 (1978), 110.

Ultimately, the first half of the prescript provides the more interesting detail, for it calls the play beneath it a story on the "Creacion of Eve," which returns us to the original question: why Eve? No other extant English creation play singles out in prefatory description the mother of humanity as the central character of the play. How the play fulfills the promise of its heading, what that means to the city of Norwich, and how the second text for the play completely abandoned the character of its original will be the focus of the following section.

Text A proper begins, like so many of the Genesis-derived pageants, with God. But God's first words on stage set a tone for the pageant that separates it from similar pageants in the other cycles:

Ego principium Alpha et O in altissimis habito:

In the hevenly empery I am resident.¹²

God's first half line, "Ego principiam Alpha et O," resembles the opening Latin lines in other pageants: the Towneley "Creation" begins "Ego sum alpha et o," as does the York *Barkeres Playe* and the Chester *Tanneres Playe*. The latter half of the line is another matter, however. God declares "in altissimis habito," an appropriate statement, considering the character apparently begins in Heaven and presumably descends from thence seven lines later: "Into Paradyce I will nowe descende" (9).¹³ yet it does not complete the famous couplet as Chester and N-town do: "*Ego sum alpha et oo, principium et finis.*"¹⁴ following the example of St. John's Apocalypse in the Vulgate: *ego*

¹² Davis, *Non-Cycle Plays and Fragments*, 8.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ This from Stephen Spector, *The N-Town Play*, 21. Chester's *Drapers' Play* begins similarly, "Ego sum alpha et omega, primus et novissimus," See Lumiansky and Mills, *The Chester Mystery Cycle*, 13.

*sum a et ω principium et finis.*¹⁵ *In altissimis habito* does also begin York's one-man play of the creation (#2; the *Playsterers*') but the line appears nowhere else in the extant corpus of English cycle drama. The Norwich line, like the heading, may be a relic of redaction, but though the use of the individual line in York deserves consideration, I will here consider the origin of the phrase itself specifically for its consequences in this "Creacion of Eve."

Ultimately, the line is an adaptation of Sirach 24:4--*ego in altis habitavi et thronus meus in columna nubis*, "I dwelt in the highest places, and my throne is in a pillar of cloud." In the biblical passage, it is not God who speaks but the female personification of Wisdom familiar from Solomon's Proverbs. She sings here a song praising herself and her place in creation:

Ego ex ore altissimi prodivi primogenita ante omnem creaturam. Ego in caelis feci ut oriretur lumen indeficiens et sicut nebula texi omnem terram. Ego in in altis habitavi et thronus meus in columna nubis.

I came out of the mouth of the most High, the firstborn of all creatures: I made that in the heavens there should rise light that never faileth, and as a cloud I covered all the earth: I dwelt in the highest places, and my throne is in a pillar of cloud.¹⁶

Interestingly, the Tanners' play on the fall of Lucifer, directly preceding the Drapers' also begins with these lines. Since the Tanners' play is missing from the earliest great collection of the plays (the Hm MS), it is possible that this Latin line represented God's opening of the pageant spectacle as a whole and could be appended to whichever play opened the cycle for that year.

¹⁵ Rev 22:13 From *Biblia Sacra Vulgata*, ed. Robert Weber and Roger Gyson, 5th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2007), 1905.

¹⁶ Translation taken from the Douay-Rheims.

Grafting a line from divine Wisdom onto the words of God echoes patristic commentary traditions on Sirach which connect Wisdom with Christ. The 5th century African bishop Fulgentius of Ruspe draws upon Sirach against Arians who denied Christ's divinity. Elaborating on Sirach 1:1 ("All wisdom comes from the Lord and it is with him forever") Fulgentius claims,

Therefore, rightly so, the Son affirms himself to be the beginning since he knows that he is coeternal with the Father from the beginning, just as he knows that he by nature is one single beginning with the same Father.¹⁷

This would help explain the use of the Sirach quote from the York play where God quotes Wisdom, who is the Word, who is Christ through whom the world is made. Yet Fulgentius' master Augustine distinguishes Wisdom-Word-Christ from a made Wisdom

[Who is] created before all things--not certainly that Wisdom that is clearly coeternal and equal to you, our God, his Father, and by whom all things were created and in whom, as the Beginning, you created heaven and earth. Rather, truly, it was that wisdom that has been created, namely, the intellectual nature that, in the contemplation of light, is light.¹⁸

It is this created Wisdom, this light of the intellect, who speaks her song of self-praise in Sirach 24 from which the Latin line derives. Both the York and Norwich texts thus present something of a theological tangle when they put the words of the created Wisdom into the timeless Creator's declaration about himself. If this is meant to suggest the creation of Wisdom as Augustine suggests, then the timing is off from Augustine's

¹⁷ From *Against Fabianus*. Excerpted and translated in Sever J. Voicu, ed., *Apocrypha*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture 15 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2010), 178.

¹⁸ Voicu, *Apocrypha*, 179.

assessment since presumably the earth has already been created. Theology may sometimes take a back seat to dramatic impulse in the cycles, but Wisdom's voice speaking, as it were, from God's mouth certainly raises questions about how this bit of Old Testament wisdom literature made its way into a play about the creation. That half-line of Latin, as it happens, has a significant connection to Marian piety both in England and on the Continent.

The liturgy, as with so much in the cycle plays, provides the most direct intermediary, and the line appears in antiphons for the summer Histories from the 10th century on.¹⁹ More specifically, the feast of Corpus Christi from its earliest attestations seems to have connected Christ to the feminine embodiment of Wisdom through the person of Mary. Discussing the lay breviaries called collectively the Mosan Psalters, Barbara Walters notes that *sapientia*, or divine wisdom, was highly prized as a feminine virtue within the lay community which embraced the new feast in thirteenth-century Liege: "Whereas men achieved knowledge through education, women achieved wisdom through the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The wisdom of Mary was esteemed most highly."²⁰ Walters shows that the new Corpus Christi antiphons connect Proverbs 9:1 ("Wisdom has built herself a house, she has erected her seven pillars") to the Eucharist for the first time in liturgical history, and the poems of the Mosan psalter in turn connect Wisdom to the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit through Mary:

O, virgin of righteousness who descended from Jesse,

¹⁹ See the wealth of exemplary antiphons for these masses at the Cantus database: <http://cantusdatabase.org/id/002576>

²⁰ Barbara R. Walters, Vincent Corrigan, and Peter T. Ricketts, eds, *The Feast of Corpus Christi* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 439.

Who gave birth to the flower in whom the Holy Spirit

Finds true rest, as Isaiah said,

And bloomed in you through the gift of seven parts

...

Grant to your servant to savor the taste
 Of the holiest fruit of whom you bore the flower.
 Enflame the heart of your servant by the heat
 Which comes down through the seven graces and by its ardor
 So that the flower of chastity may not wither in me
 Nor the flame of beneficent love die down.
 May my being and my thoughts, my existence and my words
 Be guided and directed by the spirit of knowledge,
 And my heart be filled by the spirit of piety
 So that I may remember your virtues both night and day.²¹

Mary, the second Eve, bears wisdom within her as she bears the Son of God, and while her Son brings life in the Eucharist, her *sapientia* brings understanding and virtue. So sang the female communities, lay and religious, of thirteenth century Belgium, and for Norwich, the most prosperous town in the center of Marian devotion in England, words of Wisdom may have had special significance for feminine piety.²² The York cycle may use the line in reference to creation, but Norwich uses it for an individual act of creation, Eve, who, as the mother of humanity, holds herself a special kind of *sapientia*. The

²¹ Walters, Corrigan, and Ricketts, *Feast of Corpus Christi*, 450.

²² Of East Anglia Gibson says: to the very eve of the English Reformation, the roads and streets and bridges of Suffolk and Norfolk thronged with men and women who were not only Mary's worshippers, but her pilgrims. These pilgrims journeyed to "England's Nazareth," the holy shrine at the village named Little Walsingham in the northwest corner of Norfolk, that had become by the fifteenth century not only the most important pilgrimage site in England but an international center of pilgrimage whose importance was probably rivaled only by Santiago de Compostela in Spain and by Rome itself. See Gail McMurray Gibson, *The Theater of Devotion: East Anglian Drama and Society in the Late Middle Ages* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1989), 139.

Sirach line does not so much change the act of creation as color it with something of the sacred feminine.

God's first line in English provides a loose translation of the curious second half of the Latin line: "In the heavenly empery I am resydent." The statement reinforces the image of height and sets up an image of God looking down over his creation. God makes his intentions clear in the next lines:

Yt ys not semely for man, *sine adjutorio*,
 To be allone, nor very conveyent.
 I have plantyd an orcheyard most congruent
 For him to kepe and to tylle, by contemplacion:
 Let us make an adjutory of our formacion
 To hys symylutude, lyke in plasmacion. (ll. 3-7)²³

God's purpose in these lines separates Norwich Text A from every other extant English cycle. God, having apparently returned to Heaven after the creation of Adam, looks down upon his creation and decides to create again. Biblically, this fits somewhere between verses 18-20 of Genesis 2:

And the Lord God said, "It is not good for man to be alone; let us make him a help like unto himself." And the Lord God having formed out of the ground all the beasts of the earth and all the fowls of the air, brought them to Adam to see what he would call them, for whatsoever Adam called any living creature, the same is its name. And Adam called all the beasts by

²³ Davis, *Non-Cycle Plays and Fragments*, 8.

their names and all the fowls of the air and all the cattle of the field, but for Adam there was not found a helper like himself.

Yet while the scriptural account provides this second creation, other pageants truncate the birth of humanity into a single play, often even into a single stanza directly after the creation of the beasts. While we do not see the animals in the text (though the descriptions of the pageant wagon suggest the presence at least of a griffon), this pageant seems to begin with Adam already present on the stage, perhaps enjoying the wonders of the paradise wagon. The creation of Adam, then, must have been handled by the lost "Creacion off the World" of the Mercers, Drapers, and Haberdashers.²⁴ No other extant English so divides the act of creation, which raises the question of why the Norwich guilds did so and when they did it.

5.2 Eve's Play

If the text or concept inherited by the Grocers from the St. Luke's Guild looked anything like the cycles in other towns, then the creation of the world or of Eden might well have occupied a separate pageant than the creation of the heavens and the fall of Lucifer. Since Text A does not provide the text for the creation of the world, the Grocers most likely received either a world-creation play and decided to truncate it or a fall of man play to which they added Eve's creation. God begins the play considering the necessity of Eve and, since the "Helle Carte" detailing (presumably) the fall of Lucifer passed between the creation of Adam and this scene in Paradise, the audience has literally been waiting for

²⁴ A list of the pageants played at Norwich comes from the volumes of Norwich City records and is dated from sometime in the first half of the sixteenth century: see Davis, *Non-Cycle Plays and Fragments*, xxvii-xxx.

the arrival of Eve as a consummation, and God's description of his descent into Paradise "With my mynysters angelicall" reinforces the importance of this last creative act.

These introductory lines do tie themselves close enough to Genesis 2 that the biblical text is arguably a primary source in composition. God's use of the phrase *sine adjutorio* quotes the Vulgate verbatim and translates the Latin four lines later with his desire to make for Adam an "adjutory." This aureate diction reinforces the text's indebtedness to the Latin Bible, but it also distinguishes itself from its successor text. Where text A uses "adjutory," Text B uses less ornate words like "helper" and "comforte" to refer to Eve. If text B is a revision, it has gone out of its way to hide the sources text A displays so brazenly. Despite B's claim that the play has been written "accordynge to the Scripture," the only bit of Latin evident in the play is God's first line: "I am *Alpha et Omega*, my *Apocalyps* doth testyfye."²⁵ Connecting the text instead to one of the English translations of the sixteenth century, the Great Bible of 1539 or the earlier Coverdale Bible of 1535, is an attractive alternative, but ultimately futile. Joanna Dutka has shown that B shows no sign of incorporating the phraseology from contemporary translations into its text.²⁶ Whatever source the B-text author used, the origin of the A text, the Vulgate, remains close to its surface.

This connection remains intact with Adam's salutation to the new-made Eve. His address is directed to God echoes the importance of God's act:

O my Lorde God, incomprehensyble, without mysse,
Ys thy hyghe excellent magnyficens.

²⁵ Davis, *Non-Cycle Plays and Fragments*, 13.

²⁶ Dutka, "Lost Dramatic Cycle," 6-7.

Thys creature to me *ys nunc ex ossibus meis*,

And *virago* I call hyr in thy presens,

Lyke onto me in natural preemynens.

Laude, honor, and glory to the I make.

Both father and mother man shall for hyr forsake. (ll. 17-23)²⁷

He hails her, as the Norwich B Adam does not, as *virago*, and recognizes her as "Lyke onto me in natural preemynens," acknowledging her status as another order of creation like himself. In addition to continuing to wear, as it were, its Vulgate heart on its sleeve, the text dwells on the status of both man and woman as "preeminent" together over the rest of creation. (Where are those animals? Do the actors simply gesture to the paradise-cart around them?) Text B's Adam, on the other hand, focuses on Eve's role:

Oh bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh eke,

Thow shalte be called Woman, bycaus thow art of me.

Oh gyfte of God most goodlye, that hath us made so lyke,

Most lovyng spouse, I muche do here rejoyce of the. (ll. 25-28)²⁸

The Adam of text A certainly calls Eve his spouse, though never his gift, but the idea of marriage undergirds the concept of man and woman in the B text where the A text establishes Adam and Eve first and foremost as rulers of creation.

What happens next can only be inferred due to the lack of stage directions, but it seems that Eve either wanders away from Adam or becomes engrossed in studying Paradise. Either way, when God prohibits eating from the "tre of connyng," he commands

²⁷ Davis, *Non-Cycle Plays and Fragments*, 8.

²⁸ Davis, *Non-Cycle Plays and Fragments*, 13–14.

Adam: "Showe thys to thy spowse nowe bye and bye," an admonition Adam promptly forgets, for when God has departed, he declares his intention to walk about Paradise.

Rather than warning Eve, he claims:

Nothyng may hurt us nor do us wronge;
 God ys owr protectour and soverayn guyde;
 In thys place non yll thyng may abyde. (ll. 52–54)²⁹

The following scene, of course, proves Adam dreadfully wrong, but his failure to warn Eve about the Tree of Knowledge after specifically being told to do so by God increases his culpability for the subsequent disaster. The other cycles handle this scene differently: in Chester, God warns Adam alone but does not instruct him to warn Eve; the York, Towneley and N-Town plays each have God warning the two together. Only Norwich contains an injunction to tell Eve. God's warning and Adam's failure to communicate that warning also points not only at a Vulgate-informed composition, but also a knowledge of patristic thought on the events in Paradise. Ambrose also noted Eve's absence:

[The Devil] aimed to circumvent Adam by means of the woman. He did not accost the man who had in his presence received the heavenly command. He accosted her who had learned of it from her husband and who had not received from God the command which was to be observed.

There is no statement that God spoke to the woman. We know that he

²⁹ Davis, *Non-Cycle Plays and Fragments*, 9.

spoke to Adam. Hence we must conclude that the command was communicated through Adam to the woman.³⁰

The Adam of Norwich A does not perform this essential communication. But the Adam of Norwich B does not need to, since God warns them together (ll. 19-20) before returning to Heaven.

When the Serpens character does confront Eve, she nonetheless seems aware of the prohibition: "Ne forte we shuld dye, and than be mortall; We may not towche yt, by Godes commandement" (ll. 59-60). The disconnection between Adam's failure to pass on God's prohibition to Eve and Eve's knowledge of the same indicates a likely site of revision. At some point, Eve has been told of the rule about the tree of knowledge. The question is when and by whom? She may overhear God speaking to Adam, but this is speculation and does not explain God's injunction to tell Eve. Neither does her presence at the first instance of the commandment explain Adam's own charge. The suspicion, therefore, lies on God's lines 31-40 as an addition, specifically targeted at Adam and seemingly with the intention of drawing blame towards him for failing in his husbandly duty to guide his wife.

At one point in the history of the text, perhaps Adam did pass on God's commandment to Eve, but its absence here breaks apart the traditional relationships in the chain of being. Adam's role as head of the Edenic household should make Eve's safety his responsibility, yet the act that would have shown him performing this duty has been excised from the text, along with any specifically patriarchal language; the only status-

³⁰ From *On Paradise*. Excerpted and translated in Andrew Louth, ed., *Genesis 1-11*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture 1 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 77.

language present in the text is that already-mentioned acknowledgement of equality:

"Lyke onto me in natural preemynens." However the Norwich pageant-makers intended for Eve to learn of the dangers of the Tree of Knowledge, the text highlights Adam's failure.

If that failure were only forgetfulness, Adam might well be excused. But his insistence to Eve that "non yll thyng" exists in Paradise sets her at a disadvantage when she at last confronts Serpens. Her suspicions are aroused, and she doubts Serpens' claim about the fruit, asking "For us than nowe what hold you best,/ That we do not owr God offende?" Serpens responds with a bald-faced lie unique among the surviving cycle-plays: "Eat of thys apple at my requeste./ To the Almyghty God dyd me send." Like Serpent/Devil characters in other Fall of Man plays, the Norwich Serpens begins with flattery ("O gemme of felicyté and femynyne love") and entices with an appeal to pride ("...ye shall not dye perpetuall,/ But ye shuld be as godes resydent"), but Eve's innocent request for advice ("what hold you best...?") defies Serpens' flattery and with it the culpability for what follows. Eves in other pageants are truly seduced by the words of the Serpent/Devil and the appearance of the fruit. The Chester Eve paints a picture of the will succumbing to temptation:

A, lord, this tree is fayre and bryght,
 Greene and seemely to my sight,
 The fruite sweete and much of myght,
 That godes it may us make.
 One apple of yt I will eate
 To assaye which is the meate;

And my husband I will gett

One morsell for to take. (241-48)³¹

The York Cowpers' Eve responds to the serpent's promise of power:

Than wille I to thy techyng traste

And fang þis frute vnto oure foode. (78-79)³²

As does the Eve of N-town:

So wys as God is in his gret mayn

And felaw in kunnyng, fayn wold I be. (113-14)³³

So also the Eve of Norwich B echoes the traditional and biblical psychology of temptation:

To be as God indede and in his place to sytt,

Thereto for to agre my lust conceive somewhat;

Besydes the tre is pleasante to get wysedome and wytt,

And nothing is to be comparyd unto that. (54-56)³⁴

But the Norwich A Eve is simply lied to: God, Serpens claims, commands that she now eat the apple which was before prohibited. Her statement to Adam when she returns to him bearing the fateful fruit confirms this reading:

An angell cam from Godes grace

And gaffe me an apple of thys tre.

Part therof I geff to the;

³¹ Lumiansky and Mills, *Chester Mystery Cycle*, 1:23.

³² Beadle, *The York Plays*, 1:25.

³³ Spector, *The N-Town Play*, 1:27.

³⁴ Davis, *Non-Cycle Plays and Fragments*, 14.

Eate therof for thy pleasure,

For thys frute ys Godes own treasure. (74–78)³⁵

We may perhaps fault Eve for her lack of discernment, but Eden's beauty and her husband's assurances do much to exonerate her. The Norwich Eve is not seduced but tricked.

Unfortunately, we can see only the ultimate and not the immediate results of that trickery, as a gap in the transcript (and presumably in the MS) leaves out God's discovery and punishment of Adam and Eve. When the text resumes, Adam and Eve have already been cast from Paradise. "Alas, alas, why were we soo bolde?" Adam cries, cursing the "fowle presumpsyon" which has exiled them from the Garden. Eve echoes him, claiming the depths of their sorrow "cane not be told" before launching into song with her mate. The stage direction reads: "And so thei xall syng, walkyng together about the place, wryngyng ther handes." Their elegy ends the play:

Wythe dolorous sorowe, we maye wayle and wepe

Both nyght and daye in sory sythys full depe. (89–90)³⁶

Sorrow and loss as closing themes fit the place of the Grocers' pageant in a cycle of plays which will end in the triumph of the resurrection and the glory of Pentecost. (The last pageants in the list from the Old Free Book are "The Resurrection" and "The Holy Gost.") But the more complete text of Norwich B ends with a song of praise:

With hart and voyce

Let us reioyce

³⁵ Davis, *Non-Cycle Plays and Fragments*, 10.

³⁶ Davis, *Non-Cycle Play and Fragmentss*, 11.

And prayse the Lord alwaye
 For this joyfull daye,
 To se of this our God his maiestie,
 Who hath given himsellfe over us to raygne and to governe us.
 Lett all our hartes reioyce together,
 And let us all lifte up our voyce, on of us with another. (153-61)³⁷

The Norwich B Adam and Eve sing in joy (and presumably lead the audience to sing as well) because they have received the comfort of a character called “Holy Ghost,” which in the original order of the plays will not reveal himself until the final play. Where the A text finishes with an expectation of more to come, the B text neatly wraps up the fall of man with a moral lesson akin, as White notes, to the moral interludes of mid-century Protestant drama.

Thus the Norwich Grocers' Play at the beginning of the sixteenth century had developed several variances from the traditional Fall of Man story, of which two of the most notable include 1) a focus on Eve as the final act of creation and 2) a mitigation of the blame placed on Eve by the traditional versions of the story. These particularities set off the Norwich play from others of its type by emphasizing the equality between Adam and Eve both in the garden and beyond it and presenting Eve as a character of reason and discernment.

Gail McMurray Gibson has already made the argument for the relationship between late medieval popular piety and drama, especially where it concerns the cult of the Virgin. The connection she establishes between the N-town Eve and Mary through

³⁷ Davis, *Non-Cycle Plays and Fragments*, 18.

the womanly work of spinning and cloth-making which prefigure the clothing of Christ in flesh within Mary's womb.³⁸ While the spinning/cloth-making connection does not appear in the extant Norwich A text, the unusual focus on Eve I have noted above is consonant with the Marian culture Gibson depicts. Our lack of the central discovery and punishment scenes in the A text may of course cover all manner of misogyny, but as the text stands now seems to have adapted a traditional telling of the Fall into a drama intent on depicting Eve as worthy of special attention and excusable in her actions.

Since my purpose in this chapter has been to highlight the singular nature of the Grocers' 1533 text, I do not wish to dwell too much on a text which has been admirably explicated by others. I will instead close by drawing attention to the two prologues of the B text. Whatever reasons the 1520s Grocers might have had for so altering their pageant, the B text rejects those alterations in favor of a strident scriptural fidelity. The two prologues do much of the rhetorical work towards this goal, claiming the story to be taken "Owte of Godes scripture" (Prologue 1, line 2) from "the seconde of Genesis" (Prologue 2, line 5). And while both prologues acknowledge that the play which follows them contains the creation of Eve, they do so in an interpretive mode. The standalone prologue claims:

The story sheweth further that after man was blyste,
 The Lord did create woman owte of a ribbe of man:
 Which woman was deceyvvd with the Serpentes darned myste;
 By whose synn owr nature is so weak no good we can (22-25)³⁹

³⁸ Gibson, *The Theater of Devotion*, 159–66.

³⁹ Davis, *Non-Cycle Plays and Fragments*, 12.

The language of the series prologue is similar:

And of womanes creacion appering by and bye;

And of the deavilles temptacion, diseaivinge with a lye

The woman, being weakest, that cawshed man to tast. (14–16)⁴⁰

Set beside the text which (as far as we can tell) immediately precedes them, these prologues suggest not revision but rejection. Though they share a story, a grammar, and a genre, each handles that material completely differently.

When I spoke of these texts as a high-water mark in revision earlier in this chapter, it is this division, almost between the pages, that represents that mark. We may well imagine a Protestant reviser appointed by the guild or by the city (and familiar, as White suggests, with Calvinist doctrine) reading with some amount of horror this tale of a neglectful Adam, an honest and intelligent Eve, and a serpent who is simply false rather than seductive, all presided over by a God whose lines have been infected with praise to that symbol of papist idolatry, Mary. If the Norwich grocers in the 1520s and '30s contributed to the text of their pageant, especially if they removed Adam's warning to shift blame from Eve to him, then it is hard to imagine the turning of the page to begin the second text as anything other than a changing of the guard. Thirty-two years represents sufficient time to replace a generation of guild performers and pageant-makers, and for the grocers' guild this seems to have banished not only the old religion, but also a communally-crafted script; whatever else may be said of text B, it has none of A's inconsistencies and bears all the marks of a unified mind. That mind's response to the

⁴⁰ Davis, *Non-Cycle Plays and Fragments*, 12.

original material was not to pick up the red pen, as it were, and begin revising, but to turn the page and begin again.

CHAPTER 6. IF I SHOULD AS LION COME IN STRIFE

In a discussion of production-level revision, the strange and virtually unknown plays which comprise the so-called *Stonyhurst Pageants* have little place. The plays themselves show no evidence of ever being performed and, judging from the extant text, no contact with a reviser's pen. Nor need they have. Unlike the texts of the great English cycles with their medieval embroidery on the biblical narrative mostly intact (thus making themselves targets for Protestant reformers), these plays devote themselves slavishly to the language of the Bible itself. However, as the following shows, the actions of the anonymous playwright constitute themselves as a careful and conscientious revision of that biblical language in the sense that they separate the universally Christian Scripture from the sectarian apparatus that surrounds it in production. As previous chapters have demonstrated the effect of local history and concerns on the pageant texts in question, so does this chapter address a local concern, but one that is primarily textual. The Douay-Rheims, whatever its merits or faults as a translation of the Bible, presented itself to its reader as a polemical text, countering the heresies of English Protestantism in the orthodox interpretations which surround and explicate in print the ancient texts they accompany.

Snug the joiner wants to play the lion, yet he fears the effect of the lion on stage. The concern he shows for "coming in strife" (to paraphrase the line from my chapter

heading) and frightening the ladies may be comic, but strife is precisely what he and the anonymous author of these pageants both seek to avoid. For the joiner, this is the concern of a common man before nobility but for the playwright, the concern lies in navigating between text, explication, and exhortation. Snug's solution is a speech of explanation written and memorized after he chose the lion because no lines were necessary. The Stonyhurst playwright's solution to his strife-causing text is a careful splicing of Scripture and select commentary that leaves the polemic behind. Whether or not the plays were performed, they read as a kind of Douay-Rheims for Protestants and thus present themselves not as revised plays but as revised Scripture.

What little scholarship exists on *The Stonyhurst Pageants* identifies them as an incomplete cycle of thirteen biblical plays comprising some 8,740 lines. The pageants are preserved in a single manuscript—MS. A. VI. 33—held where it was discovered in the library of Stonyhurst College, Lancashire. Despite their name, the pageants bear little resemblance to the biblical plays surviving from elsewhere in England. Where the cycles from York and Chester cover the very basics of the Pentateuch before moving on to the New Testament, all of the surviving *Stonyhurst Pageants* tell Old Testament stories and most of these come from Joshua, Judges, and the other books of Jewish history skipped in the drive towards the Incarnation.¹ As the text now stands, the pageants are:

6. Jacob (fragmentary)

7. Joseph

8. Moses

¹ Continental pageants do not so ignore the biblical books of history. For an example of this see Alan E. Knight, ed., *Les Mystères de la Procession de Lille*, 3 vols (Paris: Librairie Droz, 2001, 2003, 2004). While comparison between this French cycle and *The Stonyhurst Pageants* may prove fruitful, that project lies outside the connection to the Douay-Rheims translation discussed here, and thus outside its scope.

9. Joshua
10. Gideon
11. Jephthe
12. Samson
14. Saul
15. David
16. Solomon
17. Elijah
18. Naaman

In addition to missing the Creation, Fall of Man and Noah plays which might have been the subjects of plays 1–5, the MS is also missing play 13, possibly the story of Ruth.

Linguistic markers point toward a northern composition.² Circumstantial evidence places the text in Lancashire since at least the latter half of the seventeenth century.³ No precise composition date exists, though they were probably written before the end of the 1630s.⁴ While we cannot be sure of the *terminus ad quem* for the pageants, Carleton Brown provided as clear a *terminus a quo* as one might wish for when he published his transcription of them in 1920. His ‘happy discovery’ (as Hardin Craig puts it) that the plays borrowed heavily from the Douay–Rheims translation of the Bible means that the

² See Carleton Brown, ed. *The Stonyhurst Pageants* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1920), 13*–16*. (NB: Brown uses a number-plus-asterisk system for the pages in the prefatory matter of his edition. To avoid confusion, I have used his numbering system throughout my notes.)

³ Brown, *The Stonyhurst Pageants*, 8*–10*.

⁴ Brown argues for a date of composition not later than 1625 based on the presence of the possessive form *it*, found four times in the ms, and no sign of the newer *its*. Greg doubts the value of the evidence since the work is in manuscript form and noticeably affected by dialect. I am willing to assume only that the plays were composed before the outbreak of hostilities in 1642. See Brown, 12*, and W.W. Greg, review of *The Stonyhurst Pageants*, ed. Carleton Brown. *Modern Language Review* 15, no.4 (1920): 443. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/3714627>.

pageants could not have been composed before the publication of the two-volume Old Testament in 1609 and 1610.⁵

The chapter that follows explores the ways in which the Stonyhurst playwright undertook this borrowing from Scripture. Although Brown identifies the connection between pageant and Bible translation, he seems most interested in what this connection can tell him about the identity of the playwright and how his work might be connected with the cycle plays of the preceding century. Yet in pursuing the identity of the playwright Brown never fully explores the methods used in adapting the biblical text into dramatic form or the broader implications of those methods. For nearly one hundred and fifty years, the Douay-Rheims was the Roman Catholic Bible in English and no other work of English literature from the seventeenth century draws so heavily on that Bible as do *The Stonyhurst Pageants*. As such, they deserve our consideration as distinctive representations of post-Reformation English Catholic piety. Before turning to the pageants, however, it might be useful to give a brief description of the version of the Bible upon which it so heavily depends.

The bulk of the translation for the Douay-Rheims, the English Catholics' answer to the Bishop's Bible of 1568 and 1572, had actually been completed by 1582, thanks largely to the herculean efforts of Gregory Martin and Richard Bristow under the encouragement of Cardinal William Allen, founder of the English College and leader of the English Catholic expatriates and recusants. The Douay-Rheims New Testament was published that same year, but thanks to complications with the Latin Vulgate, thirty years

⁵ Hardin Craig, review of *The Stonyhurst Pageants*, ed. Carleton Brown. *American Journal of Philology* 42, no. 3 (1921): 280. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/289589>

would pass before the publication of the Old Testament.⁶ The translation itself retains a heavily Latinate vocabulary and is often accused of sacrificing coherence for fidelity to its original. Regardless of its literary quality, it remained the English Catholic Bible until Bishop Challoner began to publish his revision of the text in 1749.

Despite the pageants' clearly established debt to the Douay-Rheims, most reviewers of Brown's transcription took this borrowing simply as further proof of the playwright's ineptitude and focused most of their attention on the contrast between the civic pageants of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and the cycle of thirteen Old Testament plays found at Stonyhurst. "[T]he latest and longest and dullest of the Old Testament play cycles," Hillenbrand calls them.⁷ W.W. Greg speaks of their debt to the Chester cycle.⁸ Hardin Craig suggests that the plays might be a post-Reformation redaction of a now-lost cycle of traditional plays, though no such original has come to light.⁹

Poor reviews, it seems, can bury a piece of historic drama as quickly as they close a modern play. Even the most positive reviews of Brown's book fault the playwright for a slavish devotion to the biblical text, a leaden ear for dialogue, and a complete lack of humor, and after this initial reception, the text has remained almost untouched by scholars. In the ninety-odd years since Brown's reproduction of the pageants, the handful of studies treating them have addressed only the Naaman and Jephthe sections. Helen

⁶ The Clementine Vulgate of 1590 removed or reordered several books in the OT canon. Changes were made again in 1593 and again in 1598 and the English College delayed printing their translation until they were sure all textual issues had been settled. For more information see Swift Edgar, ed. *The Vulgate Bible: Douay-Rheims Translation* (Harvard, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), ix [vii–xxx].

⁷ Harold N. Hillebrand, rev. of *The Stonyhurst Pageants*, ed. Carleton Brown, *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 20, no. 4 (1921), 574.

⁸ Greg, "Review," 443.

⁹ Craig, "Review," 283.

Weiland Cole published her inquiry into the influence of Latin drama on the Naaman pageant in 1923, concluding that the playwright “had more than a casual and superficial knowledge of Plautus and Terence.”¹⁰ Her argument was superseded thereafter by Hardin Craig’s identification of the pageant as a translation from a Latin play by the Dutch priest Cornelius Schonaeus.¹¹ Finally, Sister O’Mahony’s treatment of the Jephthe play for performance included her own evaluation of the play’s connection to Renaissance (as opposed to medieval) drama.¹² No larger study or definitive edition of the plays has been attempted. Yet basing the comparison on the other English cycles when no clear line connects *The Stonyhurst Pageants* with these earlier dramas—save the name ‘pageant’—betrays an assumption about the nature of both.

The pageants’ appropriation of biblical language presents a much clearer and, in many ways, more interesting subject for study. In his introduction to the pageants, Brown’s conclusions about the playwright’s religion (Roman Catholic) and occupation (probably clerical, possibly Jesuit) are based on this use of biblical language.¹³ Yet his interest in the practice of that appropriation is limited to the dramatic flaws he sees in the playwright’s ‘fidelity’ to Scripture and the ‘wearisome and irrelevant detail’ such fidelity produces.¹⁴ His reviewers, as can be seen above, agreed with him. But the fidelity of which Brown and his reviewers complained deserves a closer examination. While it is certainly true that the playwright has made heavy use of the Douay-Rheims Bible in

¹⁰ Helen Weiland Cole, ‘The Influence of Plautus and Terence Upon the Stonyhurst Pageants’, *Modern Language Notes* 38, no.7 (1923), 399 [393-399]. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/2914699>.

¹¹ Hardin Craig, ‘*Terentius Christianus* and the Stonyhurst Pageants’, *Philological Quarterly* 2 (1923), 56–62.

¹² M. Audrey O’Mahony, “Materials for an Edition of the Jephthe Play in the Stonyhurst Pageants,” (master’s thesis, Catholic University of America, 1967).

¹³ Brown, *Stonyhurst*, 20–21*.

¹⁴ Brown, *Stonyhurst*, 22*.

producing his text, his adaptation is not without evidence of careful and sometimes quite surprising decisions.

The vast majority of the play text connects to its biblical counterpart almost identically. As Brown notes, ‘The relationship between the two texts is so close, indeed, that in some cases obscurities in the Stonyhurst text are cleared up by referring to the corresponding passage in the Douay version.’¹⁵ There are thousands of corresponding lines, but a couple of examples will here suffice. Near the beginning of III Kings (or I, if the first two are called I and II Samuel), King David’s son Adonias approaches Bathsheba, the queen’s mother.

Bible

Thou knowest, quoth he, that the kingdom was mine, and al Israel had purposed to make me over them to be their king: but the kingdom is transposed, & is made my brothers: for it was appointed him of our Lord. Now therefore I desire one petition of thee...I pray thee speak to Solomon the king (for he cannot denie thee any thing) that he give me Abishag the Sumamite to wife.(3 Kings 2:15–17)¹⁶

Pageant 16, ‘Salomon’

ADONIAS Lady you know the kingdom was by me possessed
& for to have made me their kinge all Israel had determined.

But now the kingdome is transported unto my Brother Salomon

¹⁵ Brown, *Stonyhurst*, 16*.

¹⁶ English College at Douay, *The Holie Bible Faithfully Translated into English out of the authentical Latin* (Rheims, 1609), 691. I have regularized the printer’s long s and vocalic v into modern spelling here and in all subsequent transcriptions.

your sonne as god appointed had: wherefore make this petition
 for me unto the king my Brother (who can deny you nothing)
 that I may take Abisag to wife. (16.3–8a)¹⁷

The playwright has substituted ‘transported’ for the slightly less concrete ‘transposed’ and added an honorific for addressing Bathsheba, but the pageant omits only a small interchange between the two characters[17] and keeps the meaning and most of the language intact, reorganizing it into the plays’ standard septenary line.

The plays transfer the Bible’s narrative passages into the mouth of a chorus character even more often than they appear in lines of dialogue, as with the following lines spoken by the Chorus near the beginning of the story of Gideon:

Bible

And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of our Lord: who delivered them into the hand of Madian seven years, & they were sore oppressed of them...and they [the Midianites] left nothing at al in Israel that pertained to man’s life, not sheepe, not oxen, not asses. For they and al their flockes came with their tabernacles, and like unto locustes filled al places. (Judges 6:1, 4b–5a)¹⁸

Pageant 10, “Gedeon”

CHORUS Israel agayne in our lords sight hath sin’d & ys delivered
 To the hands of the Madionits, by whom for seven yeares’ space
 They have bene sore opprest, & all they had consumed was

¹⁷ Brown, *Stonyhurst*, 224.

¹⁸ English College at Douay, *Holie Bible*, 527.

Both corne, oxen, & sheepe: still lyke Locusts they do swarme
 In every place, & do unto the Israelits much harme. (10.110–14)¹⁹

Like the previous example from pageant 16, our playwright here exerts a slight yet noticeable editorial hand, substituting corn for asses and omitting several verses and a line. What changes have been made from verse to script merely condense the message of the Scripture. Throughout the majority of the text, the playwright's approach remains similar to the examples above: he retains the sense of the words and most of their forms, changes the word order to meet the needs of his verse and makes minor substitutions and deletions.

But the playwright does make decisions about when and where he will versify. This we can see above in his summarizing or skipping over passages or exchanges within passages only to take up his re-writing at a different point. But he is just as willing to do the same on a larger scale. The story of David and Bathsheba in pageant 15 begins with David's view of Uriah's wife from his palace roof, discusses Bathsheba's pregnancy, completely ignores David's multiple attempts to cover up the pregnancy during Uriah's return visits from the battlefield, and moves directly into David's plan to have Uriah killed, skipping all over 2 Kings 11, borrowing one verse or another to get the story across. (That the story is narrated almost completely by David is another stretch in theatrical imagination.)

The most dizzying example of this practice can be found in Moses' final address to the Israelites near the end of pageant 8. The address itself runs to over a hundred lines after an initial set-up taken from Deuteronomy 31, but shows remarkable proficiency

¹⁹ Brown, *Stonyhurst*, 118.

with the text of the Pentateuch as a whole. Moses' speech begins with Deuteronomy 23:21–23 and then skips back to verse 19. From there the speech jumps to verses 14–15 of Deuteronomy 24 and from there to 25:13–16. The text now leaps back to 19:15, and then further to 17:8–13 then leaves the book entirely to pick up a discussion in Numbers 33:51–53,55, then back to Deuteronomy 7:18–19 and 8:2–4 and so on. (Please see the appendix to this chapter, below.) That the playwright would do this when several chapters quoted straight from Deuteronomy had all the admonition he might have wanted is not nearly so interesting as the fact that he could do this, moving between chapters and even books of the Law with ease and proficiency, snatching a verse here and there to suit him.

The confident ease with which the playwright make changes, whether adjusting a few lines or compiling a smorgasbord of verses from across several books, suggests a mind comfortable with adaptation on many levels, yet the plays' maddeningly close adherence to the plot argues almost the opposite. This combination of conservative plotting and expansive compilation contradicts Craig's argument for an unknown cycle of the sort found elsewhere in England. Had such a cycle been part of the Stonyhurst pageants' make-up, traces of their looser approach would be visible in the movement of the play. Lacking such traces, it seems likely that the only real source (with the obvious exception of the 'Naaman' pageant) for the pageants is the Douay-Rheims Bible.

If the *Stonyhurst* playwright felt enough at home with the Douay-Rheims translation to pick and choose his individual verses, he felt equally at home performing the same operation on the biblical text's apparatus. This apparatus, comprised of marginal notes and (sometimes extensive) annotations detailing Catholic doctrine and providing patristic interpretations for Old Testament incidences, was written by Thomas

Worthington sometime after Gregory Martin completed the translation work in the 1580s. The most obvious and awkward of these marginal inclusions provide information and have already been noted by Brown.²⁰ I include them here as a basis for comparison. The ‘Moyses’ pageant includes both of these, of which the following lines from Moses describe the eighth Egyptian plague:

Bible (marginal note)

The 8 Plague innumerable locusts, litle flying beastes with long hinder legs that destroy graine, grasse, & fruit.²¹

Pageant 8, ‘Moyses’

GOD I will Locusts to morow sende, which are litle flying beastes
Having longe hinder legges, & grass & frutes & grayne anoy.
Which all the face of th’earth shall cover, & all there on destroy (8.619–
21)²²

The inclusion feels almost accidental, as if the playwright-copyist, in working through the plagues, simply copied the marginalia as he moved from one line to another. The other inclusion like this occurs just a hundred and sixty lines previous, in the description of the third plague, for which the D-R chooses the obscure Greek loan-word ‘sciniph’ to describe the insects which the AV designates simply ‘lice’.

In addition to borrowing the notes beside the scriptural text, the playwright also borrows from the longer annotations placed at the end of chapters. When Pharaoh promotes Joseph to serve directly under him the biblical text provides us with the detail:

²⁰ Brown, *Stonyhurst*, p. 17*.

²¹ English College at Douay, *Holie Bible*, p. 182.

²² Brown, *Stonyhurst*, p. 64.

‘And he [Pharaoh] turned his [Joseph’s] name and called him in the Egyptian tongue the Saviour of the World’ (Genesis 41:45). In pageant 7, the words are placed directly in Pharaoh’s mouth, expanding on the verse from the annotations:

Bible (annotation)

In the original text the new name and title given by Pharaoh to Joseph is expressed by these two words, *Saphnath pahanaach*; the former *Saphnath* in Hebrew signifieth a secrete or hidden thing, of *Saphanto* hide: but the signification of the other word *pahanaach*, is more uncertaine, being found no where els in the holie Bible. The Rabins do commonly interpret them both together, *the man to whom secretes are reveled*, or the *reveler of secretes* and so this name agreeth wel to Joseph, in respect of the gift of interpreting dreames. But besides his interpreting, he also gave most wise counsel, that tended to saftie of manie, which it is like, Pharaoh ment to expresse by this new name.²³

Pageant 7, ‘Joseph’

KING PHARAO Saphnath pahanaach shall thy name here after called bee
 which in the Ægyptian tongue the saviour of the world doth signify But a secret
 & hidden thinge in hebrew yt importeth,
 & by the Rabins ys expund’d, one that secrets revealeth.

(7.365–68)²⁴

²³ English College at Douay, *Holie Bible*, 127–28.

²⁴ Brown, *Stonyhurst*, 17.

Here the playwright condenses a long scholarly explanation into its essence and works that information into the verse. Unnecessarily parenthetical though it be, it provides crucial information for interpreting the un-translated lines.

Not all uses of the marginalia and notes jar so with dramatic form. A line from Moses in the latter half of his expansive pageant illustrates this:

Bible (marginal note)

He meaneth that he cannot exercise the office of a captain general, and bring the people into the promised land.²⁵

Pageant 8, 'Moyses'

MOYSES Especially sith our lord said I should not passe this Jordan

Meaning I should not exercise the office of a captain. (8.1427–28)²⁶

The line expands the biblical text which reads simply 'especially as the Lord also hath said to me, "Thou shalt not pass over this Jordan"' (Deuteronomy 31:3).²⁷ Since it is addressed to the assembled Israelites, the line makes a certain dramatic sense, as Moses is in the process of handing over leadership to Joshua.

Other such inclusions are even more organic, providing not just amplification but clarification. The thirty-seventh chapter of Genesis, which begins the story of Joseph, contains this ambiguous phrase: 'and he [Joseph] accused his brethren to his father of a most wicked crime' (37:2).²⁸ No further information from the biblical text is forthcoming, but the marginalia provides this gloss: 'That for ill life they were infamous, the Hebrew

²⁵ English College at Douay, *Holie Bible*, 459.

²⁶ Brown, *Stonyhurst*, 90.

²⁷ English College at Douay, *Holie Bible*, 459.

²⁸ English College at Douay, *Holie Bible*, 116.

word *dibba* signifieth infamy'.²⁹ The seventh play 'Ioseph' presents its titular protagonist in the act of accusation, wherein he says to Jacob, 'my brothers grow scandalous to many, being become licentious livers' (7.15–16).³⁰ Although the line and the marginalia do not precisely match up, the playwright has adapted the gloss; accepting the identification of the 'most wicked crime' as some form of dissipation and placing it within Joseph's accusation.

Similarly, Samuel's call from God in the fourteenth pageant ('Saul') occurs 'before the lamp of God was extinguished' according to 1 Kings 3:3, which the Nuncius kindly clarifies as 'for almost morninge it's now' (14.105–06a).³¹ In so doing he draws from the marginal note on the verse: 'This vision happened early in the morning, before the dressing of the lampes, when some were out and others light.'³²

Beyond these clarifying additions to the text, the playwright also plumbs the annotations and marginalia to provide moral and spiritual interpretations of the Old Testament stories he tells. Pageant Fourteen, 'Saul,' moves through the first book of Kings (I Samuel) and when it describes the death of the old priest Eli upon receiving word the Ark of the Covenant had been captured by the Philistines (I Kings 4), the playwright has one of the soldiers declare the safety of the old priest's soul over his body. No such military exegete can be found in the D–R text, but the margins provide us with a source for the soldier's assurance.

Bible (marginal note)

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Brown, *Stonyhurst*, 16.

³¹ Brown, *Stonyhurst*, 152.

³² English College at Douay, *Holie Bible*, 578.

This zeale of religion in Heli toward the arke, is a great signe that he died in good state though he was temporally punished for not correcting his sonnes.³³

Pageant 14, 'Saul'

NERIO This Zeale of his towards god's arke a great signe's that he dyed in good state, though for not punishinge his sonnes he be thus punished with temporal affliction. (14.181–83)³⁴

The twelfth pageant, 'Samson,' provides a similar interpolation from the Nuncius' description of Samson's death as he pulls down the temple of the Philistines with his newly returned divine strength.³⁵

Bible (marginal note)

He desired to be revenged, not of rancour of mind but of zeale of justice.
And so al the elect & glorified Sainctes desire revenge.³⁶

Pageant 12, 'Samson'

NUNCIUS And then layinge his hands vpon the pillers, the right on th'one & the lefte on the other sayde of zeale & not of passion:
Lord let me with the Philistines dye, & there with shookey pillers.
(12.375–77)³⁷

³³ English College at Douay, *Holie Bible*, 580.

³⁴ Brown, *Stonyhurst*, 156.

³⁵ Brown notes the annotations to Judges 16 contain a longer discourse on this theme. See *Stonyhurst*, 13*.

³⁶ English College at Douay, *Holie Bible*, 552.

³⁷ Brown, *Stonyhurst*, 148.

In Exodus, Pharaoh charges the midwives to kill the boys born to Hebrew women. The response of the midwives is narrated in the Bible: ‘But the midwives feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded but saved the men-children’ (Exodus 1:17). The pageants give this piety a voice. When Pharaoh leaves them, the midwives of the eighth pageant discuss the situation, but the basis they give for their decision is found in the DR notes.

Bible (annotation)

In commendation of the midwives not obeying the kings commandment, Moyses opposeth the feare of God, to the feare of Princes; shewing therby that when their commandments are contrarie, the subjects must feare God and not do that the Prince commandeth. So did our Saviour himself teach, and that for feare of damnation.³⁸

Pageant 8, ‘Moyses’

SEPHORA Happ after as hap may, & let's excuse it as wee can,
for it's more daunger to offend Almighty god then man.
for man can only hurt our bodyes if that we do not well,

But god's of power to bring both soul & body unto hell. (8.35–38)³⁹

Much like the interpretive annotations, the teaching in the preceding examples provides a sort of moral clarification to difficult Old Testament passages. With Eli and Samson, the manner of their passing presents some difficulties regarding the disposition of their souls, and the notes exonerate these patriarchs from a death (by despair for Eli or suicide for

³⁸ English College at Douay, *Holie Bible*, 156.

³⁹ Brown, *Stonyhurst*, 42.

Samson) contrary to their status. As for the midwives, the lesson to fear God above earthly rulers may certainly be derived from the bare passage, but the note makes that derivation explicit. In no place does the included teaching deviate appreciably from the interpretations of the fathers or provide new teaching or new direction.

I hope that the preceding, while not exonerating the playwright for his faults as a dramatist, has done something to show the inordinate care and intimate biblical knowledge he used to accomplish his task. He is not, as a first encounter with his work might suggest, merely a kind of versifying plagiarist, but rather a patient adaptor of Scripture. And if we consider him not slavishly copying his text, but rather wholeheartedly engaging with it, then describing his work as ‘a curiously belated survival of an earlier form of drama’ becomes somewhat problematic, for none of the full cycles tie themselves so intimately to a specific translation of the Bible.⁴⁰ His faithful exploitation of this tie grounds him not in the civic tradition of Corpus Christi or Whitsun plays (even if he might have wished otherwise) but, along with his Bible, in recusant England in the early sixteenth century.

Fixing the playwright in time, however, has the curious side effect of setting his project adrift. If the pageants are cycle drama, even bad cycle drama, they belong to that tradition and can be explained as part of it.⁴¹ Prioritizing the pageants’ connection to the 1609 D-R Bible complicates their connection to a romanticized Catholic past without providing further insight as to their purpose. As Brown claims, there is little overtly proselytizing about them and little humor or incident (save the Naaman play) to

⁴⁰ Brown, *Stonyhurst*, 30*.

⁴¹ ‘These plays, written after Shakspeare's work had already been completed, bear witness to their author's continued interest in the religious cycle plays and to his belief that it was possible to revive them for his own generation.’ Brown, *Stonyhurst*, 30*.

recommend them as entertainment, though exhortations to attend by the Chorus suggest an audience of some sort.⁴² I believe that the interactions between Bible and pageant described above provide some sense of that purpose, and I shall conclude this essay by offering some of these impressions.

The playwright's careful selection of scriptural passages suggests concern for an audience in need of instruction. Had he simply followed the biblical text in the eighth pageant, for instance, Moses' announcement of his death and nomination of Joshua as his successor would have been followed by instructions to re-read the law after seven years and a prophecy about the Israelites' descent into idolatry (Deuteronomy 31: 5–30). Instead, the cherry-picked verses from elsewhere in the Pentateuch contain more moral instruction than plans and prophecies on the ancient Jewish conquest of Canaan. Seventeenth-century Christians may not have needed advice on when to approach Levites (ll. 1468–71), but exhortations to keep vows (ll. 1444–45), employ the poor (ll. 1453–56), etc. ought not to have gone unheeded by Christians of any stripe.

Moses' speech could have taken a very different tone, however. Though the injunction to bring cases before the Levites for judgment comes from Deuteronomy 17, the pageant declines to include here the annotations which declare a "Council of Priestess" instituted by God, "[f]or a ful and assured decision of al controversies" and take Protestants to task for their "frivolous evasion" of the Apostolic See's authority.⁴³ For the playwright to consciously include the biblical text and yet ignore the Catholic interpretation raises questions about the nature of his instruction. What meaning the biblical apparatus declaims must here be read only by implication. And if that meaning

⁴² Brown, *Stonyhurst*, 21*.

⁴³ English College at Douay, *Holie Bible*, 433–34.

be implied what is the audience to take from Moses' exhortation to "burst" in "filters" (l. 1481) the statues of the Canaanites? The line seethes with iconoclasm, yet no clarifying remark is given, though the biblical notes gloss the passage as warning to destroy "infidelitie."⁴⁴

Yet the playwright does consistently seek information in the notes of the 1609/10 D-R text to supplement the Scripture. Considering the sometimes obtuse syntax of the D-R, these explanations need not involve religious controversy. In his review of the pageants, W.W. Greg suggests that the plays were a kind of school exercise.⁴⁵ Yet if the plays were no more than an exercise, the intended recipient of the painstaking explanations and clarifications remains a mystery. This seems especially strange if the 'school exercise' were to be read only by other educated Jesuits who, one assumes, were already comfortable with the particularities of Latin and Greek. Linguistic interpretation suggests a wider audience than seminary-educated clerics and a playwright comfortable with explanation but not exegesis.

The Stonyhurst playwright thus walks a fine line between Gregory Martin's text and Thomas Worthington's critical apparatus. By doing so, in point of fact, he highlights that line or fissure between the two texts. Gregory Martin's translation is abstruse and difficult at times but it is not confrontational. Worthington's notes and commentary, almost certainly completed after Martin's death, fairly burst with zeal for addressing and correcting the manifold errors perpetrated by the Reformation heretics. Although the 1609 Bible presents them as a unity of sacred text and orthodox exegesis, the playwright neither leaves the former intact nor wholly embraces the latter. In so doing, he creates a

⁴⁴ English College at Douay, *Holie Bible*, 392.

⁴⁵ W.W. Greg, Review, 445.

text comfortable with Roman Catholic Scripture but unwilling to embrace anti-Reformation propaganda.

Brown's puzzlement over the purpose of the pageants ignores the fissure between texts the pageants exploit. A cleric may well have written them, but that cleric seems devoid of the missionary zeal which motivated so many young expatriate seminarians. Without these controversial elements there seems little benefit to the clergy or the recusant (who would have approved of them) or for the apostate (who would have been challenged by them). But a text that avoided controversy might do well before an audience which included both Protestants and Catholics and hoped to avoid seriously offending either.

The desire to avoid controversy combined with religious instruction returns these plays to the site of their discovery (northern England in general and Lancashire in particular) and the rough date of their composition. The Douay-Rheims Bible certainly belongs in the conservative north of the sort described by Bossy and Haigh.⁴⁶ Yet the playwright goes out of his way to avoid giving that Bible the interpretation demanded by its apparatus. If the pageants were performed at all, the more probable scenario for their performance is suggested by the work Margaret Spufford and, more specifically, William Sheils; both interested in the way that Catholic and Protestant neighbors deal with one another at the local level. As Sheils says of seventeenth century Egton in North Yorkshire, 'Pragmatism dictated that, where there were significant numbers of Catholics and no strong Protestant leadership, 'getting along' was vital, not only to Catholics but also to their Protestant neighbors, in order to maintain the local institutions of government,

⁴⁶ John Bossy, *The English Catholic Community 1570–1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976) and Christopher Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance in Tudor Lancashire* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

whatever official policy may have desired.’⁴⁷ After the suppression of the cycle plays, the Stonyhurst pageants could not have been part of the local institutions of government Sheils describes, but they may have benefited from the same necessity for ‘getting along’ with one’s neighbors.⁴⁸ Furthermore, this impulse towards compromise suggests resistance to missionary efforts, perhaps even within the ranks of Catholic clergy. If a cleric is willing to carve up, as it were, the orthodox Scripture in pursuit of piece of ecumenical theatre, certainly there is more to be learned about the complicated social situation in the “Catholic” north.

Even this goes too far without corroborating evidence. Nonetheless, it is in the investigations of historians and literary scholars of the early seventeenth century that the Stonyhurst pageants belong rather than with antiquarian interest in the civic religious drama. The pageants, like their biblical source, are a product of their time and deserve to be treated as the works of post-Reformation Catholic piety they demonstrate themselves to be.

6.1 Appendix to Chapter Six: Moses’ Sermon

Moses’ last sermon, lines 1443-1494. As referenced above (page 132), this sermon from pageant 8 shows just how familiar with the text of the Douay-Rheims translation the playwright was. I have provided a significant portion of the script here, followed by my own collection of the relevant verses which the playwright adapted. All biblical quotations taken from the Dunbarton Oaks edition of the Douay-Rheims.

⁴⁷ William Sheils, “‘Getting on and ‘getting along’ in parish and town: Catholics and their neighbors in England,” in *Catholic Communities in Protestant States: Britain and the Netherlands c. 1570–1720*, ed. Benjamin Kaplan, et al (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), 70.

⁴⁸ The last cycle plays did survive into early seventeenth-century Lancashire. See the testament of John Weever in David George, *REED: Lancashire* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 129.

Pageant 8

Wherefore obserue my words, which our lord by my mouth commands you
 When thou unto the lord thy god hast sworne or made a vow
 Frustrate make not thy word, nor slackly do the same fulfill 1445
 For the same at thy hands require be sure our lord god will.
 And yf thou breake thy vow, he'l yt repute to the as synne.
 In not promising there's no offence: but yf thy word have byn
 Without thy lipps, thou shalt observe, & do what thou has promised
 & spoken with thy proper will, & from thy mouth delivered. 1450
 For usury thou shalt not lend unto thy brother money
 But thou may put thy money out for gayne unto thyne enemy.
 Deny not the hyer of the pore, but see that the same day
 That he hath done his worke, his wages thou unto hym pay.
 Before the sunne be sett: for there there with his lyfe ys preserved 1455
 Lest he cry out unto our lord, & thou for yt be punished
 Both just & true let thy weights be: & have not in thy purse
 A lesser & a greater: nor two bushels in thy house,
 A greater where with for to measure the corne which thou shalt buy
 & lesser for the corne thou sells, but let them equall bee. 1460
 Agaynst none shall one wisse serve for any kind of wickedness
 But every word shall stand in the mouth of two or three witnesses.
 Yf that the judgment thou perceiue doubtfull & hard to bee
 Twixt bloud & bloud, & cause & cause, & leprosy & leprosy

& thou see that the Judges words with in thy gates do vary 1465
 Aryse & go up to the place chosen by god almighty
 & to the priests of the Leviticall stock go, & unto
 The Judge that shall be at that tyme, & aske them what to do
 Who shall shew & declare unto thee the truth of the judgments.
 And thou shalt do what s'ever they that of the place are presidents 1470
 Which our lord god hath chosen shall unto thee say & teach thee
 According to his law, & thou his sentence shalt obey
 & neyther to the right hand nor the lefte thou shalt decline.
 And he that shall be proud, & at the priests judgment repyne
 That ministreth then unto our lord thy god, by the decree 1475
 & sentence of the Iudge against hym geven, that man shall dye
 & in so doinge the evill thou shalt take away from Israell
 With heard, the people will feare, & in pryde none after swell.
 When you have Iordan past, & the land of chanaan entred
 See that th'Inhabitants of that land by you be all destroyed 1480
 Their Titles breake, statues in filters burst, waist their Excelses,
 & clense the land, that there in dwell you may, & yt possesse.
 But yf you kill them not, The remayne shall be to your eyes
 As yt were Nayles, speares in your sydes, & your most deadly enemyes.
 Fear not but to remembrance call what god hath done to pharaoh 1485
 & the Ægyptians ere he would permit you thence to go.
 What grievous plagues he layde on them, & how he you protected
 & in a stronge hand brought you thence, & his whole army drowned.

Thinke on how god did fourty yeares in wildernesse afflict thee
 Triall to make yf unto hym thou would obedient bee 1490
 & all that while to thee he manna for to eate did geue
 To make thee know that in bread only a man doth not lyue
 But lyves in every word that from the mouth of god proceedeth.
 And the rayment which thou this fourty yeares hast worne, yet lasteth.

Douay-Rheims verses, 1609 version

When thou hast vowed a vow to our Lord thy God thou shalt not slack to pay it: because our Lord thy God will require it and if thou delay, it shall be reputed to thee for sinne. If thou wilt not promise, thou shalt be without sinne. But that which is once gone out of thy lippes, thou shalt observe, and shalt doe as thou hast promised to our Lord thy God, and hast spoken with thy proper wil and thyne owne mouth. (Deuteronomy 23: 21–23)

Thou shalt not lend to thy brother money to usurie, nor corne, nor any other thing: but to the stranger. (Deuteronomy 23:19)

Thou shalt not denie the hyre of the needie, and poore man thy brother, or the stranger, that dwelleth with thee in the land, and is within thy gates: but the same day thou shalt pay him the price of his labour, before the going downe of the sunne, because he is poore, and there withal susteyneth his life: lest he crie against thee to our Lord, and it be reputed to thee for a sinne. (Deuteronomy 24: 14–15)

Thou shalt not have diverse weightes in thy bagge, a greater and a lesse: neither shall there be in thy house a greater bushel and a lesse. Thou shalt have a weight just and true, and thy bushel shall be equal and true: that thou mayest live a long time upon the Land, which our Lord thy God shall geve thee. (Deuteronomy 25: 14–15)

One witnesse shal not stand against any man, whatsoever sinne, or wickedness it be: but in the mouth of two or three witnesses shal everie word stand.

(Deuteronomy 19:15)

If thou perceive that the judgment with thee be hard and doubtful between blood and blood, cause and cause, leprosie and not leprosie: and thou see that the wordes of the iudges within thy gates doe varye: arise, and goe up to the place, which our Lord thy God shal choose. And thou shalt come to the priestes of the Levitical stocke, and to the iudge, that shal be at that time and thou shalt aske of them, ‘Who shall shew thee the truth of the judgements. And thou shalt do whatsoever they, that are presidents of the place, which our Lord shal choose, shal say and teach thee, according to his law; and thou shalt follow their sentence: neither shalt thou decline to the right hand nor to the left hand. But he that shal be proude, refusing to obey the commandement of the Priest, which at that time ministreth to our Lord thy God, and the decree of the iudge, that man shal die, and thou shalt take away the evil out of Israel: and the whole people hearing shal feare, that none afterward swell in pride.

(Deuteronomy 17: 8–14)

Command the children of Israel, and say to them: When you shal have passed Iordan, entering the Land of Chanaan, destroy al the inhabitants of that Land: breake their titles, and burst to filters their statues, and wast al their excesses, cleansing the Land, and dwelling in it, for I have geven it you in possession...But if you wil not kil the inhabitantes of the Land: they that remaine, shall be unto you as it were nailes in your eyes, and speares in your sides, and they shal be your adversaries in the land of habitation.

(Numbers 33: 51–53)

Fear not, but remember what the Lord thy God did to Pharao and to al the Ægyptians, the exceding great plagues, which thyne eies saw, and the signes and wonders, and the strong

hand, and the stretched out arme, that the Lord thy God might bring thee forth: so wil he doe to al peoples, whom thou fearest. (Deuteronomy 7: 18–19)

And thou shalt remember al the iourney, through the which the Lord thy God hath brought thee fourtie yeares by the desert, that he might afflict and prove thee, and that the things that were in thy hart might be made knowen, whether thou wouldest keepe his commandementes or not. He afflicted thee with penurie, and gave thee for meate Manna, which thou knewest not nor thy fathers: for to shew unto thee that not in bread only a man liue, but in everie word that procedeth from the mouth of God. Thy rayment, wherewith thou wast covered, hath not decayed for age, and thy foote is not worne, loe this is the fortieth yeare. (Deuteronomy 8: 2–4)

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