

AN ANALYSIS OF DRAMATIC EFFECTIVENESS IN THE PASSION SEQUENCE
OF THE YORK CORPUS CHRISTI CYCLE

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of the Department of English
University of Houston

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Susan Riggs Asfahl
August, 1971

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PREFACE

Critical commentary on medieval drama has largely ignored both the inherent dramatic value of the English Corpus Christi plays as a product of their time and the influence of ritual upon these cyclic dramas. The idea that it is possible to evaluate the cycle plays on the basis of their intrinsic dramatic worth and to work creatively with dramatic structure and still to remain aware of the religious overtones within this structure, has led to the present study. In this study, I propose to analyze the twelve plays of the Passion sequence in the York Corpus Christi cycle as important examples of medieval religious cyclical drama which owe much of their effectiveness to emotional and structural parallels with religious ritual, specifically, with the medieval Mass and Holy Week ceremonies. At the same time, I will analyze the dramatic effectiveness of the York Passion sequence, not only in terms of dramatic technique as it relates to the development of action, conflict, and character, but also in terms of position in a cyclic structure which is both representational and ritualistic, historical and universal. Through such an analysis, I hope to show that the York Passion sequence is particularly effective

as drama because it has superimposed upon its dramatic structure ritual parallels which intensify the agonistic element and strengthen, abstractly and concretely, the sense of order which is aesthetically essential to the total dramatic experience.

The first three chapters of this study will concentrate on showing (1) the shortcomings of previous critical approaches to the analysis of medieval religious drama, (2) the significance of the ritual framework as it is superimposed upon the Passion sequence, and (3) the ways in which the dramatic and non-dramatic elements of the Mass and associated Holy Week ceremonies are relevant to a dramatic analysis of the Passion sequence. The next four chapters will deal specifically with the plays of the York Passion sequence. Although the chapter divisions are made primarily for convenience in presenting a large amount of material, the twelve plays of the sequence are divided into groups which best approximate rising action, climax, and catastrophe. Thus, the first of these four chapters investigates the structure of the plays and points out those dramatic features--imaginative realism, metrical excellence, and original additions--for which the York cycle is best known. Chapter v takes up the rising action in plays XXV-XXVIII; chapter vi investigates the five Trial plays (XXIX-XXXIII inclusive), the last of which, the Second Trial before Pilate, marks the climax of the sequence; and chapter vii deals with the three Crucifixion plays (XXXIV, XXXV, XXXVI), the last of which represents the catastrophe, the

death of Jesus.

Because the present investigation is intimately concerned with the nature and function of ritual parallels within the York Passion sequence, the primary sources used, in addition to the definitive Lucy Toulmin Smith edition of the plays themselves, will involve those medieval religious materials which deal in some manner with Christ's Passion and which, either in manuscript form, or through oral transmission from the pulpit, would have played a part in influencing both the content of the Passion sequence and/or audience reaction to the dramatic performance. Examples of such works include the Biblia Sacra: Iuxta Vulgatam Clementinam (used in conjunction with the Douay Version for textual translations), The Lay Folks Mass-Book; the Cursor Mundi; The Northern Passion; The South English Legendary; Mirk's Festial; The Middle English Harrowing of Hell and Gospel of Nicodemus; and Middle English Sermons. Major secondary sources consulted are Karl Young's The Drama of the Medieval Church; O. B. Hardison, Jr.'s Christian Rite and Christian Drama in the Middle Ages; Gaspar Lefebvre's Catholic Liturgy; P. Henry's The Liturgical Year; Johann Huizinga's Homo Ludens and The Waning of the Middle Ages; Hardin Craig's English Religious Drama of the Middle Ages; Waldo McNeir's "The Corpus Christi Plays as Dramatic Art"; Eleanor Prosser's Drama and Religion in the English Mystery Plays; J. W. Robinson's "The Art of the York Realist"; V. A. Kolve's The Play Called Corpus Christi; G. R. Owst's

Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England; and Edgar De Bruyne's
The Esthetics of the Middle Ages.

During the preparation of this study, I have received many kindnesses. Mrs. Hallie Barrow, Mrs. Joan Dabek, Mrs. Louella Barclay, Miss Mary Jones, Mrs. Cindy Freeman, Miss Leacy Eaden, as well as others on the staff of the M. D. Anderson Memorial Library, rendered invaluable assistance. Dr. Anthony Collins, of the Drama Department, as third reader of this study, provided insight into several problems in my evaluation of dramatic structure and made other helpful and thought-provoking suggestions. To Dr. Archibald Henderson, my second reader, I am indebted for his scholarly--and untiring--approach to the problems of happily wedding style and content, as well as for his intuitive talent for suggesting solutions to these problems. To Dr. Jesse Hartley, my thesis director, I owe the idea for this thesis, which grew out of a topic first broached in one of his seminars. The value to this study of Dr. Hartley's careful reading, objective comments, and thorough knowledge and understanding of both liturgy and aesthetics, cannot be underestimated.

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CHAPTER I

In view of the fact that ritual is of such major importance in the determining of dramatic effectiveness in the secular drama, it is surprising that critics have not, to any extensively large degree, explored this relationship. Furthermore, the bulk of critical commentary has, until recently, neglected or ignored the inherent dramatic value of the cycle plays as a product of their time.¹ Attention has focused instead on the doctrinal sources of the plays; on the historical significance of the plays in terms of literary evolution, both organic and mutational; and on the criteria of action, dialogue, and impersonation as applied to drama in the nineteenth century.² As a result of these approaches, dramatic value has been analyzed without reference to specific ritual influence, and the parallel importance of form and function as inseparable components of dramatic experience has been totally neglected. The purpose of the discussion below, consequently,

¹ Because this chapter is concerned with major critical approaches in the area of medieval drama, general references to the "cycle plays," rather than specific references to the York cycle, will occasionally be made. Mentioning only the York cycle might seem to imply the possibility of alternate critical approaches to the other three cycles.

² O. B. Hardison, Jr., Christian Rite and Christian Drama in the Middle Ages: Essays in the Origin and Early History of Modern Drama (Baltimore, Md.: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1965), Ch. i.

is to present a cross-section of major approaches to criticism of medieval drama and to attempt to show the ways in which these approaches substantiate or deviate from the critical method outlined in chapters ii and iii of this study.

In recent years, critics have judged the cycle plays as dramatic representations whose literary value derives from intrinsic dramatic worth; earlier critics, however, saw the literary value as primarily derived from historical position. No specific point exists at which the focus of criticism shifts. As late as 1950, for example, A. P. Rossiter stated that the literary workmanship of the plays was "never far from crude and, in the older strata, insipid to a degree."³ And Hardin Craig, in 1955, reflected an evolutionary bias in his approach to the plays' dramatic position in literary history.⁴ Consequently, O. B. Hardison, Jr.'s conviction that it is possible to work creatively with the idea of dramatic structure and still remain aware of the religious overtones within this structure serves a much-needed purpose: it paves the way for a new--and more valid--critical approach to medieval vernacular drama. Hardison's investigation is chiefly concerned with pointing out the dramatic elements in the Mass and the Easter

³ A. P. Rossiter, English Drama from Early Times to the Elizabethans: Its Background, Origins and Developments (London: The Mayflower Press, 1950), p. 66.

⁴ See Hardin Craig, English Religious Drama of the Middle Ages (1955; rpt. Oxford: At The Clarendon Press, 1967), pp. 88, 354-389.

liturgy⁵ and establishing an approach to the history of medieval drama, an approach based on a comparison of chronology and content in liturgical services, liturgical drama, and vernacular drama. Because the most persistent theme of his investigation "is the question of what constitutes the nature and modes of dramatic form,"⁶ he first launches an assault on the previously almost-unchallenged theories of E. K. Chambers and Karl Young. Although he acknowledges Chambers' contribution of scholarly data, Hardison does not agree with Chambers' basic assumptions about the growth and structure of medieval drama, i.e., that medieval drama is a point on an evolutionary--and teleological--scale, that the dramatic elements in religious drama are the result of a "deep-rooted native instinct" which acted to broaden the human rather than the religious aspect of the

⁵ When Hardison refers to the "Easter liturgy," he is referring to both the Lenten phase and the Easter phase of the Easter liturgy. He consequently sees the Mass and the Easter liturgy as separate ritual expressions, or "restatements of the same drama in terms of two varieties of time" (Hardison, p. 83). Because, however, the Easter liturgy per se is the Mass, in the sense that the Mass formerly "took in the whole liturgy," and that "to celebrate the liturgy meant the same as to celebrate the Mass" (Gaspar Lefèbvre, Catholic Liturgy: Its Fundamental Principles [London: Sands & Co., 1954], p. 71), and because Hardison's distinction would be confusing in this discussion, "Mass" may hereafter be assumed to be synonymous with "liturgy." For additional information on the historical relationship of "Mass" and "liturgy," see P. Henry, The Liturgical Year: The Public Worship of God by the Church Throughout the Year (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1940), p. 90.

⁶ Hardison, p. ix.

plays,⁷ and that the dramatic elements of unity, plot, and character are "external criteria that are useful in selecting documents" but of little value "to the interpretation of the documents selected."⁸ Chambers shows his lack of interest in the inherent dramatic qualities of the Corpus Christi plays most clearly in the flat statement that "on the whole the literary problem of the plays lies in tracing the evolution of a form rather than in appreciating individual work."⁹

The dominant theme of evolution established in Chambers' theory of medieval dramatic growth reappears thirty years later as the subtly-masked leit motif of Karl Young's Drama of the Medieval Church. Young's variation on the theme is to regard the growth of medieval drama in terms of "the concept of mutations--sudden, radical changes--" rather than in terms of "the concept of development by minute variations."¹⁰ Although Young does avoid Chambers' anticlericalism, crediting the growth of the early plays to "those who were especially ambitious for the development of the religious drama,"¹¹ he, like

⁷ E. K. Chambers, The Medieval Stage (1903; rpt. London: Oxford University Press, 1954), II, 69, 147.

⁸ Hardison, p. 17.

⁹ Chambers, II, 145.

¹⁰ Hardison, p. 20.

¹¹ Karl Young, The Drama of the Medieval Church (Oxford: At The Clarendon Press, 1933), II, 422.

Chambers, neglects to analyze the appeal of liturgy and liturgical drama to the medieval audience. Basic to this non-aesthetic approach is Young's rejection of the Mass as drama. For Young, the Mass does not "represent or portray or merely commemorate the Crucifixion," but is a "true sacrifice" which actually repeats the event.¹² Similarly, the ceremonies of Holy Week emphasize the "separation between liturgy and the drama proper" because they lack, for Young, the necessary criterion of impersonation.¹³ And Young's criterion, unfortunately, is not that of the medieval man. By drawing a firm line between art and reality, Young not only denies the possibility of a dramatic experience which transcends the world of make-believe but also discounts the dramatic structure of the play in its textual form.¹⁴

It is not surprising that Katherine Lee Bates, writing as she did near the end of the last century (1893), should also reflect a strong teleological bias in her investigation of English religious drama. In fact, she begins her description of the miracle [sic] play with the statement that it "was the training-school of the romantic drama" and that it both thematically and spiritually prepared the way for the

¹² Young, I, 84.

¹³ Hardison, pp. 23-24; see Young, I, 90 ff. for an expanded discussion of the separation between liturgy and drama.

¹⁴ Hardison, pp. 30-33.

Elizabethan stage.¹⁵ In this "training-school" capacity, the cycle play demonstrates an "awkward language" and "naive ideas," although it does have, according to Miss Bates, a "grand dramatic framework."¹⁶ She does not see this framework as being in any way connected with ritual; indeed, she mentions only the Vulgate, the New Testament Apocrypha, and "the manners of the time" as the chief sources for the plays.¹⁷ Since she feels that the "rude old playwrights" were guided by "a sense of the Divine" which dwells eternally "in the depths of the English heart," it is not incongruous that she should also attribute positive audience reaction to a "child-like interest and responsiveness" which the grateful--albeit simple--villagers offered in return for the spectacle.¹⁸ What Miss Bates overlooks, first of all, by adopting such a viewpoint, is the possibility of a carefully-constructed dramatic episode whose author was guided by the principles of action, plot, and character-development and, only incidentally, if at all, by "a sense of the Divine." Her second oversight is her failure to recognize the appeal of the plays as drama, for the success of the plays would certainly have depended, not upon any serf-like sense of social

¹⁵ Katherine Lee Bates, The English Religious Drama (1893; rpt. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1926), p. 35.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 181.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 170.

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 174-175, 39.

obligation, but on their individual dramatic merit.

As indicated above in his reference to the crudeness of the cycle plays, A. P. Rossiter shows much of the evolutionary bias found in Chambers and Young. Rossiter states that one may trace ritual drama "from the germ of the famous Quem Quaeritis, as a trope or sung interpolation in the Introit: the chant sung while the celebrant approached the altar."¹⁹ Like Young, who felt that the element of impersonation was lacking in the Mass, Rossiter believes that because "the 'parts' have only a generalized or allegoric significance," the dedication ritual "falls short of acting," and he rejects the idea of drama in the Extensio manuum of the celebrant on the grounds that the celebrant "is certainly not acting the part of Christ."²⁰ Rossiter's view of the plays as "'the art-work of the folk-soul in the religious sphere'"²¹ probably accounts for his disparaging opinion of the plays in terms of their dramatic value. He criticizes the authors of the plays for lack of compression or emphasis, and he cites the "still and suffering dignity of Christ" as evidence that the plays "have tragic strength only where naivete' will serve."²²

¹⁹ Rossiter, p. 43.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., p. 53.

²² Ibid., p. 72.

This naivete may also be seen in characterization, which Rossiter dismisses as undeveloped on the grounds, "nothing complex appears."²³ A well-developed character, for Rossiter, is evidently a multi-faceted character rather than one who is effective in his particular role. This point of view, when applied to specific characters in the Passion sequence, shows a decided bias. Would one, for example, fail to respond to a characterization of Christ because the simplicity of His dialogue did not overtly indicate a complex personality? And similarly, does the insensitivity of the soldiers at the Crucifixion lessen the impact of their actions? A situation of such enormity, coupled as it is with an inherently complex emotional background, should not require the artificial creation of Macbethian motivations to be dramatically effective. Rossiter's other criticism of the cycle plays--that there is no possibility for character-development due to the shifting of many actors into the same role with each new play--is also questionable. The festive occasion of the Corpus Christi presentation would, in itself, have elicited some degree of willing suspension of disbelief; moreover, the Protean nature of the celebrant in sacred ritual, as well as the fluidity of the worshippers' roles (see Ch. iii), would have prepared the audience for an acceptance of each play as a credible representation within the secularized world

²³ Rossiter, p. 72

of illusion.

Although F. M. Salter (1955) also stresses the folk origin of English religious drama, he is far more sensitive than Rossiter to the people and their art. In his view, vernacular drama rises above the level of crudeness and naivete and achieves the grandeur which the drama's theme inherently demands. Salter feels that the plays were not reduced to low comedy by clumsy handling of a vast and powerfully moving theme; he feels, instead, that they show the "simple sincerity and good taste" of their medieval creators.²⁴ Although Glynne Wickham (1959) says that Salter "blasts to bits . . . much of the bedrock on which all judgements of the English Medieval Drama have rested for the past half-century,"²⁵ Salter has done little more than shift a cornerstone. His only departure from the traditional idea of dramatic development--from church to courtyard to pageant-wagon--is his assertion that the Church was not only responsible for the craft guilds' undertaking of vernacular production, but that it continued to have jurisdiction over that production.²⁶ It is this conclusion, however, which leads Salter away from any meaningful interpretations of the

²⁴ F. M. Salter, Medieval Drama in Chester (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1955), p. 83.

²⁵ Glynne Wickham, Early English Stages 1300 to 1660: Volume One 1300 to 1576 (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1959), p. vii.

²⁶ Salter, pp. 7-9, 95.

effect of church ritual on vernacular drama. For instance, his explanation for the appearance of the plays in a vernacular form is that the guild actors were unable to speak Latin.²⁷

Willard Farnham, in The Medieval Heritage of Elizabethan Tragedy (1936), gives a different, though still basically evolutionary, approach. Farnham concentrates on the "consistently developing tragic spirit as it found more than one specialized form of artistic and critical approach to the mystery of man's suffering on earth."²⁸ Because Farnham's discussion is a long-range one, the Passion sequences of the mystery cycles occupy only a small place in his record of tragic expression; consequently, Farnham's attitude toward the mystery plays and their construction needs little mention here. In keeping with his idea of a developing tragic spirit, Farnham feels that medieval mystery writers had only a rudimentary grasp of that spirit, and that any feelings of tragic pity or fear which their plays managed to elicit came about through a style which was marked by "little more than the unstudied simplicity and casual art of the folk ballad."²⁹ And rather than taking up the actual dramatic structures of the medieval mystery plays, Farnham relates events within the cycles to medieval ideas and

²⁷ Salter, p. 9.

²⁸ Willard Farnham, The Medieval Heritage of Elizabethan Tragedy (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1936), p. xi.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 174.

beliefs. In discussing the Crucifixion, for example, he notes the elaboration of detail, but he relates it to the medieval cult of the Passion rather than establishing its significance to action, plot, and character development.³⁰

In contrast to Farnham and the evolutionary group, Waldo F. McNeir (1951) is representative of those more recent critics who have approached the cycle plays as effective drama which invites analysis in terms of individual merit and not in terms of their being "distant forerunner[s] of Elizabethan glory."³¹ While his approach is refreshing, compared with attitudes of such critics as Chambers, Rossiter, and Bates, it fails to show how the relationship between drama and doctrine influences dramatic effect. That McNeir sees drama and doctrine as being on two separate levels of interpretation is clear from his statement that the plays, dramatically tragic, theologically comic, are "drama first, doctrine afterwards."³² Although McNeir does mention briefly that the Passion plays combine drama and doctrine, he does not base his reasons for exploring dramatic value on the artistic merit of the plays themselves but, instead, on the fact that the Passion sequences afford "a cross section of each of the four major surviving

³⁰ Farnham, p. 174.

³¹ Waldo F. McNeir, "The Corpus Christi Plays as Dramatic Art," Studies in Philology, 48 (July 1951), 602.

³² Ibid., p. 604.

cycles large enough to educe some principles" of medieval dramatic technique, and that "representations of Passion themes in allied arts" illustrate the strong interest the Passion theme held for the medieval English imagination.³³

As a consequence, McNeir supports most of his conclusions on dramatic effectiveness by means of parallel elements present in Gothic art forms. To illustrate a point about style, for example, he states that the "diffusion of accents and . . . scattered points of interest remind one of the unresolved tension between the real and the ideal which characterizes Northern religious painting of the late Gothic period."³⁴ A more valuable approach would be first to relate structural tension to the dramatic effect of the scene, then to point out parallels between the dramatic form and an external form which, although valuable as a supportive illustration, has no immediate relationship to the dramatic action.³⁵

When McNeir does not fall back on art forms to explain effect, he invariably ends with imaginative inconsistencies. His theory of dramatic relief is a case in point. According to McNeir, the author deliberately heightens the painful details of the Crucifixion to the point

³³ McNeir, pp. 602-603.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 617.

³⁵ Ibid.

of their being intolerable in order to achieve an emotionally anesthetizing effect which will provide dramatic relief.³⁶ It is unlikely, however, that an experienced playwright³⁷ would deliberately set out to make the intolerable tolerable by deadening the senses with an over-sensationalized account of an already highly emotional, not to mention sacred, event. And McNeir's earlier contradictory assertion that the Crucifixion scene loses "spirituality" because of its "insistence on the physical agonies of Calvary" negates his subsequent evaluation of this insistence as a "plus principle."³⁸ In addition to being logically untenable, McNeir's theory is dramatically superficial; it reduces the grim action to the level of an external device and negates any possibility of its being either structurally important to the development of action, plot, and character, or aesthetically necessary as an acute contrast to both the poignancy of the Crucifixion tableau at hand and the joyousness of the Resurrection which will follow.³⁹ More

³⁶ McNeir, p. 622.

³⁷ Hardin Craig states that "There is . . . great skill, genuine vigor, and no small amount of poetic beauty in the alliterative plays of the York cycle, and there is much in other metres that is poetically admirable throughout the cycle" (Craig, p. 238). With regard to the York writer's dramatic technique, Craig comments further that "he has also a strong sense of dramatic suspense and seems to carry it over from play to play" (Craig, p. 231).

³⁸ McNeir, p. 623.

³⁹ Since the joyousness of the Resurrection does, of course, provide both a dramatic and a spiritual release, dramatic relief at the

importantly, McNeir's interpretation overlooks the religious implications of the Crucifixion, and it is this emphasis on drama, at the expense of doctrine, which no doubt accounts for McNeir's failure to grasp all the dimensions of the Passion sequences. By assuming that the audience was capable of reacting to only one level of interpretation at a time, and incapable, in any event, of grasping the theology behind the Passion, McNeir places himself in the position of having to second-guess psychological reactions whose motivations do not, for him, include past experience.

V. A. Kolve (1966) also ignores the part that religious ritual has in medieval drama, but his reliance on an outmoded version of the play theory of art is responsible for most of his conclusions.⁴⁰ Kolve's approach to the play theory closely parallels the approaches of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century critics, who emphasized the contrast between make-believe and reality and who stressed the artificiality of impersonation. From this point of view, drama is no more than make-believe, a non-utilitarian activity whose key words are

height of the preceding tragic action not only would be structurally uncalled for, but also would detract from the effectiveness of the subsequent action.

⁴⁰ Because a later section of this study (see Ch. ii, pp. 28-30) deals with the relationship between conceptual play and drama, and because Kolve, in The Play Called Corpus Christi (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1966), approaches this relationship differently, I will expand the discussion here in order to make clear the contrast between the two points of view.

"imagination," "emotion," "play," and "suspension of disbelief."⁴¹ Kolve, in fact, bases his theory on the semantic implications of play and seriousness. Claiming that the OED does not clearly define " 'game' in the fully naturalized theatrical sense,"⁴² Kolve goes on to cite examples from medieval literature to reinforce his point that game and earnest were a "common medieval antithesis."⁴³ He adds that it is significant "that the verb is always 'to play,' where we might use 'to act,' 'to produce,' 'to perform,' "; thus, the "play" usage indicates to him that medieval "drama was conceived as a game," and, consequently, that the change from the early terminology to the later is not a purely semantic change, but a "change in the history of theater."⁴⁴

With regard to early definitions of "play" in the dramatic sense, Kolve is mistaken.⁴⁵ Moreover, in his pursuit of linguistic exactitude, Kolve seems to ignore the spirit of play.⁴⁶ His contention that "there

⁴¹ Hardison, pp. 31-32. For discussions illustrating the early theory of play's relationship to art and seriousness, see, for example, Herbert Spencer, Principles of Psychology (New York, 1890), II, 629; and Karl Groos, The Play of Man, trans. E. L. Baldwin (London, 1901), pp. 389-395.

⁴² Kolve, p. 279, n. 31.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 19.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 14.

⁴⁵ The OED lists a specifically dramatic meaning for "play" as early as 1325 (III, 14).

⁴⁶ Since the earliest recorded use of "act" with reference to drama

was little fundamental distinction made between drama and other forms of men's playing" in the English Middle Ages⁴⁷ not only overlooks the sacred nature of the cycle story, but also ignores the possibility of relevant connotations in other game and play usages.⁴⁸ Furthermore, as Johann Huizinga points out, "the abstraction of an antonym for play is conceptually incomplete"; that is to say, the "significance of 'earnest' is defined by and exhausted in the negation of 'play,' " but the "significance of 'play,' on the other hand, is by no means defined or exhausted by calling it 'not-earnest,' or 'not serious.'"⁴⁹

Because Kolve's approach is not a conceptual one, he invariably relies on externals to explain dramatic effect. His statement, for instance, that "a disciplined reading of the analogues and sources [of

 is in 1594, one might argue just as logically, from Kolve's point of view, the historical and semantic implications of "act" as a derivative of the multifaceted Latin ago.

⁴⁷ Kolve, p. 19.

⁴⁸ See, for instance, Piers Plowman, A. xii, 90, "that thy play be plenteous in paradys with aungelys." The idea here is not only religious but also suggestive of the "other-world" atmosphere which play creates. In the Towneley Herod play, XVI, l. 363, the grief-stricken mother cries out, in a clear foreshadowing of the planctus at the cross, "My luf, my blood, my play." An alternate medieval use of "game" is listed by the OED (9, 10) in connection with "the chase" or hunting, but the word is in no way limited to non-earnest pursuits; M. D. Anderson, for instance, in Drama and Imagery in English Medieval Churches (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1963), p. 55, notes that the abundant carvings of the "hunting of stags, foxes, or hares . . . provided many similes for the preachers who saw nothing inappropriate in describing the Dominicans as the Hounds of God (domini canes) hunting the souls of men."

⁴⁹ Johann Huizinga, Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture (1950; rpt. Boston: The Beacon Press, 1955), pp. 44-45.

the cycle plays] is our only substitute for the direct interrogation and experience denied us by the intervening centuries" would lead one to think that Kolve planned to show the importance of sources to the effect of the plays; subsequent references to sources, however, concern only the fact that the sources do not give "game shaping" to the action.⁵⁰ The external nature of Kolve's interpretation emerges also in his basic presentation of the relationship between the play concept and "the procedures and practices of the medieval stage."⁵¹ It is Kolve's contention that the familiarity of the audience with what were, for the most part, local actors; the lack of costumes and scenery; and the absence of a geographically localized setting served "as a powerful check against illusion."⁵² In fact, says Kolve, "Never was a suspension of disbelief invited. . . ."⁵³

Discussing the mechanics involved in the less-than-ethereal Ascension of the York Jesus, Kolve states that the "action was not designed to resemble reality, but rather to translate it into a game mode, a play equivalent."⁵⁴ Similarly, Kolve views the mechanics of the

⁵⁰ Kolve, pp. 3, 188-189.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 23.

⁵² Ibid., p. 24.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 27.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 26.

Crucifixion as evidence that tasks are turned into competitive games.⁵⁵

Such an attitude leads to a dualistic conception of the dramatic whole, in which the game on the stage exists separately and apart from the game or play-world of the audience. Indeed, Kolve emphasizes the cleft between the two worlds: he points out that "in drama there are always two areas of response to an action, the response made within the world of play and game, and the response that the audience makes to the entire play world of which the action is a constituent part."⁵⁶

A carry-over from this dualistic approach appears in Kolve's theory of selectivity as applied to the dramatic episodes of the Corpus Christi cycle. Comparing the arrangement of events in the liturgical year and those in the Corpus Christi drama, and finding that they are not identical, Kolve concludes that "a kind of mimesis of the liturgical year" was not the intent of the Corpus Christi drama.⁵⁷ This idea is in direct opposition to the interpretations of Hardin Craig, Paul Edward Kretzmann, and O. B. Hardison, Jr. Hardison, for example, states that "to the degree [the vernacular cycles] return to the liturgy of Lent for their structure, they return to the ritual 'plot' of the Church year."⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Kolve, p. 188.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 137.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 87.

⁵⁸ Hardison, p. 285. See also Paul Edward Kretzmann, The Liturgical Element in the Earliest Forms of the Medieval Drama: With

And he adds that the fusion of the techniques of vernacular representation with the ritual form of liturgical drama accounts for the cycles' "episodic quality and their larger unity."⁵⁹

Eleanor Prosser's two-fold approach to medieval drama (1961) is "based on a knowledge of the religion and an imaginative identification with the audience attending the plays."⁶⁰ Through this approach she hopes to solve what she considers the basic problem in critical evaluation of the dramatic structure of the cycle plays. "Why," asks Miss Prosser, "have we not valued the mysteries to the degree that they fulfill their purpose as religious drama?"⁶¹ The question is a valid one; regrettably, Miss Prosser does not answer it. Although she does present a number of sources which helped to shape the content of the cycle plays, she concludes that a comprehensive source study "is obviously beyond the scope of any but the most dedicated specialist in medieval theology," and so she limits her analysis to a study of the significance of the doctrine of repentance to the Corpus Christi drama.⁶²

This limited frame of reference probably accounts for Miss Prosser's

Special References to the English and German Plays (Minneapolis: Bulletin of the University of Minnesota, 1916), p. 90; and Craig, p. 94.

⁵⁹ Hardison, p. 285.

⁶⁰ Eleanor Prosser, Drama and Religion in the English Mystery Plays: A Re-Evaluation (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1961), p. 15.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 11.

⁶² Ibid., p. 16.

insistence that "an entire mystery cycle should not be considered as one play."⁶³ Hardison, however, points out that "the practice of referring to the individual cycles as plays is, in fact, a modern one. Medieval and sixteenth-century writers normally refer to the cycles in the singular," i.e., the "play" of Corpus Christi.⁶⁴ This viewpoint allows one to see the cycle as an "aesthetically complete" structure which expresses "ritual form in representational terms . . . an historical drama that emerges from eternity in the first episode and disappears into it once again in the last."⁶⁵ Because Miss Prosser feels that the cycles are unified by the question of man's salvation, she assumes an inductive point of view toward dramatic structure, and thus she shows little appreciation of the advantages which a deductive (and ritualistic) approach would offer.

The other main aspect of Miss Prosser's approach, an imaginative identification with the medieval audience, also falls short of the mark because she feels that "the critic must rely on his own imaginative identification with the medieval audience, his perception arising from years of enjoyable playgoing."⁶⁶ This approach allows for a wide

⁶³ Prosser, p. 54.

⁶⁴ Hardison, p. 287.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Prosser, p. 193.

range of interpretations, all of them overly subjective and therefore based on different criteria. It thus seems invalid as a method of analysis and points up the untenability of Miss Prosser's statement that, from the point of view of dramatic criticism, "no special theory that applies only to medieval dramatic art is necessary."⁶⁷

In view of the inconsistencies in attitude mentioned above, some type of theory is necessary for a valid criticism of medieval drama. The critics previously cited prove unsatisfactory as they deviate from their original courses and concentrate instead on various external factors which do not specifically affect dramatic effectiveness. Because of their lack of uniformity, and the inconsistencies this lack creates, the methods of the above two groups would seem to indicate a strong need for a systematic approach to the critical analysis of medieval religious drama, more specifically, in this study, the Passion sequence of the York Corpus Christi cycle. Therefore, I shall amend the somewhat centralized point of view of such critics as Chambers and Rossiter so as to focus upon the medieval drama as an effective product of its time rather than as a point in a slowly-developing literary scale; I shall make use of the religious and philosophical background material supplied by such critics as Young, Farnham, and Prosser and apply it specifically to dramatic technique as it relates to the development of

⁶⁷ Prosser, p. 193.

action, conflict, and character; and I shall attempt to combine these two methods in order to form a viable means of analysis with a valid raison d'être. From this hypothesis I hope to suggest a solution which profits from the most useful elements of previous criticism.

CHAPTER II

The twelve plays of the Passion sequence in the York Corpus Christi cycle¹ are important as examples of dramatic art, not only in terms of dramatic technique as it relates to the development of action, conflict, and character, but also in terms of position in a cyclic structure which is both representational and ritualistic, historical and universal.² The grouping of the Passion plays into a sequence which begins with Christ's Entry into Jerusalem and which ends with the Crucifixion, death, and burial, follows precedents set by such critics as J. O. Halliwell, Paul Edward Kretzmann, Waldo McNeir, and J. W. Robinson. That the plays are grouped in this way is no doubt directly attributable to the fact that the liturgical calendar of the Church year

¹ The Entry into Jerusalem (XXV); Conspiracy to Take Jesus (XXVI); The Last Supper (XXVII); The Agony and Betrayal (XXVIII); Peter Denies Jesus: Jesus Examined by Caiaphas (XXIX); Dream of Pilate's Wife: Jesus Before Pilate (XXX); Trial Before Herod (XXXI); Second Accusation before Pilate; Remorse of Judas: Purchase of Field of Blood (XXXII); Second Trial Continued: Judgment on Jesus (XXXIII); Christ Led up to Calvary (XXXIV); Crucifixio Christi (XXXV); Mortificacio Christi (XXXVI). The listing is taken from The York Plays: The Plays performed by the Crafts or Mysteries of York on the Day of Corpus Christi in the 14th, 15th, and 16th Centuries, ed. Lucy Toulmin Smith (Oxford, 1885; rpt. New York: Russell and Russell, 1963). All subsequent references to the plays will refer to this edition.

² "Universal" is used here in the sense of the universe as viewed and understood by medieval Western European man.

makes a distinct division between the Lenten season (which ends with Holy Saturday of Holy Week) and the Easter season (which begins with Easter Sunday, the first Sunday of Paschaltide). Furthermore, and of prime importance to this study, the grouping has a liturgical parallel with the events of Holy Week, that week called by the Church "Hebdomada Sancta, or more commonly Hebdomada Major . . . because of the number and the greatness of the mysteries celebrated during it. . . ." ³

Although a recognition of emotional and structural ties between the vernacular plays and their religious sources is necessary to a balanced aesthetic analysis of the Passion sequence, that recognition does not entirely account either for the plays' long popularity ⁴ or for their intrinsic dramatic value. That recognition considers mainly form and arrives at an evaluation based rather on ratiocinative purpose than on aesthetic function. For example, to say that the vernacular drama remained popular for a span of two hundred years because the medieval man was psychically conditioned to respond to the vernacular representations of the Holy Week liturgy is to ignore both individual response within the play world as it exists apart from the world of reality and

³ P. Henry, The Liturgical Year: The Public Worship of God by the Church Throughout the Year (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1940), p. 65.

⁴ From the early fourteenth century to the second half of the sixteenth century.

dramatic merit as it applies to the plays qua plays. Similarly, to say that an awareness of the events of the Passion sequence adds depth to an aesthetic analysis is to stop short of the question of the value and function of that depth. Only from the point of view of form, then, may one validly say that the purpose of the plays was to instruct and to entertain, and that the incorporation of ritualism and Biblical material into the freer and more realistic form of vernacular drama accomplished this purpose. As purpose, however, is not an integral element of dramatic experience, purpose cannot be equated with function. Drama may both instruct and entertain, but the instruction and entertainment are the by-products of the dramatic experience itself, the results of the participants' involvement in the world of illusion. Since the aesthetic value of the plays remains constant, whether the text be read or acted, to speak of the plays' achieving their purpose in terms of instruction and entertainment is to avoid a complete analysis of the dramatic effectiveness of the plays qua plays.

One must find a way, therefore, to explain the effect which occurs when form (in this case primarily structural parallels with subsequent emotional transference) and function (the aesthetic factor which includes, but transcends, form) merge to produce the total dramatic experience. The dramatic vocabulary used to describe the physical components of this experience is in itself revealing. One speaks of the "playgoer," the "playwright," the "players," and, of course, the "play" itself. In

keeping with this terminology is the original meaning of drama as something which is "done." One is dealing, then, with an aspect of the concept of play, and if one is to explain its function within, and its contribution to, the particularized form of play as drama, one needs an understanding of the nature and value of this concept. Conceptual play, as I use it in this study, is "a voluntary activity or occupation executed within certain fixed limits of time and place, according to rules freely accepted but absolutely binding, having its aim in itself and accompanied by a feeling of tension, joy, and the consciousness that it is 'different' from 'ordinary life.'"⁵

In terms of its relationship to society, conceptual play appears to have positive values. For example, Allen V. Sabora and Elmer D. Mitchell feel that "activity is the primary need in life. Nothing about man is more obvious or more elemental."⁶ Similarly, it is Johann Huizinga's view "that culture arises in the form of play, that it is played from the very beginning."⁷ Furthermore, because "in the form and function of play . . . man's consciousness that he is embedded in a sacred order of things finds its first, highest, and holiest

⁵ Johann Huizinga, Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture (1950; rpt. Boston: The Beacon Press, 1955), p. 28.

⁶ Allen Victor Sabora and Elmer D. Mitchell, The Theory of Play and Recreation, 3rd ed. (1948; rpt. New York: Ronald Press Company, 1961), p. 89.

⁷ Huizinga, p. 46.

expression,"⁸ conceptual play satisfies man's basic need for order.

This sense of order is the result of the interaction of two elements basic to the operation of form and function in conceptual play: tension and alternation-repetition. Order is also the controlling factor which gives these two elements their rhythm and harmony. The three elements --tension, alternation-repetition, and order--are, therefore, mutually dependent, but it is order whose effect ultimately determines the aesthetic success of the temporary world of perfection--albeit a limited perfection--created by conceptual play. Conceptual play does not exist for the purpose of creating a sense of order. Play is in itself "an independent entity which is senseless and irrational."⁹ Within the form and function of conceptual play, however, a sense of order prevails: it is inherent to the nature of playing. Moreover, anything less than total involvement in, and total commitment to, the rules and spirit of the game may result in a complete collapse of the mood.¹⁰ Thus, as they do not allow for skepticism, the rules which govern the

⁸ Huizinga, p. 17. See below, p. 28. In that it serves both aesthetic and emotional needs and thus satisfies the medieval insistence on order and unity, this sense of order is particularly important to the dramatic effectiveness of the York Passion sequence.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 11. An example of such a collapse of mood may be seen in the play of children when the withdrawal of a "spoilsport" results in shattering the illusion of the children's immediate play world (Huizinga, p. 11).

activities in the formally-limited area are freely accepted but absolutely binding.

As drama "remains permanently linked to [conceptual] play" because of its "intrinsically functional character" and "its quality of being an action,"¹¹ the particularized form of play represented by the York Passion sequence reflects the nature and value of conceptual play outlined above. For instance, in its capacity as medieval religious drama, the York Passion sequence involves voluntary participation,¹² takes place in a formally-limited area (the space set aside for the pageant wagons), and requires total commitment to the action.¹³ Furthermore, the sense of fulfillment which accompanies the dramatic experience is, in fact, a sense of order in its most basic form. As previously mentioned (see above, pp. 26-27), "man's consciousness that he is embedded in a sacred order of things finds its first, highest, and holiest expression" in conceptual play. Consequently, because the subject of the Passion sequence (the particularized form of play as drama) is a sacred one, and because the situation it recreates is of

¹¹ Huizinga, p. 144.

¹² The significance of this characteristic will be shown below in the discussion of ritual parallels.

¹³ Lee Simonson, in The Stage is Set (1932; rpt. New York: Dover Publications, 1946), p. 48, points out that "audience, playwright, and actors are engaged in a tacit conspiracy everytime a play begins, united in saying, 'Let's pretend; let's make believe.'"

cosmic scale, "an historical drama that emerges from eternity in the first episode and disappears into it once again in the last,"¹⁴ onlookers and actors alike may participate in the original situation and satisfy, for a suspended moment, a need for order by being a part of the "sacred order of things," an ordered universe.

In that it is the result of a "competitive activity involving a certain kind of will and endurance between two or more imaginary people engaged in attack and response, so designed as to be especially playfully effective in the environment of a theatre,"¹⁵ the sense of order, or dramatic fulfillment, has its basis in the concept of play. Moreover, because the play-goer enters imaginatively into the struggle and makes it "his experience, his game," the "essential confrontation" is in his mind.¹⁶ In the York Passion sequence, the competitive activity which results in a sense of order is, of course, the agon, and in an age in which the "soul [was] so imbued with the conception of the Passion that the most remote analogy [sufficed] to

¹⁴ O. B. Hardison, Jr., Christian Rite and Christian Drama in the Middle Ages (Baltimore, Md.: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1965), p. 287.

¹⁵ Samuel Selden, Theatre Double Game (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1969), p. 13. Because tension is basic to the very concept of play, and because the agonistic element is so strongly evident in the York Passion sequence, it should be pointed out that the degree of tension the participants experience is directly proportional to the difficulty of the "game" (Huizinga, p. 48).

¹⁶ Selden, p. 13.

make the chord of the memory of Christ vibrate,"¹⁷ the effect of participating in this struggle, of making it the play-goer's experience, would have been one of extreme emotional intensity. The Passion sequence is, then, that type of drama which sustains illusion and imparts a sense of order through the medium of a plotted work which employs a major conflict,¹⁸ a crisis, and a well-defined ending. As such, it may be described as "a kind of religious exercise" in which the "playwright and the actor are the celebrants of man's aspiration toward a state of greater order, of a more effective organization of powers."¹⁹

That the York Passion sequence is based upon a religious subject and has ritual parallels, does not, however, mean that its dramatic effectiveness and its religious effectiveness require separate analysis.

¹⁷ Johann Huizinga, The Waning of the Middle Ages: A Study of the Forms of Life, Thought and Art in France and the Netherlands in the XIVth and XVth Centuries (London: Edward Arnold & Co., 1924), p. 191.

¹⁸ The omnipresent conflict in the Passion sequence is one of evil versus goodness, and it is translated through the actions and speech of various characters or groups of characters throughout the plays. In the Trial plays, for instance, the major conflict is a negative, silent, or overtly implied one, inasmuch as Jesus' refusal to respond to His accusers represents a steadfast opposition to their commands (see Ch. vi). In the Agony and Betrayal and in the Crucifixion plays, the conflict is an inner one, arising in the former from Jesus' mental agony, and in the latter from His physical agony on the cross.

¹⁹ Samuel Selden, Man In His Theatre (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1957), p. 29.

Although the York Passion plays have strong liturgical ties, represent a segment of the life-death-rebirth cycle which is religious as well as archetypal, and are, in addition, based on the Vulgate and vernacular religious material, they are, nevertheless, the product of conscious creation by the medieval artist. From the purely technical point of view of dramatic technique and structural form, the York Passion plays stand, therefore, as examples of medieval vernacular drama,²⁰ and they deserve to be judged on their inherent dramatic merit. As Etienne Gilson points out, "Everything that the artist submits to the form of his art belongs to the matter of the work, and as the work acts upon us by its wholeness, it makes a total impression where it is impossible to distinguish the part that is due to art from the part that comes from the various matter which the work integrates."²¹ One must approach the plays, then, with the realization that drama and doctrine are inextricably interwoven, and that to isolate the plays' dramatic worth from their religious origin and cultural milieu is to overlook the importance of doctrinal implication and its effect both on audience reaction and on the dramatic structure of the plays.

²⁰ In this study, play, unless explicitly defined otherwise, will mean the text, the printed material, the plotted work, which gives rise to the dramatic performance. The terms "drama" and "dramatic" will refer to the genre into which this particular kind of play falls.

²¹ Etienne Gilson, The Arts of the Beautiful (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965), pp. 179-180.

Christianity, as a cultural frame of reference, does, however, provide a foundation of unity upon which the other factors involved in the dramatic effectiveness of the York Passion sequence may build. Inasmuch as "medieval life was saturated with religion to such an extent that the people were in constant danger of losing sight of the distinction between things spiritual and things temporal,"²² the significance of this foundation should not be underestimated. In an age of violent contrasts, an age in which men oscillated "between the fear of hell and the most naive joy, between cruelty and tenderness, between harsh asceticism and insane attachment to the delights of this world, between hatred and goodness,"²³ the Church offered a feeling of constancy and a sense of order that were badly needed. It is not surprising, therefore, that the medieval aesthetic system was also distinguished "by the profound influence of Christianity on its very heart and soul," and that the "fundamental principle of the beautiful resided in the spirit, in the form either of order or of simple unity."²⁴ The influence of this aesthetic system on medieval drama is apparent: "where a public accepts the allegories and symbols of Catholicism to

²² Huizinga, Waning, p. 156.

²³ Ibid., p. 27.

²⁴ Edgar De Bruyne, The Esthetics of the Middle Ages, trans. Eileen B. Hennessy (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1969), pp. 45, 110.

chart the universe, any evocation of these symbols on a stage . . . will establish a real Heaven and a real earth in the open square of a market town."²⁵ Consequently, the significance of the religious element in the York Passion sequence must be evaluated in terms of the degree to which ritual is effectively integrated into the total dramatic impression.

That the central ceremony of the Holy Week events--as well, of course, as of all medieval Christian festivals--is the Mass, has a direct bearing upon the dramatic effectiveness of the Passion sequence. The Mass is a Eucharistic service which focuses on the sacrifice itself, a "living representation of Calvary," and "the Eucharist as a Sacrament, Sacramentum, has no other end but to signify and produce the rem sacramenti, which is the unity of the Church, by the aggregation of all the faithful into the mystical Body of Christ."²⁶ As the spiritual effects produced by the Mass "vary according to the mysteries and festivals celebrated" (i.e., the graces of Lent are not the same as those of Christmas or Easter), the sacrificial nature of the Mass becomes even more significant.²⁷ Throughout Lent and Passiontide,²⁸ all the

²⁵ Simonson, p. 51.

²⁶ Gaspar Lefèbvre, Catholic Liturgy: Its Fundamental Principles (London: Sands & Co., 1954), pp. 73, 92.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 87.

²⁸ Although Lent has six Sundays, of which Palm Sunday is the last, the last two weeks of Lent, beginning with Passion Sunday, are referred to more specifically in the Missal as Passiontide. See Lefèbvre, p. 140, for a detailed chart of the cycle of Easter.

liturgy "exhorts us to imitate the death of Jesus in dying to ourselves";²⁹ thus, because every celebration of the Eucharist emphasizes "the idea of sacrifice, of holocaust, of immolation,"³⁰ the liturgy of the Holy Week ceremonies accentuates this idea by liturgically paralleling and focusing upon Christ's last days on earth, with special emphasis on His subsequent Crucifixion, death, and burial.

This parallel liturgical emphasis on Christ's sacrifice accounts ultimately, perhaps, for the success of the York Passion sequence. As I have suggested in the preceding discussion, a number of specific reasons exist for the effectiveness of the sequence. All of these reasons, however, relate, ultimately, to the special nature of the subject matter in the York Passion sequence. Because the York Passion sequence represents a particular form of drama--its working within the unifying framework of Christianity and definitely with the Mass makes it "religious drama"--and because such drama has been frequently dismissed or overlooked in terms of its effectiveness,³¹ one must ask how the subject of the Passion fulfilled the medieval emotional and aesthetic requirements for dramatic success. The most obvious answer, as mentioned above, may lie in the dramatic

²⁹ Lefèbvre, p. 141.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 88.

³¹ See, for instance, my discussion, Ch. i, pp. 3-8, of the attitudes of E. K. Chambers, Katherine Lee Bates, and A. P. Rossiter.

paralleling of the plays of the Passion sequence with the sacrificially-focused ritual of Holy Week. Such a parallel not only would produce positive response from a psychically-conditioned audience, but also would add depth to the aesthetic value of the plays.

In terms of those formal characteristics which distinguish the world of dramatic illusion from the world of reality, ritual integrates the religious and the dramatic and provides a concrete framework within which the internal dramatic structure may operate. For instance, the ritual of the Mass and the other Holy Week ceremonies³² takes place within a formally-limited area, the Church, and requires total commitment to the action. That participation in the medieval Easter ritual was not voluntary³³ lends an added benefit to the dramatic representation. The voluntary nature of dramatic participation allows the participant to experience spontaneously within the dramatic world of illusion a subject which, because of its penetration into "all details of ordinary life," was in danger of becoming "too common to be deeply felt."³⁴ The ritual of the Mass had not, however, lost its emotional

³² See Ch. iii, pp. 44-59.

³³ Failure to partake of communion at Easter could result in excommunication. See The Lay Folks' Catechism, or the English and Latin Versions of Archbishop Thoresby's Instruction for the People; together with A WYCLIFFITE ADAPTATION of the Same, and the Corresponding Canons of the Council of Lambeth, EETS, o.s., No. 118, ed. Thomas Frederick Simmons and Henry Edward Nolloth (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1901), 66.

³⁴ Huizinga, Waning, pp. 156, 152.

impact through overemphasis in daily life, for "this familiarity with sacred things" was "a sign of deep and ingenuous faith" and only when "mental contact with the infinite failed" did it give rise to irreverence.³⁵ Herein lies the clue to the effectiveness of ritual superimposition in the York Passion sequence. The sequence presents concretely the source of this deep and ingenuous faith and yet combines it with ritual overtones which, in their purest form, might have caused loss of contact with the infinite.

In terms of their relationship to the dramatic structure of the York Passion sequence, these ritual overtones, or parallels, have both concrete and abstract effects: they strengthen the agonistic quality, add depth to the emotional involvement, and, most importantly, reinforce the sense of an ordered universe. Of particular importance to this discussion is the fact that, although the area set aside for sacred ritual is a holy one and the activities carried on within this area are enacted in a mood of holy worship, the Church has been historically thought of as a theater, and the celebration of the ritual has been considered a drama with "a coherent plot based on conflict (duellum) between a champion and an antagonist."³⁶

That this agonistic element is an integral part of sacred ritual is

³⁵ Huizinga, p. 156.

³⁶ Hardison, p. 40, paraphrasing Honorius of Autun in the Gemma animae, c. 1100.

clearly evident both from the point of view of Honorius' concept of a conflict-based plot in the drama of the Church and from the point of view of the participants, whose spiritual powers are tested by the "rules" of their faith. In the dramatic structure of the York Passion sequence, this agonistic element is doubly forceful, for the dramatic conflict of the York Passion sequence, like the conflict of Church ritual, centers on the Crucifixion, and the participants are subject not only to the rules governing the dramatic world of illusion but also to those sacred "rules" which have been to some degree carried over into the emotional and structural parallels between the Mass and the other Holy Week ceremonies and the Passion sequence.

The York Passion sequence, therefore, has, superimposed upon its dramatic structure, the agonistic emphases of both the Lenten season and the Mass. The agonistic element of the York Passion plays does not, however, account entirely for their dramatic effectiveness. Unresolved conflict could not bring about this result. In order to understand the dramatic effectiveness of the York Passion sequence, one must, consequently, interpret the full meaning of the agon, and he may then discover that meaning in the Mass itself. Even though the Mass "represents, recalls, and applies the Sacrifice of the Cross," its effect proper "is to increase in us sanctifying grace."³⁷ In other

³⁷ Lefebvre, p. 71.

words, "to pass from death to life, ever more and more, is the meaning of the holy Eucharist considered in its life-giving effect."³⁸ Thus, just as participation in the Mass represents participation in the initial sacrifice, so participation in the dramatic experience represents participation in the events being re-enacted.

The effect in both cases is, however, an abstract one. In the Mass, the effect is to pass from death to life, to become one with the mystical Body of Christ; in the York Passion sequence, it is to achieve a sense of integration, to feel that one is part of an ordered universe. The content and cyclical position of the York Passion sequence are such, then, that they lend the sequence a self-containment which is both dramatically complete and aesthetically satisfying. That is to say, the York Passion sequence, like the Mass, has a unity within a unity; it looks both forward and backward and represents absolute, historical, and cyclical time. Also like the Mass, the plays of the York Passion sequence in toto represent a tragic action³⁹ but hold in abeyance the

³⁸ Lefebvre, p. 91. That the Resurrection and Ascension are thus implied in the Mass may be seen concretely in the ceremonies of Good Friday. On this feast of grief, "the lights burning near the Altar of Repose, and the Mass of the Presanctified remind us that Christ is still with His Church and with us behind this veil of mourning" (Henry, p. 94).

³⁹ Because Jesus' suffering and death upon the cross represent the catastrophe of the Passion sequence, and because this catastrophe was brought about by Jesus' opposition to forces that would have oppressed or frustrated His commitment, that action which proceeds through a series of conflicts, results in death, and effects an outward

promise of comedy: the Resurrection. Although the Passion sequence is not in itself dramatically comic, its projected conclusion, the Resurrection and Ascension, is. And because this miracle is implied, the element of tension arising from the agon is supported and made especially effective.

The York Passion sequence stands, therefore, as the strongest example, within the cyclic scheme, of man's basic need for order, and it owes its dramatic effectiveness to the unparalleled blending of a sacred ritual and a religious drama whose primary element is agonistic and whose inherent function is the creation of that sense of order. Only within the York Passion sequence does one find that note of sustained tension which arises from intense conflict, results in total absorption in the illusion, and allows onlookers and actors alike to participate in the original situation and to satisfy, for a suspended moment, a need for order by being a part of an ordered universe. The York Passion sequence would seem, consequently, to be the dramatic prototype of Gilson's statement that "religion mobilizes all the arts to press them into the service of the deity. Only, they themselves are not religion, and they first have to be art in order to serve any conceivable cause. And art should be at its best when the cause to be served is religion."⁴⁰

change must be termed tragic action.

⁴⁰ Gilson, p. 182.

The degree to which the York Passion sequence shows itself to be a carefully-designed work with interrelated parts, a work which employs a major conflict, a crisis, and a well-defined ending has yet to be explored in this study. It is true that these requirements for dramatic effectiveness may be seen as the products of conscious, external creation by a skillful dramatist,⁴¹ but in the York Passion sequence they have as their primary basis the superimposition of ritual parallels in the Mass and the other Holy Week ceremonies upon the vernacular drama. Because the content of the York Passion sequence deals so frequently with the material of sacred ritual, and takes, in fact, its structural pattern from the liturgical events of Holy Week (see above, p. 24), the participants in the world of illusion created by the re-enactment of these events would be conditioned to feel an involvement based not only on the dramatic experience but also upon the concrete and abstract qualities inherent in the ritual parallels superimposed upon the drama. The degree to which these ritual parallels are effectively integrated into the dramatic structure of the York Passion sequence will, consequently, determine their ultimate contributions, both emotional and structural, to the effectiveness of the York Passion sequence as a dramatic re-presentation of a sacred subject.

⁴¹ The unique construction of the York Passion sequence will be taken up in detail in Ch. v.

CHAPTER III

Because the structural form of the York Passion sequence takes its pattern from the liturgical events of Holy Week, and because the superimposition of the ritual framework upon the dramatic framework has a strong influence upon the dramatic effectiveness of the Passion sequence, the parallels between the two areas of expression--church ritual and vernacular drama--need to be emphasized. As stated previously (Ch. ii, p. 23), the plays discussed here cover those events which begin with Christ's Entry into Jerusalem and end with the Crucifixion. Although the familiar Biblical accounts of the Entry, the Last Supper, the Agony and Betrayal, the Trials, and the Crucifixion are present in the York Passion sequence, they vary from the original in length, content, and order of intermediate action. Regardless of these structural differences, the span of events involved has a liturgical parallel within the observances of Holy Week (see Ch. ii, pp. 23-24.)

This holiest week of the Catholic church year begins with the triumphal procession of Palm Sunday but shifts rapidly to a more sober tone which reaches its crescendo on Good Friday, "the culminating liturgical expression of the death theme."¹ This is not to say that

¹ For a detailed description of the Masses of Holy Week, see P. Henry, The Liturgical Year (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: The Bruce

the Crucifixion is the climax of the York Corpus Christi cycle (see Ch. vi, p. 66) or of the Easter liturgy; it is rather the major point of crisis marked by the "climax of a tragedy in life,"² or, in other words, the culmination of the conflicts which lead to Christ's death. As such, it represents the tristia phase in a dramatic structure which moves from tristia to gaudium.³ Inasmuch as Easter is the principal feast of the ecclesiastical year, the Resurrection is the climax of the vernacular cycle and of the Easter liturgy. The Easter miracle serves as "both the peripeteia and the anagnorisis of the Christian mythos."⁴ Consequently, the over-all dramatic structures of the Mass (as a static ceremony apart from seasonal occasion), the Easter liturgy, and the Corpus Christi cycle are comic, not tragic, and the events of the Passion sequence assume the dramatic burden of establishing an emotional tone of sufficient tragic intensity to make effective the peripeteia of Easter morning.⁵

Publishing Company, 1940), pp. 65-118; and O. B. Hardison, Jr., Christian Rite and Christian Drama in the Middle Ages (Baltimore, Md.: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1965), pp. 111-138.

² Charles Davidson, Studies in the English Mystery Plays (New York: Haskell House, 1965), p. 6.

³ Hardison, p. 83. See Ch. ii, pp. 33-34, 37-38, with regard to the abstract effects of the Mass.

⁴ Hardison, p. 178.

⁵ Ibid., pp. 139-140. V. A. Kolve, in The Play Called Corpus Christi (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1966), pp. 10, 49, 58, directly opposes this idea with his interpretation of the Passion.

The recognition of emotional and structural parallels between the York Passion sequence and the Holy Week liturgy is of major importance to an aesthetic evaluation.⁶ First, such a recognition enables one to determine as realistically as possible the impact of the cyclical Passion sequence on the medieval man. That is to say, if one is aware of the emotional implications of the typical medieval Mass and Holy Week ceremonies, he is better prepared to assess the degree of psychic conditioning which would have carried over into the medieval man's response to a vernacular representation of the same subject. Second, a study of the dramatic elements and the sources of the Holy Week ceremonies enables one to form a clearer aesthetic opinion of the cycle drama qua drama. Such a comparison, by taking into account those forces which shaped medieval thought and medieval drama, enhances the sense of the "mingling of art and reality which medieval drama seems to have encouraged."⁷ More specifically, since the goal of medieval literary art was "not to proclaim abstract ideas of which we have a theoretical knowledge, but rather to give concrete form to truths which we have actually experienced and the value of which we have realized as the "central" and "joyful" action of the cycles. For a definition of the term "tragic" in relation to the Passion, see Ch. ii, p. 38.

⁶ See Ch. ii, pp. 23-24. Although the parallels discussed here do involve effect, the focus of the discussion is on the form which causes the effect.

⁷ Hardison, p. 32.

through the practical experience,"⁸ the superimposition of ritual upon the dramatic framework of the Passion sequence emerges as the method by which medieval art achieved its goal. Underlying this goal is the fundamental aesthetic law of unity in variety. An investigation of the nature of those ritual parallels which one finds superimposed upon the internal dramatic structure of the York Passion sequence should make clear the degree to which the artistic goal is accomplished and the aesthetic law is carried out.

The dramatic elements of the Mass fall into two main categories: the dramatic elements common to any given Mass, or those found in the Ordinary; and the dramatic elements in the Masses of Holy Week, or those found in the Proper of Holy Week liturgy.⁹ As previously pointed out (Ch. ii, p. 36), the ritual of the Mass, apart from any seasonal occasion, may be thought of as a drama with an agonistic plot and definitely-assigned roles. Although a number of the mimetic actions which would influence the content of the cyclic Passion sequence are, of course, related to the representational ceremonies of Holy Week, a number of dramatic elements also occur in the Ordinary of any given Mass. The majority of these dramatic elements revolve around the

⁸ Edgar De Bruyne, The Esthetics of the Middle Ages, trans. Eileen B. Hennessy (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1969), p. 160.

⁹ This latter category also encompasses those extralitururgical ceremonies which accompany Holy Week.

central act of consecration and, consequently, have the same emotional impact as do those ceremonies specifically related to Holy Week.

Furthermore, the repetitive nature of these ceremonies increases the likelihood of their being translated into emotional recognition in the Passion sequence, for as "Sunday after Sunday the people see the Christ actually lifted up before them," the "sense of the reality of the sacrifice" which they are witnessing grows and prepares them for the ultimate emotional experience of Holy Week. Thus, on Good Friday they feel "that an actual sacrifice of momentous consequence to them is taking place."¹⁰

While the drama of Christ's being offered up as a present sacrifice for man's sins surely serves as the apex of the Mass, there are other dramatic elements within the framework of the Ordinary. Among these dramatic elements are the assumption of various roles by both the celebrant and the participants; the positional symbolism which attends the actions of the celebrants; and the presentation of the Sanctus, which--based as it is on Gospel accounts of Palm Sunday (Matt. 21.9; Mark 11.9)--is simultaneously sung and recited by the chorus and the celebrant and leads up to and away from the elevation.¹¹

¹⁰ Davidson, pp. 14-15.

¹¹ Hardison, pp. 59-60. Specific references to Biblical sources will refer throughout this study to the Biblia Sacra: Iuxta Vulgatam Clementinam, 3rd ed. (Biblioteca De Autores Cristianos, 1959). Translations will be taken from The Holy Bible with Annotations, References,

In contrast to the fixed ceremonies of any given Mass, a number of extraliturgical ceremonies accompany the usual order of events within the span of Holy Week. Depending upon whether they are governed by the principle of articulation or of coincidence, these ceremonies may be either nonrepresentational or representational. Ceremonies such as the "Farewell to the Alleluia," the "Dismissal of Penitents," and the "Laying Aside of Albs" are governed by the principle of articulation. They serve to define structurally the dramatic shape of the Easter cycle, are not dependent upon historical referents, and are usually nonrepresentational. There are also within the Proper of Holy Week Masses certain Gospel events, figures, and scenes which are extraliturgical and which are governed by the principle of coincidence, rather than by articulation. These representational ceremonies are most likely to occur when a major historical event and a regular service coincide, and, because of the nature of the occasion, appear most frequently and are most prominent during Holy Week.¹² Because these representational events occur "once and are irrevocably past," they are examples of historical time and must rely on historical source and illusion for authenticity and a heightened sense of awareness.¹³ Examples of ceremonies which illustrate the

Maps and a Historical and Chronological Table: The Old Testament Douay Version and the New Testament Confraternity Version (New York: P. J. Kenedy & Sons, 1961) and will be so noted.

¹² Hardison, pp. 86-87.

¹³ Ibid., p. 84.

principle of coincidence and which employ historical source to create verisimilitude include the Palm Sunday procession, the division and furtive carrying away of syndons from the altar during the Maundy Thursday Mass, and the burial of the "Host, the cross, or both," timed to coincide with the death of Christ on Good Friday.¹⁴ Ceremonies of this type "make use of dialogue taken from the Bible, imitative voice inflection, costume elements, and props or arrangements of setting to suggest an historical locale."¹⁵

In regard to the use of dialogue taken from the Bible, Karl Young believes that the Gospel accounts of the Passion serve as the foundation of the Passion sequences, and he analyzes the use of the Gospel narrative of the Passion in medieval worship.¹⁶ With particular regard to the passiones delivered in connection with the Holy Week Mass, he comments that the text and ceremonies of the liturgical passio are so dramatic that they need only the "merest suggestion of impersonation" to change them from dramatic dialogue into true drama.¹⁷ He feels, moreover, that numerous rubrics also indicate an attempt to dramatize the ceremony. As examples, he cites the tearing of the altar curtain

¹⁴ Hardison, pp. 111, 130, 136.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 84.

¹⁶ Karl Young, "Observations on the Origin of the Medieval Passion-Play," PMLA, 25 (1910), 310-311.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 313.

during the singing of the Passio secundum Lucam on Wednesday of Holy Week and the pause and dimming of the lights at the point of Christ's death.¹⁸ Hardison, on the other hand, believes that Young's concept of impersonation not only places "undue stress on performance," but also "suggests make-believe in contrast to reality."¹⁹ Hardison further opposes Young's theory that the Gospel served as the basis for the Passion play. Indeed, he states that the "drama of the Easter liturgy does not exist for the sake of future development but for its own sake."²⁰

In addition to historical sources, there are various illusionary devices which, by increasing sensory awareness and thus drawing the congregation more closely into the action, heighten the effect of historical representation. Such devices include the refusal of the congregation to kneel and pray for the Jews during the Collects of Holy Wednesday and Good Friday; the Holy Wednesday extinguishing of lights and the subsequent clatter or knocking which simulates "the convulsion of nature which followed the death of Christ"; the Holy

¹⁸ Young, p. 352.

¹⁹ Hardison, p. 31.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 176. Hardison's argument does not negate the fact that the basic plot of the Passion sequence is taken from the Gospel accounts. Rather, the argument emphasizes the parallel nature of the dramatic elements which exist in church ritual and in drama. Thus, in relation to this study, Hardison's argument supports the idea that the superimposition of the church ritual upon drama makes the Passion sequence doubly effective.

Thursday ecclesiastical absolution of the penitents, the blessing of the three holy oils, the stripping of the altar, the Mandatum or washing of the feet, and the single candle left burning "at the apse of the Tenebrae hearse."²¹

Other illusionary devices which Hardison believes to be important include lyric stimuli and anachronism, "the dramatic equivalent of the argumentum ad hominem."²² Although the joyful Gloria in Excelsis and the Alleluia do not appear in the Lenten service, "their absence gives a somber tone to the service, a tone which is intensified by the tracts which replace the Alleluia from the Mass of Septuagesima Sunday until the first Mass of Easter."²³ Anachronism, another illusionary device, is particularly significant as a carry-over form in the vernacular drama. Walter E. Meyers reasons that the cycle play tends to re-structure time "to bring secular material in line with Biblical," and he cites anachronism as the "most obvious" method of re-structuring time.²⁴ By "negating a strict historical sequence," anachronism achieves a relevance to the contemporary scene; it thus reveals a definite pattern and purpose.²⁵ As

²¹ Henry, pp. 89, 75, 77, 81, 83, 86.

²² Hardison, p. 84.

²³ Ibid., p. 90.

²⁴ Walter E. Meyers, A Figure Given: Typology in the Wakefield Plays (Pittsburgh, Pa.: Duquesne University Press, 1969), p. 14.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 15.

an artistic device, anachronism not only affects the emotional response of the audience, but also serves as a pointer to the interpretation of dramatic form. John Dennis Hurrell, in discussing unifying elements within the cycle play, points out that

within each play, the acceptance of the idea that behind apparent differences of time and place there is a pattern of God-given unity, or that the separate phenomena which we call historical events or geographical locations are in no real (i.e., spiritual) sense isolated from each other, makes it possible for the dramatist to mold an artistic form out of what is usually called his use of anachronisms.²⁶

In addition to those dramatic elements in the Mass and the Holy Week ceremonies which influenced the emotional response to and the dramatic form of the Passion sequences, there is the doctrine of repentance, which dominated medieval religious thought and permeated the sermons and vernacular religious material of the period. This is not to say that the doctrine of repentance did not influence the tone of the Mass or of the Easter liturgy, for its major emphasis lay with man's being made worthy through "faith in the mercy of God through Christ's Passion."²⁷ This theme is, of course, coincident with the medieval belief in the Mass as "an actual repetition of the initial sacrifice" and with the particular stress placed on immediate penance during the Easter

²⁶ John Dennis Hurrell, "The Figural Approach to Medieval Drama," College English, 26 (May 1965), 603.

²⁷ Eleanor Prosser, Drama and Religion in the English Mystery Plays: A Re-Evaluation (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1961), p. 31.

season.²⁸ It furthermore manifested itself in the artistic representations of Christ's Crucifixion. By the beginning of the fourteenth century, representations of the Crucifixion had changed from the spiritually-calm depictions of the early Middle Ages to agonized portraits which indicated that a "new willingness was being shown to search the suffering of mortality for some primary and inherent meaning."²⁹ This "interest in suffering for its inherent meaning"³⁰ undoubtedly grew out of the thirteenth-century emphasis on the repentance doctrine, for it was in that century that "the Church instituted an intensive campaign of education" in the essentials of that doctrine.³¹

Eleanor Prosser points out that penitence and preaching "were closely interrelated," and that as a result of this relationship there appeared a profusion of didactic materials, "sermon manuals for the priesthood and . . . books for private devotion."³² These materials were, of course, in Latin, and it was not until almost the fourteenth century that vernacular works designed for the common man and devoted

²⁸ E. K. Chambers, The Mediaeval Stage (1903; rpt. London: Oxford University Press, 1954), II, 4, 37.

²⁹ Willard Farnham, The Medieval Heritage of Elizabethan Tragedy (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1936), pp. 64-65.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 67.

³¹ Prosser, p. 19.

³² Ibid., pp. 20-21.

to disseminating the repentance doctrine appeared. Among such vernacular works with a repentance theme were The Lay Folks Mass Book, the Cursor Mundi, Handlyng Synne, the Lay Folks' Catechism, the Pricke of Conscience, and John Mirk's Festial and Instructions for Parish Priests.³³

In addition to these didactic vernacular materials, there were numerous Biblical narratives "available to the laity either in manuscript or through the preaching of friars or the parish priest."³⁴ In that they harmonized details and were "constantly explaining, constantly defining terms," these narratives served a homiletic purpose, but their value to the critic of medieval drama lies in the fact that they contain much legendary material and thus serve as excellent sources of Biblical tradition as it appears in the cycle plays.³⁵ Among these vernacular sources of Biblical material are such verse narratives as the Cursor Mundi, The Northern Passion, The South English Legendary, Meditations on the Supper of Our Lord and the Hours of the Passion, The Stanzaic Life of Christ, and Meditations on the Life and Passion of Christ.³⁶ The

³³ Prosser, p. 21.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 40.

³⁵ Ibid., pp. 40-41.

³⁶ Although it duplicates Miss Prosser's list in part, the list is mine. Miss Prosser states that the narratives illustrate Biblical tradition, but she examines the individual works in terms of their homiletic qualities. Thus, her focus of attention may account for her

fact that the "medieval citizen was not familiar with the Bible in translation" and depended on sermons and vernacular narratives for religious instruction, gives these Biblical narratives added significance.³⁷

Consequently, the laity, at the close of the thirteenth century, was using homilies which rendered short passages, usually from the Gospel, and metrical versions like the voluminous Cursor Mundi, which had the content, if not the exact words, of both the Old and New Testaments.³⁸

The full translation in Middle English of the Psalter was in keeping with this effort to make the Bible more accessible to the common man, and the interest which this translation aroused was a major influence for the later fourteenth-century translation of various portions of the New Testament. Some of these portions were "simple translations of the text"; others were "accompanied by a gloss or commentary, also usually translated from a Latin source or sources." A version of the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, taken mainly from the Sentences of Peter Lombard, falls into the latter group.³⁹ H. Wheeler Robinson points out that, "collectively, these works could supply inquiring

listing the Cursor Mundi as both a non-narrative didactic work (see above, p. 52) and a Biblical narrative source.

³⁷ Prosser, p. 39.

³⁸ H. Wheeler Robinson, The Bible in its Ancient and English Versions (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954), p. 134. Hereafter cited as The Bible.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 135.

minds with much of the knowledge which was fully accessible only to those who could read the Vulgate."⁴⁰ In fact, the author of the Cursor Mundi stated that his purpose was to instruct those who could read only their native English.⁴¹ It is not surprising, therefore, that the Cursor not only deviated from the original Vulgate, but also depended in part upon the early vernacular story Bible of Hermann of Valenciennes. Of particular interest here is the fact that the "most extended borrowings" of the Cursor Mundi from the Hermann Bible are from the New Testament and include Christ's Passion up to the Crucifixion.⁴²

Another Biblical verse narrative, The Northern Passion, relates in vivid manner the story of the Passion and "represents the loose practices of fourteenth-century preaching."⁴³ Based on the Old French poem, the Passio des Jongleurs, The Northern Passion "was well suited to purposes of entertainment and instruction; the narrative was brief and not

⁴⁰ Robinson, The Bible, p. 134. The original version of the Vulgate had been contaminated both by imperfect copying and by the persistence of Old Latin. In the New Testament, the practice seemed to be to revise the existing Old Latin codices by inserting the more important of Jerome's corrections. Thus, a "mixed" text resulted (Robinson, The Bible, pp. 117-118).

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 134.

⁴² Lois Borlund, "Herman's Bible and the Cursor Mundi," Studies in Philology, 30 (July 1933), 427-28, 433.

⁴³ Frances A. Foster, in "Preface" to The Northern Passion (Supplement), EETS, o.s., No. 183, ed. Wilhelm Heuser and Frances A. Foster (London: Oxford University Press, 1930), viii.

overloaded with homiletical passages, and the legendary matter copious enough to relieve the soberness of the Biblical narrative, but not so grotesque as to shock by its extravagance."⁴⁴ Its English author, however, rearranged and added to the narrative, "and while parts of the narrative are rearranged in accordance with the customary order of events, others are rewritten in a form which is even further from the Gospels than is the French poem."⁴⁵ On the other hand, an expanded form of The Northern Passion, "written for use on Good Friday as part of the Expanded Homily Collection," is, despite its greater length, closer to the Biblical account than is the earlier version.⁴⁶ And although neither version of The Northern Passion touches on the "symbolical relation between Christ's passion and the liturgy," the poem's popularity is, according to Frances Foster, "chiefly due to its rendering of scripture."⁴⁷ She bases her opinion on the repetition of phrases of the Passion which appear "in narratives and plays of the Gospels."⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Frances A. Foster, ed., The Northern Passion, EETS, o.s., No. 147 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., Ltd., 1916 [for 1913]), 2.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 9, 76.

⁴⁷ Foster, Northern Passion, No. 183, viii.

⁴⁸ Foster, Northern Passion, No. 147, 6. See Ch. iv, pp. 74-75 for influence of The Northern Passion on the York sequence.

A Stanzaic Life of Christ, another verse narrative of the fourteenth century, also embroiders its material with legend. It is based partly on the Polychronicon but chiefly on the Legenda Aurea.⁴⁹ Unlike the author of The Northern Passion, the author of A Stanzaic Life of Christ "often . . . makes the connection between the events of Christ's life and the ritual of the Church as he found it in the Legenda Aurea (the three accusations of the Jews and the 'excusaciouns' sung in the Good Friday service; the five appearances of the risen Christ and the five turnings toward the people of the priests at Mass). . . ."⁵⁰ Hardin Craig adds that the poem, rather than being a "clear narrative like The Northern Passion," is, instead, a "storehouse of theological ideas and apocryphal events." Craig believes that such subject-matter would more likely lend itself to superimposition for ornamental purposes than to source material for "original composition."⁵¹

The three highly-colored narratives discussed above, as well as others with similar themes, such as The South English Legendary, Meditations on the Life and Passion of Christ, and the Bonaventuran Meditations, were a successful means of impressing the story of Christ's

⁴⁹ Foster, Northern Passion, No. 183, ix; A Stanzaic Life of Christ, EETS, o.s., No. 166, ed. Frances A. Foster (London: Oxford University Press, 1926), xxii.

⁵⁰ Foster, Northern Passion, No. 183, ix.

⁵¹ Hardin Craig, English Religious Drama of the Middle Ages (1955; rpt. Oxford: At The Clarendon Press, 1964), p. 197.

life upon the laity, but they were "not the usual form of discourse delivered from the medieval pulpit."⁵² A Gospel narrative (narratio), accompanied by explanation (explicatio), exhortation (exhortatio), and example (exemplum), was the more common type of discourse.⁵³ One outstanding example of a collection of such medieval discourses is John Mirk's Festial, a group of homilies which Miss Prosser refers to as "a series of sermons."⁵⁴

Far from being a series of dry discourses proceeding along the lines of formal exposition, the Festial "'with its fantastic incidents indicates the vogue of narrative sermons based on the lives of holy men: it also shows lack of restraint on the part of the preachers, and the marvellous credulity of contemporary audiences.'"⁵⁵ For instance,

⁵² Foster, Northern Passion, No. 147, 2.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Prosser, p. 26. Although the terms "homily" and "sermon" are often used synonymously, there is in fact a distinction between the two, and the modern definition of homily, as applied to "'sermons that follow the text step by step,'" is actually too narrow a definition for the homily of medieval times (John Robert Sala, Preaching in the Anglo-Saxon Church [Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Libraries, 1934], pp. 80-81). Usually, the concept of the homily is a narrower one than that of the sermon, in that the homily is governed by such general--but not necessarily binding--rules as simplicity, brevity, and expository method. Moreover, although the homily is a sermon, "the sermon is not necessarily a homily" (Sala, 80-82).

⁵⁵ G. R. Owst, Preaching in Medieval England: An Introduction to Sermon Manuscripts of the Period c. 1350-1450 (New York: Russell & Russell, Inc., 1965), p. 245, quoting J. A. Mosher, The Exemplum in the Early Religious and Didactic Literature of England, p. 28. Owst feels that although Mosher is speaking of the Blickling Homilies, the

the second Narracio in the sermon titled "De Dominica in Passione Domini Nostri Ihesu Christ" relates a tale from the Gesta Romanorum in which a beautiful young woman clothed in green brings a bloody and "tomartured" child, equally beautiful, before a wicked justice whose swearing by "Godys passion, and armes, and sydys, and blody wondys" had set a bad example for his people.⁵⁶ She says to the justice, "'Thou and thy men wyth your horrybull othes han dismembryd my sonne Ihesu Cryst, that I am modyr to, and soo ye haue taght all thys lond. Wherfor thou schalt haue thyn owne dome.'" Immediately, to everyone's horror, the earth opens up, and the justice falls into hell. Not surprisingly, the people "soo aftyr" give up swearing. The priest's exhortation to the congregation to likewise give up "othys" and to do "reuerence to Cristys passyon" follows this "horrybull" anecdote and ends the sermon.⁵⁷

The next homily in the series, written for Palm Sunday, attempts to explain to the people why the day is called Palm Sunday and why the service of the day is so long. The discourse begins with a condensed version of the Biblical account of the Palm Sunday procession

description suits the Festial equally well.

⁵⁶ Johannes Mirkus (John Mirk), Mirk's Festial: A Collection of Homilies, EETS, e.s., No. 96, ed. Theodor Erbe (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., Ltd., 1905), 113. For convenience, all citations of Middle English texts throughout this study have been modernized with regard to the obsolete letters, the thorn and the yogh.

⁵⁷ Ibid., pp. 113-114.

and goes on to explain the necessity of commemorating the event.⁵⁸

The second point of the discourse illustrates the lack of restraint which was common to Festial material and which allowed the priest "to 'jest' in homely fashion with his fellows."⁵⁹ The priest quotes someone as asking how it is that Christians worship the Cross rather than the ass, "'Sythen that Crist had the grattest worschyp ridynge on an asse that euer he had in thys world."⁶⁰ Although his Chaucerian double entendre would seem to be distracting to any but the most pious listener, the priest goes on immediately to make the point, which is that "all the worschip of thys world turnythe all to vanyte and to noyt, and makythe a man bothe to foryton hys God and hymselfe, wheras myschef and woo makythe a man to thynke on hys God and to know hymselfe."⁶¹

The preceding discussion of dramatic and non-dramatic material found in the Mass and the Holy Week ceremonies should make it clear that there are emotional and structural parallels between the Passion sequence and the ritual of the Church, and that these parallels influenced both the response of the medieval audience to the vernacular

⁵⁸ In view of the fact that anachronism in the cycle plays was an accepted artistic device, it is interesting that the priest makes a point of stating that ivy and palm are carried in the procession because there is "no olyf that beren grene leues" (Festial, p. 115).

⁵⁹ Owst, p. 246.

⁶⁰ Mirk, Festial, pp. 114-115.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 115.

representations of Christ's sacrifice and, to a large extent, the dramatic structure of the cycle play. Furthermore, because the elements which are transferred from religious ritual to vernacular drama make up, in part, what I have previously referred to as "form," they must be considered necessary to an evaluative analysis of drama. The critical standards I shall apply as a means of determining the dramatic effectiveness of the York Passion sequence will, accordingly, concern such manifestations of form as selectivity of author; development of action, conflict, and character; and unity of plot. Plot ultimately determines these criteria, for plot is the "most basic element--and therefore, properly, the controlling factor, to which all other parts must be related if the work is to be fully expressive."⁶²

This method of evaluation, although Aristotelian in concept, is, as will be shown below, directly applicable to an analysis of form and function in the York Passion sequence. Because a balanced evaluation of the dramatic effectiveness of the York Passion sequence must take into account the final cause or the effect (in this case, the sense of an ordered universe) of the presentation upon the audience as well as the plot or formal cause (the Passion sequence itself) which creates the effect, Aristotle's concept of the pleasure which poetry produces is

⁶² O. B. Hardison, Jr., commenting on Aristotle's Poetics, in Aristotle's Poetics: A Translation and Commentary for Students of Literature (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968), p. 289.

particularly relevant to an analysis of cyclic drama. It makes clear that the

pleasure derived from imitative work is not sense-gratification but a type of pleasure associated with learning. This learning, in turn, . . . occurs when we come to know universals or perceive the relation of the specific to the universal.⁶³

Unlike Francis Fergusson, who believes that Aristotle's "detailed analysis of plot" applies only to classical tragedy and "cannot be directly applied to subsequent forms of drama,"⁶⁴ I feel that Aristotle's concept is applicable to the Passion sequence of the York cycle drama, for as Hardison points out, "the prototype of tragedy is the theophany, or joyous sense of rebirth and communion, that follows the sacrifice and rebirth of the god."⁶⁵ Consequently, in the Passion sequence, which is an integral part of a cyclic scheme whose action is on a cosmic scale, the specific may be thought of as the human reality of the Crucifixion; the universal to which the specific is related, and from which perception arises, may be thought of as the attendant possibility of eternal life. This perception of the universal may be equated with the restoration of a sense of order in the form of the working-out of a Divine plan, and it is essential to the achievement

⁶³ Hardison, Poetics, p. 92.

⁶⁴ Francis Fergusson, The Idea of a Theater (1949; rpt. Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1954), p. 246.

⁶⁵ Hardison, Poetics, p. 119.

of dramatic effectiveness.

The ultimate effectiveness of the York Passion sequence is not, consequently, determined simply by its capacity to sustain the audience's interest for a specified unit of time. Such a criterion assumes that the "art of plot-making is the art of making an exciting arrangement of incidents with carefully controlled and mounting suspense."⁶⁶ On the contrary, one must consider "the action, its primary form (plot in Aristotle's first sense), the nature of the pleasure intended, and the meaning of the play." Only then may one arrive at an evaluation which does not generalize "the techniques of the playwrights" and take "the audience which [these techniques] excited and diverted as determining the final cause of all drama."⁶⁷

In the Greek tragedies analyzed by Aristotle, "the action, the first form of the action, its ritual meaning, and its abstract intelligibility were one."⁶⁸ Because the Passion sequence is, by nature, ritualistic, and because religious ritual is the prototype of tragedy, the same concept of the art should hold true for vernacular drama. Furthermore, the elements within this concept will serve as the basis for the following analysis of the York Passion sequence. The total analysis, however,

⁶⁶ Fergusson, p. 246.

⁶⁷ Ibid., pp. 246-247.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 247.

will also include the abstract effect, whose impact depends upon the compositional quality of the dramatic structure. Taken together, the two factors achieve the ultimate effect of an ordered universe. This effect, as I have shown, results from a dramatic framework which is based on religious ritual, has emotional overtones that are a direct consequence of this ritualistic element, and derives its unity from an historical theme which is cosmic in scope. The inherent function of this effect is, therefore, to intensify the element of sacred ritual, to set up a pattern for emotional response, to pave the way for a "willing suspension of disbelief," and to establish "rules" for the cosmic scheme. Thus, a final evaluation of the York Passion sequence will not only illustrate the degree to which the elements of composition have contributed to dramatic effectiveness, but will also reflect the significance which the abstract product of a ritualistic form holds for that effectiveness.

In the first three chapters of this study, I have demonstrated the ways in which sacred ritual influences the dramatic effectiveness of the York Passion sequence and the necessity for taking this ritual influence into consideration. The remainder of the study will, consequently, focus upon the plays of the York Passion sequence as examples of medieval drama and as reflectors of those ritual parallels which influence dramatic success.

CHAPTER IV

The York cycle of mystery plays is not only the "most complete English collection" with the "only known full text," but also the longest of the four extant cycles: it contains a total of forty-eight plays, twelve of which make up the Passion sequence.¹ The unusually large number of plays is apparently the result of locale. York was a large, busy trading center and a cathedral town, and in order that the numerous guilds which wished to participate in the Corpus Christi pageant might be accommodated, "subjects embracing more than a single episode were apt to be split into parts."² The resulting arrangement has led Martial Rose to see the plays as "fragments, rather than dramas," and to attribute this alleged shortcoming--that is, their being fragments--to "brevity" and "insulation."³ Such a criticism does not take into consideration the value of the plays either in their cyclic form or in a

¹ Lucy Toulmin Smith, ed., The York Plays: The Plays performed by the Crafts or Mysteries of York on the Day of Corpus Christi in the 14th, 15th, and 16th Centuries (Oxford, 1885; rpt. New York: Russell and Russell, 1963), p. xliii. Martial Rose, ed., The Wakefield Mystery Plays (New York: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1963), p. 30, points out that if its text had been preserved in complete form, the Towneley cycle would actually have been longer than the York.

² Hardin Craig, English Religious Drama of the Middle Ages (1955; rpt. Oxford: At The Clarendon Press, 1967), p. 202.

³ Rose, p. 30.

composite form such as the Passion sequence, and it is especially shortsighted in relation to the York cycle: in addition to its length, the York cycle is noted for its imaginative realism, its metrical excellence, and the original dramatic features which appear particularly in the representation of the Passion and which will be discussed in detail in the following chapters. Rose, therefore, unfairly criticizes the plays for their abundance, for quantity does not necessarily preclude quality, and the fact that the events here are divided into individual plays rather than being grouped episodically within one play does not, and should not, automatically fragment them or cause them to seem "insulated."

The more valid method of approaching the plays is that of asking what effect the York divisions have upon the continuity of the cycle (or of the Passion sequence) in terms of the development of action, conflict, and character. Effie MacKinnon states this concept succinctly: "A study of the dramatic structure of the York cycle should focus attention on [the] essential situations and not on the arbitrary division into pageants."⁴ To support this point of view, Miss MacKinnon reasons that "in the York cycle the single pageants did not usually present completely closed units but small scenes or phases of a larger dramatic

⁴ Effie MacKinnon, "Notes on the Dramatic Structure of the York Cycle," Studies in Philology, 28 (July 1931), 441.

unit."⁵ J. W. Robinson, on the other hand, says that Miss MacKinnon's statement "is only true in a most general sense," for he feels that plays which are considered "so many acts or scenes of a larger play" must also be judged "lacking in the development of theme and character, and merely repetitious."⁶ Referring specifically to the plays of the York Passion sequence, Robinson maintains that each of the plays "is self-contained" and is "meant to be appreciated separately."⁷ Then, in an apparent contradiction, Robinson states that in the composition of the Passion episodes "nothing that did not elucidate the process of the Passion story was admissible."⁸ The basis of Robinson's disagreement with Miss MacKinnon seems, consequently, to be his attitude concerning the significance of the Crucifixion to the dramatic structure of the Passion sequence. Although he admits that the Passion plays "are mostly preparatory to the Crucifixion," he dismisses the event as a "basic story" beyond which the plays "are not bound together by the development of theme or characterization."⁹ Nevertheless, Robinson

⁵ MacKinnon, p. 441.

⁶ J. W. Robinson, "The Art of the York Realist," Modern Philology, 60 (May 1963), 250 and n. 35.

⁷ Ibid., pp. 249-50. Robinson's interpretation of the dramatic structure of the Passion sequence does not take into account the parallel, and integrated, structure of the Holy Week ceremonies.

⁸ Ibid., p. 250.

⁹ Ibid.

believes that the "continuity" of the York Passion plays is unequalled in any of the other cycles or in "narrative poems such as The Northern Passion," and he bases his opinion on the York playwright's ability to "extend the Passion story" through the medium of "a realism continually apparent in word and phrase, argument and debate, character and action, and, probably, in the introduction of whole episodes."¹⁰

For example, in his discussion of the York dramatist's "particular kind of realism," Robinson points out that a close attention to "small details of language and action" leads to an emphasis on "process of behavior" rather than on "separate actions," because the dialogue springs "from a necessary chain of action."¹¹ Closely related to this effective device is an "emphasis on mental processes" which is especially apparent during arguments or discussions. At such times the author, by inventing logically persuasive dialogue, insures plausible responses. Thus, "action is shown to be the result of genuine decision, and decision to be the result of genuine persuasion."¹² This insistence on dramatic plausibility is further carried over into character delineation. In addition to establishing the particular nature of evil characters through the medium of their opening speeches, the York

¹⁰ Robinson, p. 251.

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 244-245.

¹² Ibid., p. 245.

dramatist consistently applies "realistic elaboration . . . to many different characters and situations." He thus exposes "subtleties of character" and increases credibility not only in specific situations but also in the characters as identifiable personalities.¹³

Although the examples of realistic devices cited above are extremely effective in their dramatic contexts, they do not justify Robinson's interpretation of their ultimate importance to the York Passion sequence, i.e., that continuity in the York Passion sequence confines itself to continuity of realistic style. Aside from the fact that it is not necessarily inconsistent to assume that one could appreciate a play "separately" and at the same time be aware of its relationship to the plays both preceding and following it, it is unrealistic to conclude that theme and character-development cannot exist outside the confines of single play units. This is particularly the case in a sequence such as the Passion, where theme and character can progress successfully only in relation to the unfolding of the plot. On the strength of definition alone, the plays of the Passion sequence must have as their central focus the Crucifixion. The Trial before Herod, for instance, excellent drama though it be, surely has no raison d'etre outside the context of its position. And yet, it is surely more than "preparatory," as Robinson sees it; it is essential as a vital link in the chain of events leading to the Crucifixion. What Robinson overlooks is

¹³ Robinson, pp. 245-246.

the possibility of a continuity of plot strengthened, not fragmented, by well-developed episodes presented in such a realistically vivid manner that they bring to life and make even more plausible the over-all story of which they are a necessary and integral part.

One might assume, from Rose's criticism of the York plays as "brief" and "insulated," and from Robinson's reference to them as "self-contained," that the individual York plays are scarcely more than carefully-etched vignettes, and that the plot divisions created by their self-containment could hardly be other than awkward. Hardin Craig, remarking of the plays that "one would expect them not to be long, and in fact they tend to be rather short," does little to alter this assumption.¹⁴ Although length does not necessarily reflect dramatic value--the quality of the text and its relationship to adjoining texts being of considerably more importance--length can serve to indicate those plays which the playwright considered especially significant to the dramatic framework. Furthermore, as mentioned above, the burden of dramatic effectiveness, in terms of continuity, should not rest upon the episode as an isolated incident, but upon the episode as an effectively integrated part of the total, on-going action.

In relation to the York Passion sequence, this theory would seem to have particular relevance to the five key episodes: the Entry into

¹⁴ Craig, p. 202.

Jerusalem (XXV), the Last Supper (XXVII), the Agony and Betrayal (XXVIII), the Trial scenes (XXIX, XXX, XXI, XXXII, XXXIII), and the Crucifixion (XXXIV, XXXV, XXXVI).¹⁵ The York plays are longer than those of the other three cycles in four of the five major episodes: the Entry, the Agony and Betrayal, the Trial scenes, and the Crucifixion.¹⁶ Surely it is no coincidence that these episodes, critical to the dramatic structure of the Passion sequence, receive special development by their

¹⁵ Because the action of the Crucifixion in York occupies three separate plays, and because this action is essential to a complete analysis of dramatic structure, the comparison of line numbers given below, with regard to the Crucifixion, will be based on action beginning with the procession to Calvary. With regard to the inclusion of play XXXII in the Trial group, see Ch. vi. p. 109, n. 1.

¹⁶ Although in this study I am concerned only with the York cycle, I feel it necessary to establish, as a basis for comparison, the length of the five episodes in the other three cycles. The comparison of lines is as follows: Entry into Jerusalem: York XXV, 545 lines; Ludus XXVI, 141 lines; Chester XIV, 87 lines; Towneley, no play. The Last Supper: York XXVII, 187 lines; Ludus XXVII, 425 lines; Chester XV, 256 lines; Towneley XX, 173 lines. The Agony and Betrayal: York XXVIII, 301 lines; Ludus XXVIII, 131 lines; Chester XV, 111 lines, Towneley XX, 267 lines. The Trial episodes: York XXIX, XXX, XXXI, XXXII, XXXIII, 1,691 lines; Ludus XXIX, XXX, XXXI, 599 lines; Chester XVI, 432 lines; Towneley XXI, XXII, 673 lines. The Crucifixion: York XXXIV, XXXV, XXXVI, 1,066 lines; Ludus XXXII, 970 lines; Chester XVI, 507 lines; Towneley XXII, XXIII, 840 lines. Line numbers for the Ludus, Chester, and Towneley cycles are taken from the following texts: Ludus Coventriae or The Plaie Called Corpus Christi, Early English Text Society, e.s., No. 120, ed. K.S. Block (1917; rpt. London: Oxford University Press, 1960); The Chester Plays, Early English Text Society, e.s., No. 115, ed. Hermann Deimling and J. Matthews (London: Oxford University Press, 1916); The Towneley Plays, Early English Text Society, e.s., No. 71, ed. George England and Alfred W. Pollard (1897; rpt. London: Oxford University Press, 1962).

author. And, as will emerge later, it is in large part through the dramatic artistry so fully revealed in these episodes that the York Passion plays achieve their special excellence.

Contributing markedly to the success of this dramatic artistry are the "detailed and imaginative realism" and intricately-devised alliterative verse which are especially apparent in the Passion sequence and which contribute toward making those plays "stand apart as a group."¹⁷ Robinson, using realism and alliterative verse as guidelines, assigns eight of the York Passion plays (XXVI, XXVIII-XXXIII inclusive, and XXXVI) to one author, whom he refers to as the York Realist.¹⁸ This grouping excludes four plays from the Passion sequence: the Entry into Jerusalem (XXV), the Last Supper (XXVII), Christ Led Up to Calvary

¹⁷ Robinson, p. 241. The alliterative verse, in particular, has served as the basis for much critical controversy over the composition of the plays. Older criticism--most of which falls into the first quarter of the twentieth century--centers, predictably, on stages of composition. See, for instance, E. K. Chambers, English Literature at the Close of the Middle Ages (Oxford: At The Clarendon Press, 1945), pp. 89-90 ff.; C. M. Gayley, Plays of our Forefathers (New York, 1907), p. 158; W. W. Greg, "Bibliographical and Textual Problems of the English Miracle Plays," The Library, 3rd Ser., 5 (1914), 289, n. 2.

¹⁸ As justification for future references to the York Realist, I offer Robinson's explanation for his use of the term. Robinson states, "I should add that it is only partly for the sake of convenience that I write of the art of hypothetical 'York Realist,' rather than of 'eight York Passion plays that technically resemble each other'; the particular excellence of these plays excites a corollary interest in the purposiveness of their composer" (Robinson, p. 241). See below, pp. 75-77, for discussion of the York Realist's contribution with regard to cyclic revisions.

(XXXIV), and the Crucifixio Cristi (XXXV). The same four plays are excluded in Jesse Byers Reese's list of the thirteen York plays he believes to have been written in purely alliterative verse.¹⁹ Certainly the excluded plays are important as dramatic highpoints and structural necessities. One might ask, then, if their not falling under the authorship of the York Realist affects the quality of the Passion sequence as a whole. Such does not seem to be the case, for the four excluded plays are not inconsistent in their realism and do not fall apart metrically for lack of pure alliterative verse.²⁰

Studies dealing with versification and revisions in the York cycle have also raised the question of York's sources. Because the York playwright's skillful use of these sources within the Passion sequence

¹⁹ Jesse Byers Reese, "Alliterative Verse in the York Cycle," Studies in Philology, 48 (July 1951), 649. The Reese list, however, includes plays outside the Passion sequence, such as the Fall of Lucifer (I) and the Death of Mary (XLV).

²⁰ In addition to provoking controversy over authorship within the York cycle itself, realism and alliterative verse have raised questions about York's relationship to Towneley, for the two cycles not only have similarities of plot and common sources, but also have marked similarities in realistic detail and versification. The similarity in alliterative verse is, however, a general one, for, as Reese notes, "the genius shown in the York alliterative plays is not of burlesque, but of irony and humanity" (Reese, p. 668). Because the problem does not directly affect a discussion of the dramatic value of the York Passion, I will not discuss the matter here. For a brief survey of criticism concerning the York-Towneley relationship, see Francis H. Miller, "The Northern Passion and the Mysteries," Modern Language Notes, 34 (February 1919), 88-92; Grace Frank, "On the Relation Between the York and Towneley Plays," PMLA, 44 (March 1929), 319-328; and Craig, Ch. vi, passim.

definitely contributes to the plays' success, these sources deserve some general comment here (although they will be given more detailed attention below in the discussion of the individual plays). Critics have cited The Northern Passion, the Gospel of Nicodemus, the Cursor Mundi, and, of course, the Vulgate as major sources for the York Passion sequence. There has, however, been some critical disagreement over the assignment of these sources to specific plays, and the disagreement centers mainly around the revisions which the plays underwent. Lucy Toulmin Smith places the probable date of the York MS at 1430-1440,²¹ but she points out that the date of composition may "safely be set as far back as 1340 or 1350, not long after the appearance of the Cursor."²² The fact that Miss Smith's admirable study of the York plays appeared in 1885 may account for the fact that there is no mention of the possibility of more than one author or of major revisions which would have influenced the textual content and versification. She attributes the variations in verse simply to the dramatist's fascination with "the charms of rime, and the delights of French verse,"²³ and she limits her discussion of sources for the York Passion plays to the Cursor Mundi, the Gospel of Nicodemus,

²¹ Smith, p. xviii.

²² Ibid., p. xlv.

²³ Ibid., p. xlvi. Miss Smith's choice of words seems to imply a delicious decadence to the poet's shift in style, and one wonders if her turn-of-the-century perspective might not have influenced her critical judgment.

and the Vulgate.²⁴ Miss Smith contends that the York cycle offers the closest parallel to the Cursor Mundi of all the extant cycles: "first, because it is more nearly perfect and comprehensive; [and] second, because it is free from much of the coarse jocularity and popular incident which were introduced into the Towneley and Coventry plays."²⁵ She makes no mention of The Northern Passion as a possible source for York. The omission is unfortunate, and leads Miss Smith at one point, to comment that "in Play XXVIII. p. 251, the brilliant light from Jesus which strikes back the soldiers seems to have some other source than the fancy of the poet."²⁶ The conjecture is accurate but incomplete. The source for this incident may be found in both the Oxford and the Cambridge MSS of The Northern Passion (NP, Oxf. 11. 687-694; Camb. 11. 465-470).²⁷ And although the incident may not seem of particular consequence, it is, as will be shown below, especially significant within its framework. Various episodes in the York Passion sequence, such as the Porter scenes and the "episodes of Judas offering himself as bondman to Pilate," are, it is true, "elaborated

²⁴ Smith, pp. xliv, xlviii, xlix.

²⁵ Ibid., p. lxiv.

²⁶ Ibid., p. xlviii.

²⁷ The Northern Passion (Supplement), EETS, o.s., No. 183, ed. Wilhelm Heuser and Frances A. Foster (London: Oxford University Press, 1930). Hereafter cited as NP.

in an original manner"; but The Northern Passion and the Gospel of Nicodemus appear to have served as the "basis for whole plays,"²⁸ and their significance should not be overlooked.

The York cycle as it now stands, however, is the product of a number of revisions and redactions; and the incorporation of material from the Gospel of Nicodemus, the alliterative verse, and the realistic detail are major aspects of the cycle's alterations. Discussions centering on the sequence and method of these revisions are rather complex, but Craig presents what is probably the most cogent and comprehensive summary of the Cycle's literary history. Stated concisely, Craig's view is that the earliest complete version of the York cycle was "rewritten . . . on the basis of the Northern Passion," and then, in a later set of revisions, was strongly influenced by the Gospel of Nicodemus. This revision, and in particular, eight plays of the Passion sequence, were in turn stylistically affected in the late fourteenth century by the York Realist's "extensive rewriting" in alliterative verse.²⁹ The Realist, however, "did not change the basic subject matter of any of the plays, and for this reason he is not to be credited with any fundamental structural work."³⁰ It is necessary, therefore,

²⁸ Miller, p. 92.

²⁹ Craig, pp. 237-238.

³⁰ Robinson, p. 242.

to investigate what use the Realist made of his sources in the course of his alliterative and realistic revisions.

Those plays in the York Passion sequence which Craig believes to have been affected by the Gospel of Nicodemus include the Last Supper (XXVII), the Trial before Caiaphas and Peter's Denial (XXIX), the First Trial before Pilate (XXX), the Second Trial before Pilate and the Condemnation (XXXII), and, to a minor extent, the Crucifixio Cristi (XXXV).³¹ Robinson, however, distinguishes between those plays in which "hints" from The Northern Passion and the Gospel of Nicodemus are taken up and expanded by the York Realist, and those plays in which "words and phrases" from the narrative sources appear. In the latter group, Robinson cites plays XXX, XXXIII, and XXXVI as having specific parallels in the Gospel of Nicodemus, and plays XXVIII, XXIX, XXXI, XXXII, XXXIII, and XXXVI as having specific parallels in The Northern Passion.³² Plays XXXIII and XXXVI obviously have parallels in both narratives. Thus, of the eight alliterative plays whose sources Robinson discusses, only the Conspiracy (XXVI) lacks specific verbal parallels with either The Northern Passion or the Gospel of Nicodemus. Craig's list, correspondingly, includes only one play, the Last Supper (XXVII),

³¹ Craig, pp. 224, 237.

³² Robinson, p. 242, n. 9. Eleanor Grace Clark, in "The York Plays and the Gospel of Nichodemus," PMLA, 43 (March 1928), 153, cites only plays XXX and XXXIII as having specific parallels in the Gospel of Nicodemus.

which Robinson does not attribute to the York Realist. And if Craig's list and Robinson's are combined, only two plays of the Passion sequence, the Entry into Jerusalem (XXV) and Christ Led Up to Calvary (XXXIV), are omitted for lack of alliterative verse, realism, and specific narrative sources.

In the three chapters which follow, I will discuss alliterative verse, realism, and specific narrative sources with particular reference to the contribution they make to continuity of action, conflict, and character, and, ultimately, to the over-all dramatic effectiveness of the York Passion sequence. Such an approach allows one to view the sequence as a unified whole, rather than as a series of self-contained fragments (see above, pp. 64-66). Furthermore, because the York Passion sequence represents a dramatic unity, it has a dramatic structure which includes rising action, climax, and catastrophe. Accordingly, I shall divide the twelve plays of the sequence into groups which best approximate these three structural areas. Thus, chapter five includes as rising action the Entry into Jerusalem (XXV), the Conspiracy to Take Jesus (XXVI), the Last Supper (XXVII), and the Agony and Betrayal (XXVIII); chapter six investigates the five Trial plays (XXIX-XXXIII inclusive), the last of which, the Second Trial before Pilate, marks the climax of the sequence; and chapter seven takes up the three Crucifixion plays (XXXIV, XXXV, XXXVI), the last of which represents the catastrophe, or death of Jesus. The chapter divisions do not imply a break in the unity of the sequence as a whole. They simply permit a convenient presentation of a large amount of material.

CHAPTER V

The Entry into Jerusalem (XXV), the first of four pre-Trial plays, is the only one of the five major Passion episodes (see Ch. iv, pp. 69-70) which is not included in the York Realist's group and which is not mentioned as having sources in either The Northern Passion or the Gospel of Nicodemus.¹ Therefore, one might suppose that this opening (and seemingly outcast) play of the Passion sequence is lacking in realistic detail, undistinguished in versification, and generally inferior in its development of action, conflict, and character. Certainly it has escaped the critical attention--and acclaim--accorded to those plays bearing the unmistakable mark of the York Realist. Nevertheless, the Entry into Jerusalem is an extremely artistic, highly complex episode whose function is to establish structural and figurative patterns which will be repeated throughout the Passion sequence. These structural and figurative patterns are developed in two major ways: first, concretely, through the use of carefully-chosen dialogue which produces realistic characterization startlingly similar to that used in those plays credited to the York Realist; and second, abstractly, through repeated references to the fulfillment of prophecy and through numerous light images.

¹ Although play XXXIV is also excluded, it is one of three plays--XXXIV, XXXV, and XXXVI--which make up the Crucifixion episode.

Furthermore, when these patterns appear in the Entry play, they have a positive quality and are thus in accord with the triumphal mood of the occasion. In subsequent plays, as the mood darkens, the patterns reverse themselves and serve purposes which are in direct opposition to those they served in the Entry. Not until the Resurrection will their original positive functions be renewed.²

This shifting of moods occurs, of course, in the parallel episodes of the other cycles, but there the shifting exists as the result of an established framework, the Passion story, and the artistic devices which embellish this story are, for the most part, effective only within their immediate context. The York Passion sequence, on the other hand, does not rely simply upon an already-constructed framework for its effectiveness. Here a microcosm (the Entry play itself) exists within the macrocosm (the full Passion sequence), and the major purpose of the smaller scheme is to increase the consequence of its sequential correspondent. Artistic devices such as the patterns discussed above have far-reaching value beyond their immediate effect, and the result is the creation of a unity within a unity. The most significant aspect of this arrangement is its close correspondence to the liturgy of the Holy Week ceremonies, a correspondence which lends to the York Passion sequence a high degree of internal complexity.

² An investigation of the Resurrection plays per se is, however, beyond the scope of this study.

Because this complexity has as its dramatic basis those structural and figurative patterns mentioned previously, it is necessary to point out some specific devices in the Entry play which illustrates these patterns.³

At the beginning of the York Entry into Jerusalem (XXV), Jesus is speaking to His disciples Peter and Phillip. Prophesying His death, He explains that by this act He will save "Mannys sowle." He then sends His disciples to fetch an ass and her foal

So the prophicy clere menyng
May be fulfilled here in this place,
 'Doghtyr Syon,
Loo! this lorde comys rydand on an asse
 the to opon.'
 (11. 24-28)

Although opening speeches by major characters were stock conventions of medieval dramaturgy,⁴ Jesus' speech here is effective for the contrast it makes with the boastful openings in every other play of the sequence except the Agony and Betrayal (XXVIII). J. W. Robinson believes that the stock openings by boastful characters not only invited the audience's

³ Because the Entry into Jerusalem bears the responsibility of establishing these patterns for the entire Passion sequence, I will expand my comments on this play in order that I may limit later, related discussion within this extremely long sequence to concise remarks bearing directly upon dramatic effectiveness. These remarks will focus mainly upon those five episodes which serve as dramatic highlights within the Passion sequence, although incidents which fall outside these episodes will be referred to if they have parallels with the major episodes or if they contribute significantly to the overall dramatic effect.

⁴ J. W. Robinson, "The Art of the York Realist," Modern Philology, 60 (May 1963), 242.

denunciation of these "presumptuous pagans," but also served "a dramatic function by establishing the particular emphasis to be given the character of the evil protagonist."⁵ Because Jesus immediately makes reference to His forthcoming death and stresses the fulfillment of prophecy, the "particular emphasis" to be given His character is apparently that of redemption.⁶ Such an approach imposes a heavy dramatic burden upon the dramatist, who must establish, and sustain, an emotional tone of sufficient tragic intensity to make effective the peripeteia of Easter morning (see Ch. iii, p. 42).

Jesus' instructions to His disciples, the reference to "Doghtyr Syon," and the carrying out of the errand occur in the Vulgate,⁷ but certain words and phrases in the York version, such as "gud harte" and "tarie noght" (l. 16), echo the following account of the Entry in The Northern Passion:⁸

⁵ Robinson, p. 243.

⁶ It is especially significant that Jesus says He will ransom souls "fro sorowes sere / That loste was il" (ll. 6-7), for the Gospel of Nicodemus, with its vivid description of Christ's descent into Hell and His extending of mercy to the lost souls who resided there, has a definite effect on the tenor of the York Passion sequence.

⁷ Cf. *Secundum Matthaeum* 21.4-5 and *Secundum Ioannem* 12.15 in Biblia Sacra: Iuxta Vulgatam Clementinam, 3rd ed. (Biblioteca De Autores Cristianos, 1959). Matthew is the only one of the Gospels that mentions both an ass and a colt, but it omits the owner's asking why the beasts are being taken. John includes the "Syon" reference but does not follow the traditional story.

⁸ The passage is taken from The Northern Passion (Supplement),

He cald of his discipels twa,
 And bad that thai suld smertly ga
 To the cete that by-for tham stode,
 And thus he said with myld mode:
 "Twa bestes bi-for yhow sall yhe fynd,
 And baldly sall yhe tham unbynd,
 And un-to me that thai be broght;
 And if any say to yhow oght,
 Sais yhour maister of tham has nede,
 Than sall thai suffer yhow gud spede."
 The apostels went with hert glad,
 And all thai fand, als Ihesu bad.
 Thai broght un-to him bestes twa,
 Ane Asse with hir fole all-swa.
 Thair clathes thai layd with-uten lett,
 And Ihesu sythen o-bouen thai sett,
 And so he rade un-to the toune.
 (NP, Oxf. ll. 99-115)

The disciples' repetition of these phrases when they return from their
 errand further strengthens the similarity with the narrative account:

Pet. Ihesu! lord and maistir free,
 Als thou comaunde so haue we done,
 This asse here we haue brought to the,
 What is thi wille thou schewe us sone,
 And tarie noght.
 And than schall we, with-uten hune,
 Fulfill thi thought.
 (11. 267-273)

Phil. Lord thi will to do all-way
 We graunte thing.
 (11. 279-280)

The insistence on fulfilling prophecy and numerous references to Jesus

EETS, o.s., No. 183, ed. Wilhelm Heuser and Frances A. Foster (London:
 Oxford University Press, 1930). Future citations will refer to this edition,
 and the MS being used--Cambridge (Camb.) or Oxford (Oxf.)--will be indi-
 cated with citations of line numbers.

as a "prophette"⁹ are not, however, based on Biblical or known narrative sources, and so must be attributed to the author's invention and be assumed to serve the definite dramatic purpose of emphasizing the redemptive nature of Jesus' character.

When Peter and Phillip arrive at their destination and prepare to take the ass and colt, the first of many realistic touches by the author of this play becomes apparent. Peter tells Phillip that he thinks they should find "hym that thame gan bynde, / And aske mekely" (ll. 55-56) for permission to take the beasts. Phillip replies that these "beestis are comen" (l. 57), and that there is no need to ask. The Janitor, who then appears, evidently does not agree with Phillip's rationalization, for he says

Saie, what are ye that makis here maistrie,
 To loose thes bestis with-oute leverie?
 Yow semes to bolde, sen noght that ye
 Hase here to do, therfore rede I
 such thingis to sesse,
 Or ellis ye may falle in folye
 and grette disease.
 (11. 64-70)

Peter and Phillip explain the situation to the Janitor, who assents readily to their request, and then, thinking ahead, says he will tell the chief of the Jews that Jesus is coming, so that a crowd will be assembled to greet Him properly. The Janitor is careful, however, to make certain that the plan is agreeable to the disciples, saying first, "And if thou

⁹ See, for instance, ll. 10, 85, 123, 127, 148-153, 156.

thynke it be to done" (l. 92), and then asking "What is your rede?" (l. 96). Peter, concurring with the plan, adds the assurance that he and Phillip will bring the beasts back soon.

The foregoing scene clearly illustrates such aspects of style as attention to small details of language and action, emphasis on mental processes, and realistic elaboration of character and situation. Because these realistic devices recur not only in this play, but also throughout the Passion sequence, it is hard to accept Robinson's statement that plays XXV, XXVII, and XXXIV--all of which have the qualities Robinson sees in "realism"--"contain nothing" of the York Realist's "special kind of realism."¹⁰ In the scene involving the two disciples and the Janitor, for instance, the action progresses smoothly and logically through the use of realistic detail and dialogue. Peter's reluctance to take the beasts without asking permission is overcome by Phillip's explanation that the beasts are common, i.e., town beasts, and the Janitor's distrust is allayed by a series of logical questions and answers which persuade him that the disciples' mission has merit. Won over, the Janitor enters totally into the spirit of the occasion, and his plan to proclaim Jesus' coming provides a logical reason for the presence of the assembled multitude who greet Jesus when He arrives at Jerusalem.

There is no indication in any of the sources of this play that the

¹⁰ Robinson, p. 248.

people knew about, and consequently prepared for, Jesus' coming; that the assemblage should be so reasonably explained in the York version is, therefore, the mark of a careful constructionist who leaves no action without a motive, and no motive without a rationale. Moreover, the author has, within the narrow limits of this one scene, established distinct personality-patterns for the characters' traits appropriate to the characters' later actions. Peter, for example, despite the fact that Jesus clearly has told him and Phillip to take the beasts and to explain the necessity only if the occasion arose (ll. 15-35), apparently feels some personal concern about taking the beasts without first asking for them. Furthermore, Peter has promised, not once, but three times in the space of seven lines, to do as he is told:

Jesu, maistir, evyn at thy wille,
And at thi liste us likis to doo,
Yone beste whilke thou desires the tille,
Euen at thi will schall come the too,
Un-to thin esse.
Sertis, lord, we will thedyre all
The for to plesse.
(11. 36-42)

Then, in play XXIX, when he denies his master three times (XXIX, 11. 89-159), Peter displays the same concern for himself. In other words, his character remains consistent, but the pattern of his action reverses itself.

The examples from the scene above exemplify clearly the major structural devices used by the author of the Entry play to establish

patterns which recur within, and lend unity to, the subsequent actions leading to the Crucifixion. In succeeding plays, these patterns will, as mentioned above (pp. 78-79) and as specifically illustrated in Peter's dialogue, reverse themselves, and appear as negative actions or responses. With regard to those characters who do not reappear in subsequent plays, there can, of course, be no reversal. Nevertheless, the repetition of patterns through these minor characters and incidents establishes concretely the significance of those patterns which do recur. The eight burghers, for instance, who are advised by the Janitor of Jesus' imminent approach, carry on a discussion which is marked by logical process of thought and by careful plot construction.

In what might, at face value, seem to be a rather unemotional discussion of Jesus' genealogy and kingship, the burghers reveal the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. Repeatedly referring to Jesus as a prophet (see above, pp. 78-80), they recount the miracles Jesus has performed. They thus establish simultaneously the action which has occurred prior to the events of the Passion, Jesus' divine nature, and a definite reason for His enemies to plot against Him. The last point is particularly significant, in that the emphasis on good deeds establishes a concrete impression which will be carried over to, and sharply contrasted with, the charges of wrong-doing brought against Jesus in the trial scenes. That the burghers' discussion does not become merely a mechanical device for advancing the plot is, again, due to certain

realistic touches which bind the separate speeches together and give a real sense of human interaction. Never do the burghers appear to be simply delivering information; they are aware of one another as human beings and make their awareness felt by asking for one another's viewpoints. The eighth burgher, for instance, presents his reasons for meeting Jesus "as oure owne kyng" (l. 172) and quite reasonably asks for his companions' opinions on the matter:

What is youre counsaill in this thyng?
 Now say ye all.
 (ll. 174-175)

The Janitor, who has been listening to the impressive accounts of Jesus' importance, decides to elaborate on his personal knowledge of and involvement in Jesus' forthcoming arrival, hoping, obviously, to bask in reflected glory. His account of his dealings with the disciples is marked by an attention to detail which appears throughout the sequence, and which, at this point, precisely suits the Janitor's wish to seem important in the eyes of those around him. Furthermore, in his retelling of the encounter with Peter and Phillip, the Janitor embellishes the actual scene to increase his own importance, and although he does not actually lie, he does not give an exact account of what went on, either. He says:

Of his discipillis ij this day,
 Where that I stode, thei faire me grette,
 And on ther maistir halfe gan praye
 Oure comon asse that thei myght gete
 bot for awhile,

Wher-on ther maistirs ofte myght sitte,
 Space of a mile.
 (11. 190-196)

It is typical of the dramatist's style that the Janitor should not say merely that Jesus needed a beast to ride upon, but that He needed a soft sitting-place for an explicitly-defined distance. The burghers resolve to meet and honor Jesus, and after again reciting Moses' prophecy, the eighth burgher concludes that

The Genolagye beres witnesse on;
 This is right playne.
 Hym to honnoure right as I canne
 I am full bayne.
 (11. 242-245)

The discussion ends with the first burgher's announcement that they will all go to meet Jesus

With braunches, floures, and unysoune,
 With myghtfull songes her on a rawe. . . .
 (11. 262-263)

Their children, they add, will "Go synge before, that men may knawe / To this graunte we all" (11. 264-266).

As Jesus and the two disciples approach Jerusalem, a blind man (Cecus) and a pauper converse. The pauper explains to Cecus that Jesus is coming, Cecus asks to be helped to the street where Jesus will pass, and then he cries aloud for Jesus to notice and have mercy on him. His blindness and frustration are poignantly amplified, first through his request to be led where he "may here / That noyse" (11. 315-316), and then through his inability to make himself heard while the pauper stands

idly by, merely urging him to "Cry som-what lowdar" (l. 326). Phillip eventually hears the cries, and, in an extension of his earlier insensitive attitude, tells the blind Cecus to keep quiet, because he is ruining the effect of the otherwise joyful occasion (ll. 330-334).¹¹

Peter also finds the blind man bothersome, but, tempering his annoyance, he asks Jesus to grant the man "his boone and his askyng" so that they might have some peace (ll. 337-343). Jesus restores the man's sight, saying "Thi faith shall the saue," and the blind man praises Him, concluding his speech with "I was are blynde as any stone; / I se at wille" (ll. 356-357).¹² Although there is in *Secundum Ioannem* no account of the healing of the blind man on the road to Jerusalem, chapter nine deals with the parable of the blind man. Jesus summarizes the lesson for the Pharisees: "'For judgment have I come into this world, that they who do not see may see, and they who see may become blind'" (John 9.39, DV). The sight (and light) imagery is echoed in chapter twelve in Jesus' assertion that "he who sees me, sees him who sent me. I have come a light into the world, and whoever believes in me may not

¹¹ Phillip's rather unchristian behavior in this play may account for the fact that he never reappears in subsequent plays, such as the Last Supper, where he might logically be included. This poetically-licensed--possibly implied--reprimand may, or may not, have been obvious to the onlookers.

¹² Cf. *Secundum Lucum* 18.35-43, *Secundum Marcum* 10.46-52, and *Secundum Matthaeum* 20.30-34.

remain in the darkness" (John 12.45-46, DV). This idea emerges in the medieval belief that "since God alone is sufficiently powerful to multiply being instantaneously and to influence universal activity, He is Light in its pure form."¹³ It then follows that "insofar as objects are luminous, they are not only noble, but also divine." For this reason, "the pleasures of light are more noble and more spiritual than those of touch."¹⁴ Because light imagery is to play an important part in later episodes of the Passion sequence, its translation in the Entry play into the physical reality of sight is a significant addition to the piling-up of these images; it is especially interesting in that its abstract quality is presented through a concrete medium, the realistically-depicted healing of a blind man.

The abstract meaning of the light/dark contrast becomes more evident as Claudus, a lame man, begs that Jesus might also restore him to health. In the midst of his plea, he notes that Jesus "schope both nyght and day" (l. 365). Jesus heals the lame man and Zacheus, the publican, wonders at the miracles. Zacheus' speech serves not only as a hint of foreboding, but also, and more importantly, as an affirmation of God's omnipotence in an ordered universe, a universe which is beyond man's knowledge or power to change or to understand

¹³ Edgar De Bruyne, The Esthetics of the Middle Ages, trans. Eileen B. Hennessy (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1969), p. 60.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 116.

fully. Zacheus says:

Sen first this worlde was made of noght,
 And all thyng sette in equite,
 Such ferly thyng was neuere non wroght,
 As men this tyme may see with eye.
 What it may mene?
 I can noght say what it may be,
 Comforte or tene.
 (11. 392-398)

Zacheus' uncertainty as to whether comfort or grief may result from the miracles Jesus has wrought ironically reflects the dual emotions which the Crucifixion will arouse: grief over Jesus' mortal suffering and death, and comfort from the knowledge that the death brings redemption. It is within this larger framework of tristia and gaudium that the patterns of light and dark--or more literally, the forces of goodness and sin--operate. And it is fitting, consequently, that references to light should fill the Hail lyrics which triumphantly herald Jesus' arrival. The chorus of burghers refer to Jesus, for example, as "blossome brigh[t] ," "lylly lufsome lemyd with lyght," "sonne ay schynand with bright bemes," and "lampe of liff" (11. 500, 520, 532, 533). The praise rests, too, almost entirely on comparisons with flowers and jewels. Jesus is called "vyolett vernand," "marke of myrthe," "blossome brigh[t] ," "rose ruddy," "birrall clere," "dyamaunde with drewry dight," "jasper gentill," "lylly lufsome," and "balme of boote" (11. 407-521). These references to nature, which ever renews itself, but is evanescent in relation to eternity; to beryl, whose name means "soothsayer" or

"prophetic"; and to diamond, which is associated with purity and brilliance, are explicitly appropriate to the occasion.¹⁵

Although Robinson does not mention the Hail lyrics of the Entry play (since he does not attribute the Entry to the York Realist), he does call attention to what he terms "anti-boast" and "anti-Hail" lyrics, which he feels provide dramatic contrast in the eight plays by the York Realist. Robinson cites as the "chief example" of an anti-Hail lyric lines 409-420 in the Second Trial before Pilate (XXXIII)¹⁶ and states that this lyric "is a burlesque of the kind of lyric spoken" in the Adoration play.¹⁷ Perhaps, though, the anti-Hail lyric of the Trial scene is much more than a "burlesque," for that term limits it to but one dimension and precludes the possibility of its serving a structural purpose. Because the Hail lyrics of the Entry play carry out the positive theme of Jesus' kingship and the fulfillment of prophecy, it is more logical to see the anti-Hail lyric of the Trial scene, where Jesus is dressed in purple, crowned with thorns, given a reed sceptre, and set

¹⁵ Summerfield Baldwin, in The Organization of Medieval Christianity (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1962), p. 31, points out that the "writings of the saints are full of the symbolism of plants and flowers. To all the perfumes, to all the precious and semi-precious stones, hidden meanings were thought to attach."

¹⁶ Cited in Ch. vi, p. 131.

¹⁷ Robinson, p. 243. It is significant that the Hail lyrics in the Entry are closely paralleled by the Hail lyrics of the three kings in the Adoration play (XVII, ll. 253-288); the parallel emphasizes the joyousness of the event and establishes a basis for contrast with later events.

upon a mock throne, as a structural antithesis whose function goes beyond contrast. Inasmuch as the anti-Hail lyric represents a simultaneous repetition and reversal of the concrete and abstract patterns of the two earlier Hail lyrics, it serves to unify further the dramatic structure of the Passion sequence and to intensify the increasingly-foreboding mood.

The Hail lyric of the Entry play does, consequently, serve a definite purpose in establishing a pattern which is to reappear in a subsequent play. Furthermore, the last stanza of this lyric is parallel in tone with Jesus' speech at the opening of the play; the two stanzas thus serve as structural parentheses which sharply define the true motive for the joyousness of the occasion and, consequently, give an added depth of meaning to that joy. Although the tones of the two stanzas are serious, they are not pessimistic. Their emphasis is on divine power and majesty, and the words of the closing stanza of the Entry Hail lyric not only provide an appropriately prophetic close but also serve as a springboard for subsequent action:

Hayll! domysman dredful, that all schall deme,
Hayll! quyk and dede that all schall lowte,
Hayll! whom worschippe moste will seme,
Hayll! whom all thyng schall drede and dowte.
We welcome the.
Hayll! and welcome of all abowte,
To owre cete.
(11. 539-545)

The sincere reverence and awe evidenced in these lines serve to

emphasize the shallowness and falseness of the boast with which Pilate begins *The Conspiracy to Take Jesus* (XXVI). Although this play is the only one of the twelve Passion plays of the York sequence which does not take up in any degree the action of the five major dramatic episodes, it is structurally important in that it sets up much of the background for subsequent action taken against Jesus. It is true that Pilate's boastful speech invites denunciation and establishes the particular emphasis which is to be given Pilate's character (see Ch. iv, p. 67). But the speech is not, at this point, "fitted to the speaker"¹⁸ beyond its basic representation of a vainglorious ruler whose wickedness was already well-established in the minds of the medieval audience. As Roscoe Parker points out, Pilate's prominence in the events of the Passion was "perpetuated by the words of the Creed, 'and suffered (or was crucified) under Pontius Pilate,'" as well as by Pilate's "historical and legendary reputation as a royal official and by his use in the pulpit as an exemplar of the corrupt politician and unjust judge."¹⁹ However, as the scene progresses and Pilate listens to the accusations lodged against Jesus, he assumes a less arrogant attitude than that projected in his opening speech, and his replies are those of a reasonable judge who is aware

¹⁸ Robinson, p. 243.

¹⁹ Roscoe E. Parker, "'Pilates Voys,'" *Speculum*, 25 (April 1950), 243.

that hatred can easily distort reason and who thus insists on the presentation of true and objective fact. He says, for instance, "Bees rewly, and ray fourth your reasoine" (l. 38), "His maistreys schulde moue you / Youre mode for to amende" (ll. 62-63), "Youre rankoure is raykand full rawe" (l. 93), and "With-uten grounde yow gaynes noght, / Swilke greffe to be-gynne" (ll. 105-106). Not until the second Doctor points out that Jesus "callis hym oure kyng" (l. 115) does Pilate become alarmed; this accusation threatens him personally, and he says that if the accusation is true, he will make Jesus "boldely to banne the bones that hym bare" (l. 118).

Nevertheless, it is not until his reappearance in plays XXX, XXXII, and XXXIII that Pilate assumes a personality beyond that projected in his role as judge, and the added depth of character in these later plays may in large part derive from the realistic detail which accompanies Pilate's interaction with other characters, such as his wife, Judas, and, to a lesser degree, the accusers of Jesus. Despite the restricted scope of Pilate's characterization in play XXVI, however, it is dramatically important that Pilate appear in the Conspiracy council, for his appearance early in the sequence emphasizes his importance to the events of the Passion.

Judas also plays an important part in the action of the conspiracy. In a long soliloquy spoken outside Pilate's hall soon after Pilate's threat to Jesus in the preceding scene, "For kende schall that knave

be to knele" (l. 124), Judas explains his motive and intent:

Ingenti pro Iniuria, hym Jesus, that Jewe,
 Un-iust un-to me, Judas, I juge to be lathe;
 For at oure soper as we satte, the sothe to pursewe,
 With Symond luprus full sone
 My skiffte come to scathe.
 Tille hym ther brought one a boyste,
 My bale for to brewe,
 That baynly to his bare feet
 To bowe was full braythe.
 Sho anynte tham with an oynement
 T[h]at nobill was and newe;
 But for that werke that sche wrought
 I weke woundir wrothe.
 And this, to discouer, was my skill,
 For of his penys purser was I,
 And what that me taught was untill,
 The tente parte that stale I ay still;
 But nowe for me wantis of my will,
 That bargayne with bale schall he by.
 That same oynement, I saide,
 Might same haue bene solde
 For siluer penys in a sowme
 Thre hundereth, and fyne
 Haue ben departid to poure men
 As playne pite wolde.
 But for the poore ne thare parte
 Priked me no peyne,
 But me tened for the tente parte,--
 The trewthe to be-holde,--
 That thirty pens of iim hundereth
 So tyte I schulde tyne.
 And for I mysse this mony
 I morne on this molde,
 Wherfore for to mischeue
 This maistir of myne,
 And therfore faste forthe will I flitte
 The princes of prestis untill,
 And selle hym full sone or that I sitte,
 For therty pens in a knotte knytte.
 Thus-gatis full wele schall he witte,
 That of my wretthe wreke me I will.

(11. 126-154)

The soliloquy thus makes final and adds weight to the machinations of the conspirators. However, even though Judas' revelations are significant to the dramatic action of the conspiracy, they are not the sole catalysts for the following tragic events. The conspirators have other grievances against Jesus, and, as their cold-blooded plotting shows, they could undoubtedly find a way to accomplish their ends without the aid of Judas. From the logical point of view, then, the character of Judas is not absolutely essential. His inclusion, nevertheless, is not only Biblically correct--and thus anticipated by the audience--but is also dramatically effective. Judas represents human frailty; he serves as a linking element between the Judeo-Christian, Judeo-Roman, and Roman factions; and he points up the conflict between holiness and evil which will be magnified in the coming events.

Judas ends the soliloquy, knocks at the gate of Pilate's hall, and demands that the Porter allow him to enter. The Porter refuses, and, in the ensuing dialogue, he makes clear that he mistrusts Judas' appearance. He says, for instance,

For I fele by a figure in youre fals face,
It is but foly to feste affeccioun in you.
(11. 161-162)

and

Full false in thy face in faith can I fynde.
(1. 171)

Because the York Passion sequence emphasizes the fulfillment of

prophecy, beginning with Jesus' reference to redeeming lost souls in the Entry play (see above, p. 80), the scene at the gate of Pilate's Hall is structurally significant: it represents a reversal of the earlier positive reference and also sets up a parallel with the situation in the Harrowing of Hell (XXXVII), where Christ storms the gates of Hell, victoriously tramples His enemies, and extends mercy to the lost souls. Consequently, Judas' haggling with the Porter, and his difficulty in gaining entrance, provide a strong contrast to the immediate, and victorious, entrance of Christ into Hell.

Although the scene at the gate does have farcical overtones (e.g., the Porter's alliterative verbal abuse, which might seem to justify the scene's being classified purely as comic relief),²⁰ the nature of the situation is such that tension is actually heightened rather than relieved. Furthermore, the alliteration in this and subsequent bombastic passages serves to increase the intensity of tone. The Porter's references to Judas as a "glorand gedlyng" (l. 157), a "stark" (l. 166), and a "hanged harlott" (l. 175), are especially apt foreshadowings of his suicidal death by hanging. Inasmuch as Judas cannot carry out his evil intentions until he gains entrance to Pilate's hall, the verbal jousting between him and the Porter takes on the aspect

²⁰ Waldo F. McNeir, in "The Corpus Christi Plays as Dramatic Art," Studies in Philology, 48 (July 1951), 613, sees the function of the scene in this light.

of a game of riddles played for extremely high stakes. The audience, knowing how the game must resolve itself if Judas can give the "right" answer, is thus drawn into the immediate conflict as well as into the larger conflict of the Passion story itself.

When Judas finally asserts that his mission is to save the nobles in Pilate's court from harm--

For thurgh my dedis youre dugeperes
 Fro dere may be drawe[n] --
 (1. 183)²¹

the Porter consents to go within and to ask if Judas may be admitted. Pilate agrees to see him, the Porter warns Judas to mind his manners in the presence of such distinguished company, and Judas enters the court to make his perfidious offer. In the scene that follows, Pilate maintains the role of a judicious ruler, and his equitable demeanor is made especially evident through its contrast with the vicious, and rapid, dialogues held between the other members of the court. When they have completed the deal and paid Judas, the first soldier gloats over the plan and issues a threat:

For we may reche that rekeles
 His ribbis schall we rappe,
 And make that roy, or we rest,
 For rennyng to raffe.
 (11. 285-286)

²¹ Although the quoted lines above appear as two lines, they are joined by a marginal { and are designated textually as one line. In future quotations where cited lines and line number references do not coincide, one may assume that a { appears in the text.

Pilate, however, forbids the soldiers to harm Jesus and, preserving his image as a fair-minded judge, says

For if the sotte be sakles
Us sittis hym to saue,
(1. 288)

The second soldier promises to obey, and Pilate sends the group away with a final admonition:

Do flitte nowe forthe till ye fette hym,
With solace all same to youre sale.
(11. 293-294)

The Last Supper (XXVII) is the shortest of the five key episodes (see Ch. iv, pp. 69-70) in the York Passion sequence, and Waldo McNeir believes that the brevity of the play indicates a preference for dramatic action, in that the writer hurries on to the Betrayal.²² Despite its brevity, however, the play has substantial dramatic value, and it owes much of its success to a rapid series of actions which combine references to Old and New Testament prophecy. It thus creates an historical and dramatic oasis at once self-contained and connective: It looks both forward and backward and binds together Jewish, Judeo-Christian, and Christian history through the common theme of adversity and eventual triumph over adversity.

The play's opening mood of quiet stability creates an effective contrast with the harangues and threats of the previous scene in Pilate's

²² McNeir, pp. 605-606.

hall. After beginning the scene with a benediction to his disciples,²³

Pees be both be day and nyght
Un-till this house, and till all that is here!
(11. 1-2)

Jesus takes charge of the Paschal supper. Distributing the Paschal lamb, Jesus says, "Of Moyse lawes here make I an ende" (1. 25); He then forbids the lamb "Eure forward . . . Fro cristis folkes . . ." (11. 31-32), an anachronistic touch which emphasizes the sacramental nature of the occasion. There is no distribution of the Host, the York account apparently having been taken from *Secundum Ioannem* 13, the only one of the Gospels to omit this action. Jesus does, however, end the supper by establishing a "newe lawe" that "who therof schall ette, / Behoues to be wasshed clene" (11. 34-36), and the spirit behind His words parallels The Northern Passion accounts of the Last Supper, where Jesus distributes wine and states that it will cleanse the disciples of their sins (NP, Camb. 1. 225; Oxf. 1. 323).

Following the Supper, Jesus washes the disciples' feet.²⁴ Peter at first refuses, but when Jesus warns him he will get "no parte in blisse"

²³ There is no Biblical precedent for this benediction. The Northern Passion (Camb. 1. 206) says of Jesus, "Mild he was euir of word," and the York dramatist apparently translated the description into dialogue.

²⁴ The footwashing episode has a Biblical precedent in *Secundum Ioannem* 13.3-11 and in The Northern Passion, Camb. 11. 285-300; Oxf. 11. 442-476. Because of parallel wording between the two texts, the NP account would seem to be the York source here.

(l. 52), Peter submits. Reacting to Jesus' oblique reference to His coming death (ll. 69-72), the disciples begin to argue about who "schalle be princepall" (l. 75), and, in a parallel with The Northern Passion account (see NP, Oxf. ll. 407-416), "Jesus brings a little child before them as an example of humility."²⁵ There is no Biblical precedent for the presentation of the child at this time.²⁶ However, in that the child illustrates concretely the literal meaning of Jesus' lesson and abstractly the quality of natural innocence, his inclusion shows dramatic selectivity and perception on the part of the writer. Furthermore, the child, as a realistic reminder of the sacrificially-focused Old Testament story of Abraham and Isaac, points up in a dramatically poignant manner the design of the coming sacrifice. In that the theme of youth and innocence is made especially apparent in the Trial plays (see Ch. vi), the inclusion of the child at the Last Supper also serves a unifying purpose.

Following this incident, Judas departs to tell the Jews that the time for Jesus' capture is at hand. His departure signals an upswing in dramatic pace, and the dialogue and action for the remainder of the play

²⁵ Frances A. Foster, ed., The Northern Passion, EETS, o.s., No. 147 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd., 1916 [for 1913]), 82-83.

²⁶ Jesus does present a child as an example in an earlier lesson on ambition and envy in *Secundum Matthaeum* 18.1-4, *Secundum Marcum* 9.34-36, and *Secundum Lucum* 9.46.48..

relate almost entirely to coming events: Jesus promises that the disciples shall sit with Him in Heaven and judge the twelve tribes of Israel; He charges Peter with leadership of the disciples after He is gone; He foretells Peter's denial; and He makes sure that, even if they must sell their coats to buy them, the disciples have swords to protect themselves in the coming strife.²⁷ The play ends with Jesus' recognition of the inevitability of coming events,

My fadir saide it schall be soo,
His bidding will I noght for-bere,
(ll. 182-183)

and a final injunction and benediction to His disciples:

Loke ye lere forthe this lawe
Als ye haue herde of me,
Alle that wele will itt knawe,
Ay blessed schall thei bee.
(ll. 184-187)

Well-prepared-for by the sense of foreboding at the close of the previous play, the first of three scenes in the Agony and Betrayal (XXVIII) opens in the Garden with Jesus addressing His disciples.²⁸ It is dramatically important that the Agony in the Garden substantially foreshadow the Agony at Golgotha, and play XXVIII, by combining the mental

²⁷

Jesus' reference to the swords is found in *Secundum Lucum* 22. 36-38 and in *NP*, Camb. ll. 347-358; Oxf. ll. 539-547. The *NP* Camb. version omits the realistic reference to the disciples' selling their coats.

²⁸

Although the opening address (ll. 1-12) is, according to Robinson, an "anti-boast" (Robinson, p. 243; see above, p. 91), its content does not create a contrast with the boastful speeches by Pilate and Herod.

agony which Jesus undergoes, the overt conflict with the soldiers at the close of the play, and the overriding tension created by the knowledge of coming events, achieves this effect. Jesus' words, "My flesshe dyderis & daris for doute of my dede" (1. 2), immediately make apparent the thread of conflict which runs throughout the play. Although Jesus admonishes the disciples to "be wakand alway" and to pray that they "falle in no fandynge" (11. 11-12), they are weary and, when Jesus goes a little way from them, they lie down. There is no Biblical or vernacular source for the explanation they give for their weariness, and it is characteristic of the York Realist's attention to process of behavior and realistic elaboration that he make plausible their failure to "wake and pray." Furthermore, because this small lapse of fidelity is expanded to emphasize its being a betrayal of trust, the larger betrayal by Judas gains added dramatic power. The betrayal is underscored by what McNeir calls the "gentle irony" of Jesus' chiding words to Peter: "Might thou nought the space of an oure / Have wakid nowe mildely with me?" (11. 74-75).²⁹

Jesus, Who again goes away, offers up the first of three prayers, all of which reflect both a genuine dread and anguish over what must come and a steadfast acceptance of God's ultimate will. The third prayer asks that His Father send comfort, expresses again Jesus' faith

²⁹ McNeir, p. 606.

in His Father's decision, and ends with the poignant plea, "Yitt yf thy willis be / Spare me a space" (ll. 111-112). An Angel appears,³⁰ restates the necessity for Jesus' suffering, and promises that His "bale schall be for the beste" (l. 119) and that He shall "Rengne in thy rialte full of reste" (l. 122). Because light imagery is a major unifying element in the York Passion sequence (see above, p. 79), it is particularly significant that the Angel begins his message by telling Jesus to "Be louyng ay lastand in light that is lente" (l. 114).

Scene two of the Agony and Betrayal "vividly conveys the ferocious impatience of Annas and Caiaphas as they organize their posse, which 'gentle Judas' is to lead."³¹ As the soldiers prepare to leave, the second soldier, in an unwitting bit of irony, says, "I schrewe hym all his liffe, / That loues to be last" (l. 187). Although he is referring to the soldiers' speedy departure, his words actually represent an ironic reversal of Jesus' pronouncement in Mark 9.34 (DV), "If any man wishes to be first, he shall be last of all, and servant of all."³² Moreover, because Jesus'

³⁰ The Angel has a Biblical source in *Secundum Lucum* 22.43, where he appears after the first of two prayers. Unlike the York version, the Lucum account merely reports the appearance of the Angel and gives no dialogue.

³¹ McNeir, p. 606

³² Pride, the deadliest of the seven deadly sins, was an obvious choice of topics for medieval sermons. See Ch. iii, p. 59, for an example of a Palm Sunday sermon dealing with vanity. For an additional example, see also *Middle English Sermons*, EETS, o.s., No. 209, ed. Woodburn O. Ross (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 49-50. G. R. Owst, in *Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England: A Neglected*

warning against ambition and envy is made in conjunction with His presentation of the little child (see above, p. 102 and n. 25), the soldier's comment serves by dramatic contrast to unify the previous play and the present one. As the scene closes, Malcus steps forward, identifies himself, and says to Caiaphas that he should be rewarded because he bears a light for his lord (ll. 231-234).

Inasmuch as it creates a sharp dramatic contrast with the events which open scene three in the Garden of Gethsemane, Malcus' action is dramatically significant. After Judas betrays his master, the soldiers advance and are suddenly amazed and confounded by a brilliant light shining around Jesus (l. 253). The light, whose Divine origin is reinforced by the Angel's comforting message in scene one (see above, p. 104), points up the enormous disparity between the tiny lantern which lights Caiaphas' way and the overwhelming brilliance which emanates from the Godhead. The light has no Biblical source,³³ and The Northern Passion account elaborates only slightly on the incident, identifying the source of Jesus' might as His "godhede":

He schewes thare som dele of his might,
And so astond tham in that stound

Chapter in the History of English Letters & of the English People (1933; rpt. New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1961), p. 308, points out that pride, "for the contemporary moralist," was one of the "two burning problems of the hour."

33

John 18.6 (DV) reports that the soldiers "drew back and fell to the ground," but gives no reason for their action.

That doun thai fell all to the ground;
 And styll thai lay and dared for drede,
 Un-tyll he with-drogh his godhede.
 (Oxf. ll. 690-694)

The invention of the beam of brilliant light is, therefore, the logical solution for a dramatist concerned with realistic processes of behavior. It serves as a plausible and dramatically-effective explanation for the soldiers' fright, and it creates a credible situation. That the incident is an example of the York Realist's emphasis on "process of behavior" rather than on "separate actions" (see Ch. iv, p. 67) is reaffirmed at the close of the play. Biblical sources³⁴ and The Northern Passion agree with the York account in having Jesus complain at being taken "Euen like a theffe" (l. 294); in The Northern Passion versions, Jesus objects specifically to being taken at night (NP, Camb. l. 530; Oxf. l. 770). It is clear, consequently, that the York Realist chose the earlier incident of the brilliant light with a definite dramatic purpose in mind. Not only does the light serve to alleviate somewhat the shame of Jesus' being taken at night, but it emphasizes the contrast between the nature of light in the triumphal Entry into Jerusalem and in the Agony and Betrayal. In the earlier play, light references served to increase the effect of a positive situation; in the Agony and Betrayal, light serves to combat the forces of evil and darkness. Light thus becomes a unifying element, and

³⁴ See Secundum Matthaeum 26.55, Secundum Marcum 14.49, and Secundum Lucum 22.52-53.

its artistic application lends added depth to McNeir's statement that "the balance and contrast between calm in the first scene and bustling hubbub in the third have the impact of pointed drama."³⁵

In this chapter, other unifying elements established in the Entry play and repeated throughout subsequent plays include references to the fulfillment of prophecy, as illustrated in the Entry and the Last Supper (see above, pp. 83-84; 103-104), and realistic dialogue, as illustrated in the Entry, the Last Supper, and the Agony and Betrayal (see above, pp. 83-84; 103-104). In addition to setting up figurative and structural patterns which will be repeated throughout the Passion sequence, these unifying elements--light imagery, references to fulfillment of prophecy, and realistic dialogue--add cumulative force to the rising action presented in the four plays discussed in chapter five. Similarly, in the Trial plays analyzed in chapter six, these elements will unify the action within the plays and will relate this action to that in the previous plays. They will also intensify the impact of the climax attained in the Second Trial before Pilate (XXXIII).

³⁵ McNeir, p. 606.

CHAPTER VI

The trial and accusation scenes which appear in plays XXIX-XXXIII¹ occupy the approximate physical center of the York Passion sequence. The last of these scenes, which portrays Pilate's final judgment on Jesus, serves as the emotional and structural pivot of the sequence (see below, p. 130) and owes much of its force to the accumulation of realistic detail and dramatic tension and the addition of vivid legendary material. The overt dramatic effect of these factors is, or should be, quite obvious: the creation of suspense by means of dialogue and action that heighten sensibility and allow the audience to participate more fully in the world of dramatic illusion.

The artistic methods by which the York writer² achieves this effect are, however, rather complex. With regard to realistic detail, these devices include invented bits of action and dialogue that give unity of action and added depth of characterization; unrestrainedly

¹ In the sense that Jesus does not appear in court, the Second accusation before Pilate: remorse of Judas, and purchase of Field of Blood (XXXII), does not contain a trial scene per se. The discussion between Pilate, Annas, and Caiaphas concerning Jesus' fate does, however, constitute a trial in absentia, and, as I will demonstrate below, is important to the dramatic structure of the Trial group.

² It is generally agreed that plays XXVIII-XXXIII are the product of one writer, the so-called York Realist. See Ch. iv, pp.

vicious action and speech--frequently involving "game" motifs--on the part of the soldiers who torment Jesus;³ and intimate glimpses of Pilate and Herod that allow the on-looker to loathe the characters as petty, pampered, egotistical human beings as well as historically evil--but psychically unapproachable--potentates. Dramatic tension, which along with realistic detail contributes to the force of the final Trial scene, has as its basis the omnipresent conflict between evil and holiness. It also gains depth and impact through a series of inner conflicts, conflicts between characters other than Jesus, and implied contrasts, the most frequent of which involves repeated references to Jesus as a "boy" or as a person with childish qualities.⁴ Moreover, Jesus' refusal to respond to His accusers creates a negative conflict in the sense that it represents steadfast opposition to their commands.

In addition to using realistic detail and dramatic tension to achieve maximum dramatic effect, the York writer introduces, primarily from the Gospel of Nicodemus and The Northern Passion,

³ V. A. Kolve, in The Play Called Corpus Christi (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1966), p. 180, points out that "a new set of game words becomes important at this point [the Trials]--mainly the words 'jape,' 'jest,' 'bourde,' and 'layke,' all of which are used again and again to describe the actions by which Christ is captured, brought to trial, buffeted, scourged, and killed."

⁴ The point will be taken up below, p. 113, in greater detail.

incidents such as Satan's appearance to Percula and the bowing of the standards. Although these additions show the characteristic touches of the York Realist, in that the original versions have been augmented by realistic detail, they retain a certain legendary aura which heightens the sense of dramatic illusion. Even when the additions are not included in the Trial scenes, e.g., Percula's dream, their content directly relates to, and has influence on, the tone of the trials.⁵ These additions also reinforce the conflict between holiness and evil (see above, p. 110), in the sense that their subject matter specifically points up either the wickedness of Jesus' adversaries (as in the Purchase of the Field of Blood) or the Divine nature of Jesus (as in the bowing of the standards).

Peter denies Jesus[:] Jesus examined by Caiaphas (XXIX), the first of the Trial plays, illustrates in specific ways the types of realistic detail and dramatic tension discussed above. Furthermore, this play sets up certain images and patterns of action which will recur in subsequent Trial plays, and the ultimate effect of these repetitions is the creation of dramatic continuity.⁶ The play opens

⁵ That such legendary material appealed to the medieval man is evidenced by its frequent inclusion in medieval sermons (see Ch. iii, pp. 56-57, for an example of such a sermon).

⁶ The discussion of play XXIX will, accordingly, include expanded comments on these repetitive constructions.

with a boastful speech by Caiaphas which creates a tone of suspense and cruelty that will maintain itself in the following group of plays.

A. W. Ward notes that in the York cycle, "tyrants, especially, and the enemies of our Lord, are depicted with powerful realism."⁷

Because of the sustained nature of the action and the large amount of dialogue assigned to these wicked personages, the Trial group offers a particularly good example of this sort of realism. Waldo McNeir states, for example, that throughout the Trial plays, "Jesus is characterized obliquely by contrast with his enemies," and Caiaphas, "the first of several effective foils," not only serves this purpose but also preserves a strong dramatic interest as a character in his own right.⁸

At the close of his vainglorious address, Caiaphas charges his "knightis"

To wayte both be day and by nightis
Of the bringyng of a boy in-to bayle. . . .
(11. 24-25)

The reference to Jesus as a "boy" is the first of many such ironic

⁷ Adolphus William Ward, A History of English Dramatic Literature to the Death of Queen Anne, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1899), I, 46.

⁸ Waldo F. McNeir, "The Corpus Christi Plays as Dramatic Art," Studies in Philology, 48 (July 1951), 611.

references which will occur throughout the Trial plays.⁹ Similar ironic terms applied to Jesus in this and subsequent plays include "ladde," "fool," "lidrone," "mytyng," and "brolle." These terms are used almost to the exclusion of such common--and, perhaps, more to be expected--slurs as "brethell" and "warlowe," and, when analyzed as a metaphorical group tied together by the implied idea of a childish figure, their dramatic value is two-fold: they present an effective contrast between appearance and reality, thus pointing up the divergence between Jesus' true characteristics and those attributed to Him by His enemies; and they emphasize the quality of natural innocence and/or innate wisdom associated with childhood, thereby heightening abstractly the conflict between goodness and sin. In addition, the references give particular significance to the inclusion of the little child at the Last Supper and thus provide support for the argument that the York Passion sequence is dramatically unified (see Ch. iv, pp. 65-66).

The basis for future action having been established, Annas asks Caiaphas what "wondirfull workis" Jesus has done, and Caiaphas touches briefly upon some of the miracles of His ministry, attributing them to "false happenyng" (l. 39) and to "wicche-crafte" (l. 57):

⁹ In play XXIX alone, "boy" occurs twelve times and "ladde" three times.

Seke men and sori he sendis siker helyng,
 And to lame men and blynde he sendis ther sight;
 Of croked crepillis that we knawe,
 Itt is to here grete wondering,
 How that he helis thame all on rawe. . . .
 (11. 34-37)

Kolve believes that "in the York Trial sequence the conception of Jesus as joker is uppermost," and because His accusers "decide in advance that Jesus is a joker, a trickster, an absurd impostor," they "never properly see Him or hear Him."¹⁰ The invalidity of this concept is best shown by referring to Kolve's previous comment that game words are used quite frequently "to describe the actions by which Christ is captured, brought to trial, buffeted, scourged, and killed" (the italics are mine; see above, p. 110, n. 3). The wicked actions, as well as the related terms, reflect back upon Jesus' enemies and not upon Jesus.¹¹ It is more logical, therefore, to view the game motifs as a dramatically-appropriate method of accentuating the central image of a child.

It is significant that Caiaphas specifically refers to the miracles--as distinct from "blasphemous" statements attributed to Jesus--in that there is no precedent for their inclusion in either the

¹⁰ Kolve, p. 184.

¹¹ See G. R. Owst's discussion of pulpit denunciation of minstrels in Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England: A Neglected Chapter in the History of English Letters & of the English People (1933; rpt. New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1961), pp. 12-13.

Vulgate or The Northern Passion. The Gospel of Nicodemus refers to specific miracles in two separate incidents (pp. 24-27; 52-55),¹² the second of which is not included in the York plays. Caiaphas' limited reference to the miracles is the first of three such testimonies (see XXX, ll. 439-447 and XXXI, ll. 196-217) which not only emphasize Jesus' holy nature, but also serve ironically as a defense for a man who does little to defend Himself. Because these repeated testimonies serve a definite dramatic purpose, they point up the invalidity of J. W. Robinson's assertion that the plays of the Passion sequence are "lacking in the development of theme and character, and merely repetitious" unless one views them as "self-contained."¹³

The close of this short scene clearly illustrates the York writer's attention to logically-progressing action and realistic detail. By stating that "This day is comen on hande" (l. 69), and that Caiaphas "schulde haue tithandis sone / Of the knyghtis that are gone" (ll. 67-68), Annas at once heightens suspense and makes the coming arrival of

¹² The Middle-English Harrowing of Hell and Gospel of Nicodemus, EETS, e.s., No. 100, ed. William Henry Hulme (London: Oxford University Press, 1961). Because the Gospel of Nicodemus gives parallel texts for four manuscripts, page numbers rather than line numbers will be noted in all references to this work.

¹³ J. W. Robinson, "The Art of the York Realist," Modern Philology, 60 (May 1963), 249-250. See also Ch. iv, pp. 65-66.

Jesus and the soldiers, separated as it is by Peter's denial, dramatically well-prepared for.¹⁴ The first soldier offers Caiaphas a cup of wine,¹⁵ and then Caiaphas gives instructions for his being prepared for sleep:

Do on dayntely, and dresse me on dees,
And hendely hille on me happing,
And warne all wightis to be in pees,
For I am late layde unto napping.
(ll. 81-82)

The mincing tone of the speech, graphically supported by the required action on the part of the soldier, shows an aspect of Caiaphas' personality not revealed in his role as the accusing high priest and thus provides for the audience a character to whom they may strongly react.

Peter's denial, which opens scene two, also gains impact through attention to language and realistic detail. For example, the woman who accuses Peter of complicity with Jesus jeeringly calls him an ape, a badger, and an owl (ll. 107, 117, 119). The imagaic invectives are explicitly appropriate: the first term has medieval

¹⁴ The reference to time underscores the "careful attention to the time-scheme" which the York Realist gives to this "nocturnal piece filling the interval between the betrayal and the first trial before Pilate" (McNeir, p. 610). Other time references occur in ll. 89, 179, 228, 320-321, 348-349, and 391-392.

¹⁵ In that there is no distribution of the Host in the Last Supper play, it is perhaps significant that each play in the trial group contains a scene in which wine is elaborately offered. In view of Robinson's application of the term "anti-boasts" to the vaunting opening passages by wicked rulers, one might refer to the wine-drinking passages as "anti-Hosts." Robinson, commenting on the ordering of wine "in a lordly fashion" in play XXX, points out that, in most medieval plays, this sort of debauchery is the prelude to a fall (Robinson, p. 247 and n. 25).

associations with both a foolish person and Satan, and the latter two terms refer to creatures of darkness. Following Peter's second denial, Malcus steps forward, identifies Peter as the person who cut off his ear, and tells how Jesus made him "all hole" again (ll. 133-148). In the Biblical accounts of the denial, Peter's accuser is not named,¹⁶ but "York and the Passion add vividness to the scene by identifying this unnamed soldier with Malcus."¹⁷ Peter denies Jesus again; Jesus enters with two soldiers and gently reminds Peter of His prophecy of denial; and Peter sorrowfully acknowledges his weakness. Peter's repentance seems all the more genuine because it is linked to Jesus' disappointment. Peter says,

The loke of his faire face so clere
With full sadde sorowe sheris my harte.
(ll. 170-171)

This brief exchange is abruptly ended as the third and fourth soldiers

¹⁶ See *Secundum Matthaeum* 26.69-95; *Secundum Marcum* 14.66-72; *Secundum Lucum* 22.54-62; and *Secundum Ioannem* 18.12-27. Because the account in John identifies Peter's accuser as "one of the servants of the high priest, a relative of him whose ear Peter had cut off" (18.26 DV), it seems possible that the writer of either the NP or the York play would have seen the dramatic potential of inserting Malcus himself. Certainly his being identified increases both credibility and dramatic unity.

¹⁷ Frances A. Foster, ed., The Northern Passion, EETS, o.s., No. 147 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., Ltd., 1916 [for 1913]), 83.

take charge of their captive and try to gain entrance to Caiaphas' hall. Their argument with the soldiers within is representative of four street scenes which show Jesus without a speaking part, "effectively prolong the dramatic representation of Homo Paciens," and thus portray His silent suffering at length.¹⁸

Caiaphas, awakened, calls Annas, and the two sit in court anticipating Jesus' arrival. Caiaphas, who at the beginning of the play was overtly hostile and indeed eager to prosecute Jesus, now speaks more temperately. Annas, who has become the impatient one of the pair, sets in motion the dramatic machinery for the grim "game" to follow: "Sir, this game is be-gune of the best" (l. 207). Although Annas' reference to "game" is a direct foreshadowing of the buffeting scene after the trial (see below, p. 119), it is also appropriate in a larger sense to the trial itself, for this trial, as well as subsequent trials, is to some extent "rigged" and conforms to a "game" situation where the players observe certain "rules" within a specific boundary.¹⁹

Annas, Caiaphas, and the soldiers dominate almost entirely the

¹⁸ Robinson, p. 248.

¹⁹ See below, p. 127, where I interpret Herod's ultimate dismissal of Jesus as a rejection of one who does not "play the game."

dialogue of the trial, and they virtually obscure its true purpose by the emphasis they place on Jesus' refusal to tell them "som tales" (l. 248). Caiaphas, eventually losing patience, tells the soldiers to strike Jesus down (ll. 336-337). Annas, however, reminds him that, legally, Jesus must be presented to Pilate, the "domysman nere and nexte to the king" (ll. 342-343). Not to be entirely thwarted, Caiaphas tells the soldiers to keep Jesus until morning and to "lerne yone boy bettir to bende and bowe" (l. 351). He adds a final admonishment--"Ya, and felawes, wayte that he be ay wakand" (l. 354)--and they reply that "Itt were a full nedles note to bidde us nape nowe" (l. 356). In that it represents a reversal of the situation in the Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus' disciples could not stay awake to watch and pray with Him, the soldiers' reply is extremely ironic. Furthermore, because the exchange is original with the York Realist, its parallel with the earlier play would seem to be a deliberate effort to further dramatic unity. The soldiers proceed with the buffeting of Jesus, translating Annas' previous words--"Sir, this game is be-gune of the best" (l. 207)--into a grim reality and underscoring the game nature of the action with their pronouncement that they "schall play papse for the pages prow" (l. 358).

With regard to structure, the positioning of the game references and the game situation in the first Trial play, rather than in later Trial plays or in the Crucifixion group, is more effective both dramatically

and aesthetically. For the highly emotional and realistically brutal Crucifixion, an artificial framework such as that provided by the game references would be not only superfluous but inappropriate. In the first Trial play, however, the game references emphasize the idea that practically all aspects of the Trials, i.e., the motivations, the accusations, and the name-calling, have been set up on a fallacious scale. Kolve, referring to game references, contends that the dramatists in all the cycles used this method in order to achieve "some coherent characterization for the tormentors, out of which dialogue could grow," and also in order "to shape the Passion into strong dramatic patterns."²⁰ Kolve believes that because Christ's tormentors use game references when discussing their work, the action takes on "a kind of distancing"; that is, what the torturers "do is done in game," and, therefore, "it is not done directly in hatred of Christ."²¹

On the contrary, far from creating a "distancing" effect, the game references at the Buffeting intensify the horror of the action. Johann Huizinga points out that "the more 'difficult' the game the greater the tension in the beholders,"²² and in this case, the difficulty of the game is further increased by the fact that it occurs within what is

²⁰ Kolve, p. 179.

²¹ Ibid., p. 189.

²² Johann Huizinga, Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture (1950; rpt. Boston: The Beacon Press, 1955), p. 47.

already an agonistic context.²³ What Kolve sees as an impersonal dramatic device would, therefore, seem instead to be a highly effective means of engaging the audience's participation, for "tension and uncertainty as to the outcome increase enormously when the antithetical element becomes really agonistic. . . ." ²⁴ Clearly, then, the object of the action is not, as Kolve believes, "simply the game itself," ²⁵ but the outcome of the game.

Finding that they are unable to make Jesus speak, the soldiers abandon their game and lead Him back to Caiaphas, who instructs them to tell "sir Pilate oure pleyntes all pleyne" (l. 389). In words calculated to increase dramatic tension, Caiaphas adds,

And saie this same day muste he be slayne,
Be-cause of sabott day that schalbe to-morne.
(ll. 391-392)

The play closes with Caiaphas' ironically accurate injunction to "Goose onne nowe, and daunce forth in the deuyll way" (l. 398).

Pilate opens play XXX with a threat which "specifically demand[s] order in any complaints brought before him as judge." ²⁶ He then

²³ "Agonistic" is used here in the sense of "conflictual." The ultimate agony of the Passion sequence is, of course, the Crucifixion, but it is dramatically important that a series of conflicts precede this ultimate emotional experience.

²⁴ Huizinga, p. 47.

²⁵ Kolve, pp. 180-181.

²⁶ Robinson, p. 246.

delivers a pontifical--and apocryphal--lecture on his lineage and on the privileges this background accords him.²⁷ In the domestic scene which follows, the York writer "puts his gift for realism to satirical purpose and shows himself to be a master entertainer."²⁸ Pilate and his wife engage in a conversation which is not only realistic, but suggestively racy. They oppose Church teaching with their obvious delight in connubial intimacy and compound their error with subtle double entendres:

Pil. Yhitt for to comforte my corse, me must
kisse you, madame!

Ux. To fulfille youre forward, my fayre lorde,
in faith I am fayne.

Pil. Howe! howe! felawys, nowe in faith I am
fayne
Of theis lippis, so loffely are lappid,
In bedde is full buxhome and bayne.

Domina. [alias Ux.] Yha, sir, it nedith not to
layne,
All ladise we coveyte than
Bothe to be kyssed and clappid.

(11. 48-54)

27 Lucy T. Smith, ed., The York Plays (Oxford, 1885; rpt. New York: Russell and Russell, 1963), p. xlviii, notes that the "allusion to the legend of Pilate's name . . . is from a variation of the Abgar-legend (Veronica and Vespasian) among the apocryphal gospels." Its inclusion is a direct contribution to dramatic unity in view of Pilate's reaction in play XXXII, ll. 85-87, when "he is told that Jesus claims that He will judge mankind; this information really disturbs Pilate because it touches him in his professional capacity: is not he the great judge?" (Robinson, p. 245).

²⁸ Robinson, p. 246.

The moral decadency of the two, pointed up by the "futile indignation of the decorous beadle,"²⁹ makes abundantly clear the human frailty of the man who will sit in final judgment on Jesus. McNeir, commenting on the scene, suggests that Percula is not only "an ornament to her husband's high estate; she is also, in another sense, a foil to the Virgin Mary."³⁰ In the sense that Percula represents the antithesis of purity and holiness, McNeir is correct. His observation would have greater depth, however, if it encompassed the following scene in which Satan, the evil counterpart of the angel Gabriel at the Annunciation, appears to Percula.

In an effort to hasten the undignified Percula's departure and to restore order to the court, the righteous Beadle delivers a speech, the first six lines of which are marked by a lyric grace and metaphorical richness unmatched elsewhere in the Passion sequence:

My seniour, will ye see howe the sonne in your sight,
 For his stately strenghe he stemmys in his stremys,
 Behalde ovir youre hede how he holdis fro hight
 And glydis to the grounde with his glitterand glemys.

²⁹ Daniel C. Boughner, The Braggart in Renaissance Comedy: A Study in Comparative Drama from Aristophanes to Shakespeare (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1954), p. 121. For further information, see G. R. Owst, Lit. and Pulpit, pp. 382, 496. Owst cites the Beadle's objections in connection with a discussion of sermons against kissing.

³⁰ McNeir, p. 611.

To the ground he gois with his bemys,
 And the nyght is neghand anone. . . .
 (11. 73-78)

Pilate agrees; wine is ordered and drunk; Percula retires; and a fastidious Pilate is put to bed.

Scene two opens with Percula also preparing for bed.³¹ As soon as she and other characters on stage are sleeping, Satan enters, "explains his cowardly purpose in a piece of sinister direct address to the audience and then tells his story to Pilate's sleeping wife."³² Percula wakes, frightened, and calling her sleeping son to her side, bids him go and tell his father of the dream. The son, with a realistic lack of filial devotion, protests the lateness of the hour and says that he will nap first. Although Robinson, basing his opinion on two lines of similar phrasing, believes the incident to be taken from the Gospel of Nicodemus,³³ The Northern Passion offers a more complete version

³¹ Eva Freeman, in "A Note on Play XXX of the York Cycle," Modern Language Notes, (June 1930), 393, suggests that the attention devoted to beds and bedding in play XXX is due to the fact that the play was put on by the Tapiteres and Couchers. Robinson, however, points out that the series of nocturnal events in plays XXIX, XXX, and XXI provided a logical dramatic motive for bedding scenes in all three plays, so that the York Realist "could then very neatly and without forcing accommodate the mundane wishes (whether explicit or implicit) of his patrons" (Robinson, p. 246).

³² Robinson, p. 247.

³³ Ibid.

and a closer parallel with regard to content.³⁴

As McNeir points out, Satan's warning serves as "a fearful reminder of the great issue that has almost been forgotten. The trial scene returns to this issue."³⁵ As the scene opens, Annas is talking to Caiaphas. The dialogue, carefully explaining their reason for accompanying the soldiers to Pilate's court, is an example of the York Realist's attention to logical detail. Because Annas and Caiaphas appear in Pilate's court in the next scene and present their charges against Jesus, Caiaphas' previous instructions to the soldiers at the end of play XXIX--to tell "sir Pilate oure pleyntes all pleyne" (l. 389)--would have created a flaw in construction were it not for this intervening explanation. The group gains admittance to Pilate's court; Pilate's son enters and relates his mother's dream, which the high priests dismiss as a product of

³⁴ Cf. the Gospel of Nicodemus, pp. 34-37 and The Northern Passion, Camb. ll. 971-994; Oxf. ll. 1410-1438. Both sources place the incident later, at the second trial before Pilate, and Pilate's wife goes directly to her husband and repeats her dream. Matthew 27.19, however, states that Pilate's "wife sent to him, saying, 'Have nothing to do with that just man, for I have suffered many things in a dream today because of him.'" Thus, it seems possible that the York Realist might have woven together all three accounts and embroidered them with his characteristically-rich interpolations.

³⁵ McNeir, p. 611.

witchcraft; and the Beadle, going to fetch Jesus, suddenly bows and worships Him as he recalls the worship at the Entry into Jerusalem.³⁶

The Beadle's explanation for his 'shocking behavior (i.e., bowing to and worshipping the prisoner Jesus) has its basis in the Gospel of Nicodemus account (pp. 26-30). The explanation has no effect, however, on the assembled court. As the trial progresses, Pilate maintains his image as a fair and humane magistrate, and Annas and Caiaphas continue their harassment of Jesus. Finally, learning that Jesus is from Galilee, Pilate orders Him sent to Herod, the king of that province, and "his final words to the soldiers taking Jesus to Herod foreshadow the second trial: 'takes tente for oure tribute full trule to trete.'" ³⁷

The Trial before Herod (XXXI), shortest of the five Trial plays, is the play which, according to Kolve, "shapes the action most

³⁶ McNeir believes that because the Beadle acts in a consistently righteous manner, and because he witnessed the Entry into Jerusalem, he and the Porter from the Entry play are one and the same character (McNeir, p. 612, n. 28). This interpretation seems strained, inasmuch as it would not be illogical for both the Porter and the Beadle to have witnessed the Entry. Furthermore, the Beadle's objections to Pilate and Percula's unseemly behavior would appear to indicate a more privileged position in the royal household than that of porter.

³⁷ McNeir, p. 612.

elaborately into game."³⁸ To support this view, Kolve points, for example, to "Herod's decision to address Jesus in French," and to various devices which Herod employs in his unsuccessful attempts to induce Jesus to talk.³⁹ It is true that there are a number of game words and game situations in play XXXI, but they are best viewed as integral parts of a larger, ongoing game situation--the play itself--rather than as separate units, as Kolve tends to see them. If one sees the trial as a continuous game in which Jesus never speaks, although enticed to do so many times by Herod, then one will understand more clearly why Herod's ultimate dismissal of Jesus represents a rejection of one who will not "play the game" (see Ch. ii, pp. 27-28 and above, pp. 118-119). Kolve does not see the action in this light, and he proceeds, consequently, to draw inaccurate conclusions. He implies, for instance, that the play ends on a game note with Jesus dressed "in the white robes of a fool" and being displayed "in the marketplace."⁴⁰ The play not only does not end in this manner, but also contains no mention of a marketplace.⁴¹ In actuality, the

³⁸ Kolve, p. 183.

³⁹ Ibid., pp. 183-184.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 184.

⁴¹ Herod gives an order to "garre crye in my courte" (l. 356), and stage directions indicate that the first duke "Crys in the court" (l. 360).

play ends in Herod's court, and Herod makes entirely clear his reasons for finding no fault with Jesus:

And sen that he is dome, for to deme hym,
Ware this a goode lawe for a lorde?
(11. 385-386)

The momentary respite provided by Herod's refusal to sentence Jesus ends abruptly in the opening scene of play XXXII, which shifts again to Pilate's hall. Badgered by a viciously eager Annas and Caiaphas, Pilate continues to maintain his image as an equitable ruler until Caiaphas brings against Jesus a charge which represents a challenge to Pilate's authority:

He claymes hym clerly till a kyngdome of Jewes,
And callis hym selffe oure comeliest kyng.
(11. 101-102)

The immediately-aroused Pilate is eager to have Jesus back in his court; Annas quite logically reminds him that Jesus is at Herod's hall, where Pilate himself sent Him. Then Caiaphas, playing on the previously-successful method of angering Pilate, tells him that it is his right as sovereign, and by the law of the land, "to sitte of enquiry" (11. 109-110). Pilate vows vengeance against Jesus; his son reminds him that he must wait for Herod's judgment; and, in anticipation of Jesus' return, Pilate orders wine and commands that it be drunk.

At this point, Judas enters. In a long soliloquy (11. 127-149), he expresses his guilt at having betrayed his master and makes known his intention of trying to remedy the deed. Confronting Pilate, he

begs him to let Jesus go:

My tydyngis are tenefull, I telle you,
 Sir Pilate, therfore I you praye,
 My maistir that I gune selle you,
 Gode lorde, late hym wende on his way.
 (11. 152-155)

Annas and Caiaphas immediately rebuff him, and, after a series of increasingly importunate pleas, Judas sets down his "blood money," laments the hopelessness of his position, and announces that he is going to destroy himself.⁴² Following Judas' exit, the officials decide to use Judas' money to buy a burial place for "pilgrimes and palmeres"; they bargain with a squire for "Calvary locus" and then cheat him of his land. The York writer's inclusion of the remorse of Judas and the purchase of the field of blood is dramatically significant in that the interlude it creates between the scene in the hall and the final, and decisive, trial before Pilate both heightens dramatic tension and points up the cruelty and duplicity of

⁴² Although Judas does not mention the manner in which he will die, Pilate has, in the course of the preceding exchange, three times foreshadowed the suicide with his angry comments to Judas. He says, "Thou on-hanged harlott, hark what I saie" (l. 186); "Yu art wo[r]thi to be hanged & drawen" (l. 228); and "the deuill mot the hange" (l. 295).

Jesus' accusers.⁴³

Arnold Williams gives a particularly well-stated analysis of the structural significance of play XXXIII:

The second trial before Pilate is the climax of the Passion, dramatically speaking. . . . All the enmity of the Jews, the capture and the inquisition before Caiaphas and Annas, the trial before Herod can avail nothing, if Pilate determines to find Jesus innocent. Hence Pilate is the key figure, and his court the focal point of the tragedy. . . . Here the issues are settled, and all that follows is, barring a miracle, inevitable.⁴⁴

Play XXXIII represents also the culmination of those factors which augmented dramatic effectiveness in the previous four Trial plays.

A profusion of realistic detail, dramatic conflict, and vivid legendary

⁴³ The remorse of Judas and the purchase of the field of blood have precedents in both *Secundum Matthaeum* 27.3-8 and in *The Northern Passion*, Camb. ll. 733-804; Oxf. ll. 1060-1170. However, "the story of the Squire who lets 'Calvary locus' . . . and is cheated of his title deeds must be of English invention" (Smith, p. xlviii). The importance given to the purchase of the field of blood is particularly significant. It represents, in its Biblical form, a fulfillment of the prophecy of Jeremias, found in Zacharias 11.12, "And I said to them: If it be good in your eyes, bring hither my wages: and if not, be quiet. And they weighed for my wages thirty pieces of silver" (DV). Its inclusion thus lends additional support to the York emphasis on the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy.

⁴⁴ Arnold Williams, *The Drama of Medieval England* (Michigan State University Press, 1961), pp. 80-81. Although Williams uses the term "dramatically speaking" when referring to the second trial before Pilate as the climax of the Passion, his subsequent comments make clear that he is using "dramatically" as if it were synonymous with "structurally." See Ch. ii for an expanded discussion of the dramatic structure of the Passion sequence.

material serves to make even more forceful this structural and emotional pivot of the Passion sequence.

The trial itself opens with an anti-Hail stanza:

Hayll! louelyest lorde that euere lawe led
yitt,
Hayll! semelyest undre on euere ilka syde,
Hayll! stateliest on stede in strenghe that
is sted yitt,
Hayll! liberall, hayll! lusty to lordes allied.
(11. 49-52)

The soldiers tell Pilate that Herod greets him as his "gud frende" who "By hym-selfe full sone wille he sette," and they add that Herod finds "no faute" in Jesus (11. 56, 59, 66). Pilate, showing his political insecurity, delightedly tells his courtiers how he has gained Herod's friendship. He then adds the information that Herod had found Jesus innocent. The incident has a source in Luke 23.12 (DV), which states, "Herod and Pilate became friends that very day; whereas previously they had been at enmity with each other." The Northern Passion account makes clear that Pilate sent Jesus to Herod to mend their friendship, and that this was accomplished:

"Un-to sir Herode sall yhe wende,
And gretes him wele with wordes hende,
And says [him] how that I him send
This man our frendship for to mend. . . ."
(Oxf. 11. 1247-1250)

"
 Mi gud will graunt I him for euer"
Et facti sunt amici Herodes et Pilatus nam inimici
erant adinuicem
 ffrendship was made thus tham bi-twene
 (Oxf. 11. 1316-1319)

The York Realist's expansion of the incident is dramatically significant in that it underscores Pilate's insecurity at a point where his decision about Jesus is all-important, and it brings to the surface the underlying conflict which has existed between Pilate and Herod.

After the delivery of Herod's message and the restatement of the charges of Annas and Caiaphas, Caiaphas brings forward a group of false witnesses to testify against Jesus. The basis for this incident may be found in the Gospel of Nicodemus (p. 24), but the York writer alters the apocryphal account by making Caiaphas responsible for the witnesses' appearance and by having Pilate refuse to hear the witnesses. Pilate's perceptiveness here lends support to Kolve's belief that "all the English cycles except Towneley work basically within a 'good Pilate' tradition, according to which Pilate is a troubled judge, one who has no wish to condemn Jesus. . . ."45 Annas and Caiaphas at length persuade Pilate that he should send for Jesus again, and the soldiers, issuing vicious threats, lead Him back into the hall. As Jesus enters, Annas and Caiaphas utter exclamations of amazement, for the banners of the soldiers have bowed "To worshippe this warlowe unworthy in wede" (l. 172). Furious at this display of reverence for someone other than himself, and disbelieving the soldiers' protestations that they could not help their actions, Pilate orders the

⁴⁵ Kolve, p. 231.

Beadle to fetch the two strongest soldiers he can find to come and hold the standards upright. Again the banners bow, and Pilate, overcome, rises and worships Jesus:

I upstritt! I me myght noght abstene
 To wirschip hym in wark and in witte.
 (11. 275-276)

According to Williams, the bowing of the standards is "waste motion--it makes no point, and the outcome of the trial is unaffected by the incident."⁴⁶ On the contrary, the incident makes a very strong point: it emphasizes Jesus' divine nature and His potential power. Thus it creates an ironic--and dramatic--contrast with the trial situation, where a seemingly-defenseless Jesus is subject to the power of mortal rulers. Furthermore, it does not seem valid to reject the incident as "waste motion" because it does not affect the outcome of the trial. Such a judgment reduces dramatic structure to an arbitrary formula and overlooks the possibility of an integrated structure in which actions may effectively contribute to the outcome without necessarily causing the outcome.

Pilate continues to be unconvinced of Jesus' guilt. Pushed by

⁴⁶ Williams, p. 81. The type of development which Williams sees as "purposeful" is that which relates specifically to the trial, e.g., Pilate's continued insistence on Jesus' innocence and Annas and Caiaphas' reiteration of charges against Him.

The soldiers take Jesus to another part of the hall, where they unclothe Him, bind Him, and brutally scourge Him. Their stichomythic dialogue is dramatically well-suited to the action at hand, for it reproduces verbally the swift, alternately-inflicted blows which rain down upon Jesus. When Jesus swoons, the scourging ceases, and the soldiers unbind Him. They clothe Him in purple, crown Him with thorns, seat Him on a mock throne, and place a reed sceptre in His hands. They then

ridicule Him with another anti-Hail stanza:⁴⁷

Aue! riall roy and rex judeorum!
 Hayle! comely kyng, that no kyngdom has kende,
 Hayll! undugthy duke, thi dedis ere dom,
 Hayll! man, unmyghty thi menghe to mende.
 iii Mil. Hayll! lord with-out lande for to lende,
 Hayll! kyng, hayll! knave unconand.
 iv. Mil. Hayll! freyke, without forse the to fende.
 Hayll! strang, that may not wele stand
 To stryve.

(11. 409-417)

Afterwards, they lead Him back to Pilate's hall, where they take grim delight in describing what they have done. The York Realist's touch is particularly evident in the second soldier's grisly comment, "Lo! his flesh al be be-flapped that fat is" (l. 432). Pilate sees how Jesus has suffered, and in a moving line taken from *Secundum Ioannem* 19.5 he exclaims, "Sirs, be-holde upon hight and ecce homoo" (l. 435).⁴⁸

⁴⁷ It is significant that the third soldier refers to Jesus as a "freak" (l. 415), a word which the EETS glosses as "warrior, man, fellow." In that it emphasizes both the concrete and the abstract levels of the conflict, the "warrior" connotation is particularly meaningful. The term "freak" is used three times more during the Passion: by Pilate at the first trial (XXX, l. 415); by Herod in his court (XXXI, l. 156); and again by Pilate at the end of this play (l. 441).

⁴⁸ That this tableau contains considerable dramatic power is evident in the number of paintings portraying the subject and bearing the title "Ecce Homo." Correggio, Titian, Guido, Van Dyck, Rembrandt, Poussin, and Albrecht Dürer are among those whom the scene has inspired.

Here occurs a gap in the manuscript, but Pilate is possibly going to express his misgivings at having sentenced Jesus, for, when the manuscript resumes, he is preparing to publically--and symbolically--wash his hands:

For propirly by this processe will I preve
I had no force fro this felawshippe this freke for
to lende.

(11. 440-441)

The York writer's attention to realistic detail lends dramatic interest to this action, in that the Beadle shows punctilious concern over the hotness of the water with which Pilate will wash his hands. Pilate then has Barabas brought in, gives him his freedom,⁴⁹ and issues the orders for Jesus' Crucifixion:

Here the jugement of Jesu , all Jewes in this stede,
Crucifie hym on a crosse and on Caluerye hym kill,
I dampne hym to-day to dy this same dede,
Therefore hyngis hym on hight uppon that high hill.

(11. 450-453)

The soldiers lead Jesus away, and with casual cruelty they bind His body "in cordis":

Late us bynde hym in bandis all bare,
Here is one, full lange will it laste.
Lay on hande here.
I powll to my poure is past.

(11. 468-472)

⁴⁹ This incident departs from the Gospels, the Gospel of Nicodemus, and The Northern Passion Oxf. version in relating the release of Barabas. It apparently follows The Northern Passion Camb. account, ll. 1171-1172, which does not mention either Pilate's asking the Jews whom they would like to have released or the crowd's clamoring for Barabas.

Annas urges them to hurry, reminding them that Jesus must be dead by noon; they acknowledge the fact; and, as they depart, Pilate brings the play to a close with an ironic--and prophetic--observation:

Now certis, ye are a manly menge!
 Furth in the wylde wanyand be walkand.
 (ll. 484-485)

The Trial plays thus bring to a climax the action set in motion in plays XXV-XXVIII. The dramatic tension which has accumulated throughout these plays has eventuated in an action--Pilate's judgment--which assures the inevitability of future events. On the other hand, the Trial plays, and, in particular, the Second Trial before Pilate, also provide the impetus for the action which culminates in Jesus' Crucifixion, death, and burial, and this latter action not only is highly agonistic, but also involves a strong degree of emotional intensity (see Ch. ii, pp. 29-30; Ch. vii, pp. 164-165). To refer to the Second Trial before Pilate as the structural and emotional pivot of the Passion sequence (see above, pp. 130-131) is not, therefore, to imply a subsequent lessening of dramatic force. Nevertheless, in terms of plot arrangement, the Second Trial before Pilate does represent the height of dramatic tension, and it is to the credit of the York dramatist that he expanded the Trial plays and gave them a degree of depth that allows for a climax not only effective in its own context but also dramatically proportionate to the coming catastrophe.

CHAPTER VII

Christ led up to Calvary (play XXXIV) is the first of three Crucifixion plays which portray in vivid and extended detail the events which lead up to, and eventuate in, Christ's death and burial. According to J. W. Robinson, play XXXIV is characterized by a lack of alliterative verse and specific narrative sources. However, the lack of alliterative verse in no way detracts from the play's effectiveness: the long, poignant scene involving John and the three Marys at the site of the cross, together with the consistently colorful and forceful dialogue in the other scenes, makes alliterative verse not only unnecessary but, at times, inappropriate. Robinson also believes that play XXXIV contains realistic sections which do not compare to the art of the York Realist. Indeed, he states that in play XXXIV "many of the realistic details . . . are unoriginal and undeveloped. . . ." ¹ To the contrary, the play shows evidence of realistic detail and process of behavior and has, as well, specific parallels with The Northern Passion.

It is true that play XXXIV does not possess the same degree of emotional intensity as the two succeeding Crucifixion plays. Because, however, the last of the three plays represents the culmination of

¹ J. W. Robinson, "The Art of the York Realist," Modern Philology, 60 (May 1963), 248; see Ch. iv, pp. 65-66.

the agon and must reflect the greatest degree of dramatic intensity, it is essential that the two preceding plays provide mounting, rather than sustained, tension. Thus, in play XXXIV, the lower emotional key afforded by non-alliterative dialogue and a minimum of overtly-cruel action at once produces a mood of controlled tension and sets in motion--albeit slow motion--the dramatic machinery for subsequent events.

As the play opens, preparations are being made for the coming Crucifixion;² repeated references to the necessity for haste create a sense of urgency and establish firmly the grim reason for the present action. The first soldier asks, "Where is sir Wymond . . . ?" (l. 46) and learns that Sir Wymond has gone "to garre a crosse be wrought / To bere this cursed knave" (ll. 47-48).³ Sir Wymond enters and exclaims that he has been making a cross "Of that laye ouere the lake, / Men called it the kyngis tree" (ll. 65-66). The incident is "drawn from the fine legend of the Holy Tree, which, having sprung from a seed of Adam's tongue, appears in the histories of Moses, David, and Solomon,

² The first soldier, referring to Jesus' crown of thorns, calls Him a "fole kyng" (l. 28). The term sustains the image set up previously in the Trial plays and appears again at the beginning of play XXXV, l. 5.

³ Frances H. Miller, in "The Northern Passion and the Mysteries," Modern Language Notes, 34 (1919), 92, points to the York Realist's naming of one of the soldiers Sir Wymond as one of several original elaborations in the Passion sequence.

till it is finally cut down for the cross. . . ."4 The Northern Passion (Camb. ll. 1186-1310; Oxf. ll. 1749-2532) relates the legend in great detail,⁵ and although the York account is condensed, the story would have been familiar to a medieval audience. Its incorporation in the first Crucifixion play is dramatically important, for it underscores the emphasis placed on the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy throughout the Passion sequence. Furthermore, because the legend deals with the specific instrument which shares the focal point in both the Crucifixion and the Mass, its inclusion in the early part of the action firmly establishes its historical significance and increases its dramatic potential.

In an elaboration of the original story, the York writer demonstrates an attention to realistic detail which is reminiscent of that used in previous plays (i.e., plays XXVIII-XXXIII) attributed to the York Realist. The first soldier expresses concern over the length and width of the cross, and the third soldier (Sir Wymond) reassures him that before he went he measured Jesus "Bothe for the fette and hande" (l. 82) and thus, "To loke ther-aftir it is no nede" (l. 80). The second soldier admires the evenness with which the holes have been bored on either

⁴ Lucy Toulmin Smith, ed., The York Plays (Oxford, 1885; rpt. New York: Russell and Russell, 1963), pp. xlvi-xxix.

⁵ The Northern Passion (Supplement), EETS, o.s., No. 183, ed. Wilhelm Heuser and Frances A. Foster (London: Oxford University Press, 1930).

end; the group makes certain that they have on hand the necessary materials, such as hammers, nails, and brads; and then, assigning the cross to Jesus "That ther-on hanged sone schall be" (l. 101), the soldiers depart.

Scene two, which occupies approximately a third of play XXXIV, opens with a long soliloquy by John (ll. 107-142). He relates, in condensed form, the action which has transpired since Jesus' capture in the Garden of Gethsemane and assumes responsibility for warning Jesus' mother and her sister, although he fears that Jesus' mother for dole schall dye, / When she see ones that sight. . . " (ll. 138-139). Jesus enters with the soldiers and, in an address to the weeping women taken almost verbatim from Luke 23.28-30 (DV), He prophesies the coming of evil times:⁶

Doughteres of Jerusalem cytte,
Sees, and mournes no more for me,
But thynkes uppon this thyng;
.
.
.
That ye schall giffe blissyng
To barayne bodies all,
That no barnes forthe may brynge,
.
.
.
That with sore sighyng schall ye saye
Unto the hillis on highte,
'Falle on us, mountaynes, and ye may,
And couere us fro that felle affraye,
That on us sone schall light.'
(ll. 161-176)

It is especially significant that the York writer would choose to base

⁶ The prophecy also appears in The Northern Passion, Camb. ll. 1425-1446; Oxf. ll. 2674-2698, but there the account is expanded and the wording does not afford a close parallel.

Jesus' words on the account in Luke, rather than on the expanded Northern Passion version (see above, n. 1), for the Biblical passage represents the fulfillment of the prophecy in Isaias 2.19 that "they shall go into the holes of rocks, and into the caves of the earth from the face of the fear of the Lord. . . ." Inasmuch as the second chapter of Isaias prophesies that all nations shall flow to the church of Christ, that the Jews shall be rejected for their sins, and that idolatry shall be destroyed, the inclusion in York of the fulfillment of this prophecy must have been dramatically effective, for the medieval audience would have been well-conditioned in their response to the part the Jews played in the Crucifixion and to the concept of Judaism in general. Wednesday and Friday of Holy Week were designated as the days to pray for the Jews as enemies of the Church, and "because the Jews mockingly bowed to Christ, calling him 'King of Jews,' the Christian congregation [disregarded] the deacon's command," Flectamus genua, issued before the prayer for the Jews.⁷ O. B. Hardison, Jr., believes that the congregation's response represents "a unique instance in the Easter liturgy of dramatic impulse overcoming regard for history," and that this response, along with others, confirms "the congregation's sense of participation at least as a chorus, in the developing action."⁸

⁷ O. B. Hardison, Jr., Christian Rite and Christian Drama in the Middle Ages (Baltimore, Md.: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1965), p. 115.

⁸ Ibid., pp. 115-116.

In addition to this ritualistic and highly negative reaction to the Jews, the congregation would have been familiar with those legends and exempla--often of a sensational nature--which pertained to the Jews and stressed the Jews' wickedness.⁹ Audience recognition of these dramatic and non-dramatic religious sources would constitute, then, a strong basis for emotional transference from church ritual to drama, and, in this case, because tangible human relationships would be added to the more intangible emotional response to the Crucifixion, the tension and sense of conflict would be increased.

The third Mary, in a reenactment of the Vernacle legend,¹⁰ wipes Jesus' face and then, apparently holding the kerchief up before the audience as if to show the impression, says,

This signe schalle bere witnesse
Unto all pepull playne,
Howe goddes sone here gilteles
Is putte to pereles payne.

(11. 187-190)

The soldiers, abruptly cutting short the dramatic moment with a spate of

⁹ See, for instance, The South English Legendary, EETS, o.s., Nos. 235, 236, ed. Charlotte D'Evelyn and Anna J. Mill (London: Oxford University Press, 1956 [for 1951]), 227-228, 384, 550, and 563; Middle English Sermons, EETS, o.s., No. 209, ed. Woodburn O. Ross (London: Oxford University Press, 1940), sermons 11, 22, and 31; and the early English ballads, "Judas" (C 23) and "The Ballad of the Jew's Daughter" (C 155), in The English and Scottish Popular Ballads, ed. Francis James Child (New York: The Folklore Press, 1956). It is significant that of the three sermons containing exempla dealing with Jews, two sermons are intended for Easter Sunday and one for Friday after Ash Wednesday.

¹⁰ See Lucy T. Smith, p. xlix.

crude insults, order the weeping women to leave the site. When the group is slow to leave, the soldiers--picking up the words "quenes" from their previous insults--play upon it:

Ther quenes us comeres with ther clakke,

 We schall garre lygge thame in the lake. . . .
(11. 211, 215)

The clever word choice not only illustrates the soldiers' insensitivity to the grief of the women, but also supplies a vivid metaphorical contrast between the senseless "clacking" of water fowls and the genuine distress of Jesus' mother and her sisters.

The women flee; Jesus swoons from loss of blood; and the soldiers, noting the approach of Simon the Cyrenian, press him into service to help bear the cross. Simon protests, saying that his "wayes are lang and wyde" and that he has promised a surety which "Must be fulfilled this nyght," or his estate will be injured (11. 251-256). The Gospels merely mention the fact that Simon was forced to take up the cross, and it is only in The Northern Passion that one finds Simon carefully explaining why he must be on his way:

Symon answered and said: "nay,
 I may noht bere it bi this day,
 And hasty thinges I haue to do,
 So that I may noht tent thare-to."
(NP Supp., Oxf. 11. 2727-2730)

That the York writer chose to incorporate this version of the story is further evidence of close attention to realistic detail (see above, pp. 140-141).

The expanded account also exemplifies the dramatist's careful building-up of each of the details of the Crucifixion preparations, a dramatic device which imparts an air of finality and thus increases the sense of the inevitability of coming events.

As the group prepares to leave for Calvary, the first soldier, with characteristic cruelty, says that Jesus must be hanged naked, "Allyf he called hym-selffe a kyng" (ll. 310-313). The second soldier points out quite practically that although this seems a good idea, Jesus' clothes are stuck to His body "For bloode that he has bledde" (ll. 314-316). Unmoved by this appalling detail, the third soldier insists that Jesus be led away naked, and adds that "for the more myscheue, / Buffettis hym schall be bedde" (ll. 319-320). After the soldiers remove Jesus' clothes and bind Him again, the first soldier notes that Jesus "schall be feste of fee, / And that right sore and sone" (ll. 337-338). The unwittingly ironic remark emphasizes the contrast between Jesus' true identity as God's Son Who will rise from the dead and ascend into heaven and His identity as a mortal who must suffer, die, and return to the earth. The contrast is made even more emphatic when, as the company departs, the third soldier delivers the final, and profoundly meaningful, lines of the play:

If anye aske aftir us,
Kenne thame to Caluarie.
(ll. 349-350)

Crucifixio Cristi (XXXV), the most brutal of the three Crucifixion plays, concerns the horrid work of the four soldiers: They nail Jesus to the cross, raise and position the cross, and draw lots for Jesus' garments. Although Robinson concedes that this non-alliterative play is realistic, he believes that the realism is of a traditional sort.¹¹ One may assume that by "traditional" realism Robinson means that sort of realistically brutal action which one finds in the Crucifixion plays of the other cycles. Arnold Williams, for example, states that the "physical process of the crucifixion is brutal in all the plays."¹² Inasmuch as the action of the play confines itself to one scene and to one procedure, there are few dramatic possibilities for the type of realism which shows logical process of behavior or subtleties of character. Furthermore, because the procedure--the Crucifixion--is by definition realistically brutal, it is difficult to establish standards which would distinguish various degrees of brutality. Nevertheless, the realism in play XXXV frequently illustrates a degree of complexity well beyond the "traditional."

This complexity emerges in the depiction of certain brutal actions which seem the more brutal because the soldiers who perform them do not do so unthinkingly. When, for example, the soldiers have reached

¹¹ Robinson, p. 248-249.

¹² Arnold Williams, The Drama of Medieval England (Michigan State University Press, 1961), p. 82.

the top of the hill and prepare to raise the cross, they deliberately let it fall into the mortice with a jolt, so as to increase Jesus' pain:

Nowe raise hym nemely for the nonys,
And sette hym be this mortas heere.
And latte hym falle in alle at ones,
For certis that payne schall haue no pere.
(11. 219-222)¹³

This same attention to logical process of thought also obtains in the soldiers' response to Jesus' prayer (11. 49-60) after He has been laid upon the cross earlier in the play. Moreover, the prayer has been dramatically well-prepared for, in that the fourth soldier has just commented ironically, "Thyne hyre [reward] schall thou haue" (l. 47). Jesus says that He dies to save mankind from Adam's sins, and the soldiers stop, listen, and analyze His speech. They note that Jesus does not dread death and they comment that they think He might have stopped such sayings:

This doulfull dede ne dredith he noght,
.....
I hope that he had bene as goode
Haue sesed of sawes that he uppe sought.
(11. 64, 67-68)

In keeping with the attention given to logical progression of action and thought are the numerous realistic elaborations applied to characters and situations throughout the play. For example, as the soldiers in York nail Jesus to the cross, they find that His arms do

¹³ Cf. Northern Passion, Oxf. 11.2809-2820.

not reach the holes bored in the wood. The third soldier, minutely examining the situation, comments on the discrepancy:

It failis a foote and more,
the senous are so gone ynnne.¹⁴
(11. 107-108)

When the second soldier replies, "I hope that marke a-misse be bored" (1. 109), the third soldier concludes that

In faith, it was ouere skantely scored;
That makis it fouly for to faile.
(11. 111-112)¹⁵

The first soldier, evidently a practical man, then interrupts the speculative discussion and urges the soldiers to get on with their grim task:

Why carpe ye so? faste on a corde,
And tugge hym to, by toppe and taile.
(11. 113-114)

This concern for well-thought-out details (the measurement of the nail holes and the practical settlement of the problem) contributes a brand of realism which is not dependent solely upon the shock of physical horror for its effectiveness. Moreover, because this type of realism adds depth to characterization and credibility to situation, and because unqualified horror tends to negate even dramatic acceptance,

¹⁴ Cf. Northern Passion, Camb. 11. 1501-1516; Oxf. 11. 2766-2784. The discrepancy in length is described in both versions as being one foot.

¹⁵ The inclusion of the legend of the cross reference in play XXXIV, together with Sir Wymond's comment that there is no need to worry about the length and width of the cross since he measured Jesus before he went for the tree, indicates an attention to dramatic unity between, as well as within, the plays of the Passion sequence.

this realism allows the on-looker to enter more fully into the world of dramatic illusion and to experience more intensely the ongoing agonistic action.¹⁶ A clear example of this realistic method occurs as the soldiers struggle up the hill to Mount Calvary, grumbling bitterly about the heaviness of their grim burden and communicating a very real sense of the weight through their remarks:

For grete harme haue I hente,
My schuldir is in soundre.
(11. 189-190)

This crosse and I in two muste twynne,
Ellis brekis my bakke in sondre sone.
(11. 193-194)

This bargayne will noght bee,
For certis me wantis wynde.
(11. 203-204)

The complaints not only underscore the soldiers' essential human frailty, but also provide an experience with which the on-lookers can identify.

After the cross has been raised and jolted into position, the soldiers find that it will not stand upright. Observing that the hole of the mortice was "made ouere wyde" (l. 231), they decide to stabilize the cross with wedges "bo th grete and smale" (l. 238).¹⁷ They request

¹⁶ The ultimate importance of this characteristic will be discussed in the concluding chapter.

¹⁷ Cf. Northern Passion, Oxf. 11. 2809-2820.

and receive hammers and then give close attention to the proper carrying out of their chore. Here, as in the examples given above, the York writer's use of realistic detail serves a definite dramatic purpose: It extends the immediate action and focuses attention upon the cross, thereby strongly engaging the on-looker's emotions and increasing dramatic response.

Their task completed, the soldiers stand and mock Jesus. He responds with an exhortation to "Al men that walkis by waye or strete" to "By-holde myn heede, myn handis, and my feete" (ll. 253, 255)¹⁸ and then prays to His Father:

For-giffis these men that dois me pyne.
What thai wirke wotte thai noght,
Therefore my Fadir I craue
Latte neuere ther synnys be sought,
But see ther saules to saue.

(ll. 261-264)

The familiar prayer for the forgiveness of Jesus' enemies, which has its Biblical source in *Secundum Lucum* 23.34, appears twice in the York Crucifixion group.¹⁹ Its inclusion in this play is dramatically significant in that it comes in close proximity to the savage actions of Christ's tormentors and thus makes especially meaningful His reference to "pyne."

As the soldiers prepare to leave, the second soldier makes a

¹⁸ Cf. *Northern Passion*, Oxf. ll. 2929-2936.

¹⁹ The second prayer occurs in play XXXVI, ll. 255-256.

prophetic statement that serves both as a summary of the previous action and as a dramatic link to the coming action:

This race mon be rehersed right,
Thurgh the worlde thoth [sic] este and weste.
(ll. 283-284)²⁰

The first soldier reminds the others that they have not yet divided Jesus' clothes (see above, p. 145), and, in an action which has parallels with all four Gospels, the soldiers draw lots for the garments and take their leave. The gaming incident is extremely brief (ll. 291-300), and it is a mark of the York writer's skill that he chose not to apply his usual technique of expansion at this point. A more extended account of the game could only have created an awkward interruption which would have destroyed the existing mood as well as the sense of inexorable movement toward the conclusion of the Crucifixion.

Mortificacio Cristi (XXXVI) represents not only the dramatic fulfillment of Pilate's sentence in play XXXIII (see Ch. vi, p. 134), but also, and perhaps more importantly, the fulfillment of Old

²⁰ The word "race" (l. 283) takes on added dramatic value here in view of its connotative association with the Race of Peter and John, a dramatic expansion in a fourteenth-century Sarum processional for Easter. (See J. Q. Adams, ed., Chief Pre-Shakespearean Dramas [Cambridge, Mass.: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1924], pp. 11-14.) Peter and John race to the sepulchre, find it empty, and announce the Resurrection. Thus, the term "race" might be linked with the result of the race, and its use in the lines quoted above might assume the secondary meaning of Resurrection. Although Miss Smith makes no note of the inconsistency in meaning created by the thorn before "oth" in l. 284, it seems likely that a copying or printing error resulted in the substitution of "th" for the more logical "b."

Testament prophecy. It also marks the culmination of the agon and must therefore reflect the enormity of that catastrophe--the Crucifixion--toward which dramatic tension has been building in the previous two Crucifixion plays. The play opens with Pilate, Caiaphas, and Annas making their way to Mount Calvary. Pilate closes his initial boastful speech on an unusual note. He regrets that Jesus has been crucified, and he lays the blame for the Crucifixion squarely upon Annas and Caiaphas:

Of Jesu I holde it unhappe,
That he on yone hill hyng so hye,
.....
Thus was youre wille
Full spitously to spede he were spilte.
(11. 33-34, 38-39)

In the discussion that follows, Annas and Caiaphas reiterate Jesus' wrongdoings, ending with the charge of treason they have previously used as a means of arousing Pilate's anger. Now, however, when it is too late to save Jesus, Pilate remains unmoved. Again he denounces the two priests:

His bloode schall youre bodis enbrace,
For that haue ye taken you till.
(11. 68-69)

Dramatically, this added bit of conflict is not ineffective, and because it occurs within the ranks of Jesus' enemies, it subtly suggests a sense of disorder which is appropriate to the agonistic situation. Moreover, Pilate's expression of remorse, which is apparently original

with the York Realist, ²¹ underscores his consistent characterization as a weak, vacillating, yet troubled judge (see Ch. vi, pp. 133-135) and sets up a dramatic parallel with the remorse of Judas. This re-emphasis on Pilate's weakness, coupled as it is with his repudiation of guilt, serves to present the Crucifixion even more emphatically as a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy.

Accepting Pilate's imprecation exultingly, Annas and Caiaphas hurl insults and taunts at Jesus. Annas then complains that the writing Pilate has set above Jesus proclaiming Him to be King of the Jews should be altered to read "He said I am King of the Jews":

And sette that he saide in his sawe,

 'Jewes kyng am I,' comely to knawe,
 Full playne.
 (ll. 110, 112-113)²²

Pilate's reply, "Quod scripci, scripci" (l. 114), is taken directly from the Vulgate "Quod scripsi, scripsi (Secundum Ioannem 12.22). But in a departure from his source, the York dramatist has Pilate add the prophetic statement, "What gedlyng will grucche there

²¹ The York Realist may have taken as a basis for the incident Pilate's comment in The Northern Passion, "Alle with wrong ye blamith me" (NP, Camb. 1. 1581).

²² In the Vulgate account, Secundum Ioannem 19.19-21, the inscription is written in three languages, and it is the chief priest of the Jews who complains to Pilate. The York proclamation apparently is not written in other languages, and the complaining priest is identified as Annas. This latter point is characteristic of the York Realist. See Ch. vi, p. 117, where Peter's accuser is identified as Malcus.

agayne" (l. 117).

Scene two opens with Jesus issuing a powerfully-dramatic warning from the cross (ll. 118-130). He urges sinful man to take heed of His plight and sums up explicitly the concept of the Blissful Passion:

Thus for thy goode
I schedde my bloode,
Manne, mende thy moode,
For full bittir thi blisse mon I by.
(ll. 127-130)

As Jesus concludes the warning, Mary, His mother, enters and begins a short, plaintive, and poignantly beautiful planctus, or complaint (ll. 131-143), which is not found in any of the Gospel accounts. Her opening words make clear the extremity of her grief:

Allas! for my swete sonne I saie,
That doulfully to dede thus I dight,
Allas! for full louely thou laye
In my wombe, this worthely wight.
Allas! that I schulde see this sight
Of my sone so semely to see,
Allas! that this blossome so bright
Untrewly is tugged to this tree,
Allas!
(ll. 131-139)

Mary's reference to birth (l. 134) emphasizes the humanity of the situation, thus underscoring the real and terrible suffering being undergone, and it also brings into sharp contrast the opposition of life and death. It is a mark of the York writer's skill that he doubles the effect of the life-death contrast by introducing the metaphor of

the "blossome" attached to the lifeless tree. In that it is a poignant reminder of the lyrical tributes accorded Jesus at His triumphant entry into Jerusalem (see Ch. v, p. 91); the restatement of the metaphor at the time of Jesus' death not only reflects the reversal of the positive quality of light images in the Entry play, but also provides strong support for the idea of a unified Passion sequence.

Waldo F. McNeir believes that Mary's lament in York "is presented without much force," and "comes too late to provide an adequate emotional complement to the rigors of the Crucifixion."²³ It is his contention that the preceding scene with Annas and Caiaphas takes away from the impact which would have resulted from having Mary's planctus immediately follow the tortures of the Crucifixion. In view of the fact that Mary and the other two Marys issue complaints as the soldiers in play XXXIV prepare to carry on their grim work (see above, p. 141), McNeir's criticism of the lateness of the complaint(s) in play XXXVI does not seem well-founded. The first appearance of the Marys immediately before, rather than after, the more torturous scenes of the Crucifixion emphasizes the helplessness of those who love Jesus and creates an emotionally-evocative contrast between the adoring,

²³ Waldo F. McNeir, "The Corpus Christi Plays as Dramatic Art," Studies in Philology, 48 (July 1951), 624. McNeir cites ll. 118-195 as a textual reference for Mary's lament (McNeir, 624). The lines are shared, however, with Jesus, John, and Mary Cleophe. Mary, the mother of Jesus, speaks only five times and then quite briefly.

yet powerless, women and the sadistic, but effectual, soldiers.

Similarly, because of their proximity to Jesus' death, Mary's laments in play XXXVI take on added tragic intensity and depth of meaning.

It is true that they are brief, and that they are not especially marked by lyric grace, but they have the realistic force of naked emotion:

Mary consistently expresses a mother's love at its purest and most elemental level. When Jesus tells her not to weep because He is doing His Father's will (ll. 144-147), Mary, untouched by theological explanations, remains inconsolable:

How schulde I but wepe for thy woo!

.

Allas! why schulde we twynne thus in twoo
For euere?

(ll. 149, 151-152)

Jesus then delivers Mary into John's care,²⁴ and Mary, overcome with her grief, wishes that she were dead:

Allas! sone, sorowe and sighte,
That me were closed in clay,
A swerde of sorowe me smyte,
To dede I were done this day.

(ll. 157-160)

Mary's expression of despair, the ultimate sin against God, would have

²⁴ Secundum Ioannem 19.26-27 is the only one of the Gospels to record this action. It is included in The Northern Passion, Camb. ll. 1588-1608; Oxf. ll. 2864-2892; and in Meditations on the Supper of Our Lord, and the Hours of the Passion, EETS, o.s., No. 60, trans. Robert Manning, ed. J. Meadows Cowper (London: N. Trübner & Co., 1875), ll. 716-718.

been especially horrifying to a medieval audience. Responding to Mary's grief, John and Mary Cleophe try to comfort her; they urge her to come away from the terrible scene, but she refuses to leave while her Son still lives:

To he be paste
 Wille I buske here baynly to bide.
 (11. 181-182)

Jesus, speaking again from the cross, urges man to take note of the pain He is undergoing "all thi misse for to mende" (l. 184). Then, in a beautiful lyric passage, He expresses poignantly His terrible sense of isolation:

Manne, kaste the thy kyndynesse be kende,
Trewes tente un-to me that thou take,
 And treste.
For foxis ther dennys haue thei,
Birdis hase ther nestis to paye,
But the sone of man this daye,
 Hase noght on his heed for to reste.

(ll. 190-195)

Because it implies the disruption of natural order, the speech underscores the disorder of the agonistic situation and thus concretely and abstractly makes its powerful emotional appeal.

There follows a short, but effective, exchange between the two thieves who are being crucified with Jesus:

Lat. a sin. If thou be Goddis sone so free,
Why hyng thou thus on this hille?
To saffe nowe thi selffe late us see,
And us now, that spedis for to spille.

Lat. a dex. Manne, stynte of thy steuen and be
 stille,
 For douteles thy God dredis thou noght,
 Full wele are we worthy ther-till,
 Unwisely wrange haue we wrought
 i-wisse.

Noon ille did hee,
 Thus for to dye;
 Lord! haue mynde of me
 What thou art come to thi blisse.
 (ll. 196-208)²⁵

By choosing to incorporate this argument, the York playwright provides not only for a more realistic characterization, but also for an added degree of conflict. After assuring the second thief that he will that day dwell "In paradise place principall" (ll. 211-212), Jesus cries out despairingly from the cross:

Heloy! heloy!
 My God, my God, full free,
 Lamasabatanye,
 Whar-to for-soke thou me,
 In care?
 (ll. 213-217)

Jesus' assurance to the thief and His subsequent cry of despair create a sharp contrast between optimism and pessimism that furthers the prevailing agonistic mood. Jesus says, "A! me thristis sare" (l. 221), and a drink, specifically identified as "Aysell and galle" (l. 244), is

²⁵ The incident occurs in *Secundum Lucum* 23.39-43, and in *The Northern Passion*, Camb. ll. 1588-1608. *Secundum Matthaeum* 27.44 and *Secundum Marcum* 15.32 say only that the thieves reproached Jesus, and *Secundum Ioannem* omits the episode entirely. With his usual attention to detail, the York Realist places the thief who reproaches Jesus on His left and identifies him as the "Latro A Sinistris."

brought to Him. Jesus will not take it, and, in a final prayer to His Father, He asks forgiveness for His enemies (ll. 255-256) and commends His spirit to God:

My fadir, here my bone,
For nowe all thyng is done,
My spirite to thee right sone
Comende I in manus tuas.
(ll. 257-260)

The declining action includes the restoration of Longeus' sight by the blood from the shaft which pierces the heart of Jesus and the subsequent conversion of Longeus (ll. 300-312); the conversion of a centurion by the miraculous darkness attending the Crucifixion (ll. 313-325); the begging of Pilate for the body of Christ by Joseph of Arimathea, who is joined by Nicodemus (ll. 326-364); and the arrival of Joseph and Nicodemus at the site of the Crucifixion and the preparations for, and burial of, Jesus (ll. 365-416).

Whereas those events leading up to the culmination of the agon--Christ's death--are specifically concerned with achieving a degree of emotional intensity commensurate with the catastrophe, the events leading away from the Crucifixion must serve a double purpose. They must, of course, represent declining action, but they must also sustain, with lessened tempo, the tragic rhythm which precedes the Resurrection. Although on the level of eschatological history, "Christ has already achieved His victory over the adversarius," He is, "in terms of earthly

history . . . still dead."²⁶ This idea may be seen within the ritual of the Church, where "a mood of quiet mourning" replaces "the literal agony of the Crucifixion."²⁷

In terms of dramatic presentation, this period of quiet mourning must be translated through those events which follow the sacrificial death. In York, these events sustain the note of tragedy through a combination of sensitively-handled dialogue and action, each complementing the other through a realism so refined, so perceptively attuned to fresh grief, that it takes its every cue from that grief without ever seeming to intrude upon it. The gentle, but firm, manner in which John and Mary Cleophe assume responsibility for the anguished and lamenting mother of Jesus following His death is a clear example of this technique. Their decision to lead her away is a joint one, and they tacitly assume parental roles in the emotional void created by the dual loss of mortal son and Divine Ruler. Mary's dramatically effective lament, which immediately follows Jesus' death, serves both as an emotional response and as an emotional release:

Now dere sone, Jesus so iente,
 Sen my harte is heuy as leede,
 O worde wolde I witte or thou wente;
 Allas! nowe my dere sone is dede.
 Full rewfully refte is my rede,
 Allas! for my darlyng so dere.

(ll. 261-266)

²⁶ Hardison, pp. 142-143.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 138.

The lament thus creates an appropriate dramatic transition to the declining action.

Another example of sensitively-handled action and dialogue occurs when Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus go to the cross for Jesus' body. Before they take the body down, they comment concisely, and eloquently, upon the contrast between Jesus' true nature and appearance and the "sorofull sight" they now behold. Tender devotion marks both their feelings and their actions:

Be-twene us take we hym doune,
And laie hym on lenthe on this lande,
This reuerent and riche of rennounge,
Late us halde hym and halse hym with hande.
(ll. 377-382)

Making note of each aspect of the burial--the grave, the winding sheet, and the "myrre and aloes" for anointing the body--Joseph and Nicodemus proceed with the burial. Although the essential reason for their task--Jesus' death--is never obscured, the tenor of their speech grows perceptibly more positive with each ministration they perform. Joseph's prayer as they bury the body illustrates a steadfast moral outlook that acknowledges death and grief but continues to look to the future:

To thy mercy nowe make I my moone,
As sauour be see and be sande,
Thou gyde me that my griffe be al gone,
With lele liffe to lenge in this lande,
And esse.
(ll. 395-399)

Joseph, kneeling and praying again after Nicodemus has anointed the

body, expresses even more strongly this dual recognition of mortal death and Divine victory:

To the kyng on knees here I knele
That baynly thou belde me in blisse.
(ll. 496-497)

Nicodemus asks to be remembered and forgiven of his sins, and Joseph, in concluding words that serve as a benediction for Nicodemus, for the audience, and for play XXXVI, says:

This lorde so goode,
That shedde his bloode,
He mende youre moode,
And buske on this blis for to bide.
(ll. 413-416)

Clearly, the series of events following Jesus' death represent a dramatically-balanced and sensitively-handled declining action. They also sustain the tragic rhythm which precedes the Resurrection. In addition to serving this dual purpose, they fulfill an important structural need: By creating a balanced contrast with the preceding agon and by establishing firmly a mood of quiet mourning, the events of the declining action effect a well-defined ending for the Crucifixion group and for the Passion sequence as a whole. Because a major conflict, a crisis, and a well-defined ending are essential dramatic components of the plotted work which sustains illusion and imparts a sense of order (see Ch. ii, p. 30), the effective presentation of the events of the declining action has a direct influence on the ultimate dramatic

success of the York Passion sequence.²⁸

Contributing greatly to the effectiveness of the declining action are those structural and emotional factors of the preceding action of the Crucifixion that provide the basis for the subsequent balance and contrast: a mounting, rather than a sustained tension, and a catastrophe (Jesus' death) which represents the culmination of the agon and the height of emotional intensity. These factors, in turn, owe their effectiveness to realistic dialogue and action and to an agonistic element which has its basis in the sacrificially-focused ritual of the Mass and the other Holy Week ceremonies. For example, in the opening Crucifixion play (XXXIV), the York dramatist creates a mood of controlled tension through careful attention to realistic dialogue and action which center on the preparatory details of the Crucifixion (e.g., the attention given to the cross) and make grimly clear the inevitability of coming events. In the brutal Crucifixio Cristi (XXXV), logical progression of action and thought intensifies the horror of the action by illustrating the intentional cruelty of Jesus' tormentors and by creating situations so credible that the onlooker may experience that horror. In the final Crucifixion play, the agon is brought to its ultimate peak of emotional

²⁸ Because in the concluding chapter of this study I focus on the dramatic effectiveness of the York Passion sequence in terms of ritual parallels and the dramatic means by which the sequence realizes the effects of these parallels, I will not expand upon the point here.

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intensity, first through a discordant exchange between Pilate, Annas, and Caiaphas, and then by Mary's realistic expressions of grief and by Jesus' emphasis on repentance and redemption.

Thus, through various realistic methods, the Crucifixion plays present the suffering and death of Jesus. That the agon (the conflict) here is not between two or more people, but rather centers upon Jesus, in no way lessens its emotional impact. As previously stated (see Ch. ii, p. 29), the "essential [dramatic] confrontation" is in the play-goer's mind, because he enters imaginatively into the struggle and makes it "his experience, his game."²⁹ And because the liturgy of Lent and Passiontide "exhorts [the participant] to penance, puts before [him] the word of God and entreats [him] to imitate the death of Jesus in dying to himself,"³⁰ the medieval play-goer's perception of the dramatic agon would have been doubly acute.

²⁹ Samuel Selden, Theatre Double Game (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1969), p. 13.

³⁰ Gaspar Lefebvre, Catholic Liturgy : Its Fundamental Principles (London: Sands & Co., 1954), p. 141.

CONCLUSION

That a need exists for a fresh approach to medieval religious cyclical drama is evident from a brief survey of major critical commentary in this area. With regard to the value of the Corpus Christi dramas, this commentary proceeds basically from two major schools of thought. Karl Young, E. K. Chambers, and A. P. Rossiter are representative of those critics who evaluate the cycle plays in terms of historical position. As a result, they see the plays as points in a slowly-developing literary scale rather than as dramatically-effective products of their time. On the other hand, critics such as Waldo F. McNeir, Eleanor Prosser, and V. A. Kolve acknowledge the intrinsic dramatic value of the medieval cycle drama, but they attempt to explain this value by relating it to such diverse factors as Gothic art forms, the medieval doctrine of repentance, and an outmoded version of the nineteenth-century theory of play. These factors, however, being external to the drama itself, do not specifically influence dramatic effectiveness.

A more comprehensive and viable approach to the analysis of medieval cyclical drama is that of focusing upon the inherent--rather than the generative or contributive--worth of the drama, and explaining this inherent worth in terms of the existing dramatic structure. Because its structure is paralleled, strengthened, and made especially effective by

the superimposition of ritual correspondences in the Mass and the Holy Week ceremonies, and because the nature and the function of these parallels are such that they at once satisfy the medieval and the dramatic requirements for order and unity, the Passion sequence of the York Corpus Christi cycle is uniquely suited to such an analysis.

The grouping of the York Passion plays into a sequence of events which has a liturgical parallel within the observances of Holy Week not only results in a dramatic framework which is based on religious ritual, but also provides for those factors which are essential to dramatic effectiveness: a major conflict, a crisis, and a well-defined ending. The liturgically-based framework of the Passion sequence also provides for a unified dramatic structure which has a rising action, a climax, and a catastrophe and in which the major conflict, the crisis, and a well-defined ending operate. Although the individual plays of the Passion sequence have been criticized for "brevity" and "insulation," they are, in fact, rather long and tautly unified. This unity is in large part due to the imaginative realism, the metrical excellence, and the original dramatic features for which the York cycle, and, in particular, the Passion sequence, is noted. These characteristics emerge in the Entry into Jerusalem (XXV) as the artistic means by which the York playwright establishes structural and figurative patterns which are repeated throughout the Passion sequence and which contribute to the special unity of

the sequence. These patterns are developed in two major ways: first, concretely, through the use of carefully-chosen dialogue, which produces realistic characterization startlingly similar to that used in those plays credited to the York Realist; and second, abstractly, through repetitive references to the fulfillment of prophecy and through numerous light images.

In those plays which present the rising action of the Passion sequence--the Entry into Jerusalem (XXV), the Conspiracy to Take Jesus (XXVI), the Last Supper (XXVII), and the Agony and Betrayal (XXVIII)--light imagery, references to fulfillment of prophecy, and realistic dialogue give added unity of action and characterization and lend cumulative force to the sense of foreboding related to coming events. In the five Trial plays (XXIX-XXXIII), the last of which, the Second Trial before Pilate, marks the climax of the sequence, an accumulation of realistic detail and the addition of vivid legendary material create suspense by means of dialogue and action that heighten the sense of dramatic illusion. Moreover, the York dramatist skillfully develops dramatic tension through a series of inner conflicts, conflicts between characters other than Jesus, and implied contrasts, the most frequent of which involves repeated references to Jesus as a "boy" or as a person with childish qualities. The latter device, by subtly emphasizing the contrast between Jesus' true characteristics and those attributed to Him by His accusers, abstractly heightens the immediate--as well as the omnipresent--conflict between goodness

and sin. It is dramatically significant that the action of the Trial plays has been sufficiently expanded from the original Biblical account of the Trials to assure the achievement of a degree of depth that allows for a climax not only effective in its own context but also dramatically proportionate to the coming catastrophe.

The Crucifixio Cristi, the third of three Crucifixion plays (XXXIV, XXXV, XXXVI), represents the culmination of the agon. It is carefully prepared for in plays XXXIV and XXXV by mounting, rather than sustained, tension. This effect is achieved through the use in play XXXIV of non-alliterative dialogue which affords a lower emotional key and also by a minimum of overtly-cruel action. Play XXXV, the most brutal of the three Crucifixion plays, makes use of vividly-realistic detail and dialogue to create a situation not dependent solely upon the shock of horror for its effectiveness. The final play, the Crucifixio Cristi, represents the height of emotional intensity in the series of Crucifixion plays and in the Passion sequence. Its effectiveness is due both to specific dramatic devices such as realistic dialogue and action and to the superimposition of ritual parallels in the sacrificially-focused Mass and Holy Week ceremonies. Similarly, the declining action which follows the Crucifixion gains emotional impact through its correspondence to the period of quiet mourning which, in the ritual of the Church, replaces the overtly agonistic ritual of the Good Friday ceremonies.

Thus, the York Passion sequence achieves a high degree of dramatic effectiveness through a combination of recurring structural and figurative patterns which lend unity of action and characterization, and through the superimposition of ritual parallels which increase dramatic unity and emotional impact. The ultimate effect of the structural and figurative patterns as they recur throughout the Passion sequence is one of unity of action and characterization, a unity which, in part, creates the sense of order which makes the Passion sequence dramatically effective. The patterns also give added tension and conflict, and this added tension results in a stronger--hence, more dramatically effective--sense of order. Combined with the agonistic emphases of the ritual parallels, the structural and figurative patterns produce that effect which results in the unique success of the York Passion sequence as medieval religious cyclical drama.

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