

## Adam's Dream in the Chester *Adam and Eve*

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The plays on the Fall of Man in the Medieval English cycles are based on the first three chapters of Genesis, but among the cycles there are many differences in characterization, structure and story development. In the York cycle, for example, the episodes are divided into six short plays; on the other hand, the N-Town Creation play is a dramatization of the biblical accounts in one long play. The Chester *Adam and Eve* includes the Cain and Abel episode, instead of an independent play as in other cycles. While the York Eve is more cautious and sensible than Adam, the Chester Eve suffers severe criticism from her husband as well as remorse for her sin. Besides antifeminism and the integration of the Cain episode into the Fall play, Chester includes a long monologue of Adam on his dream, which has no counterparts in other cycles. In this paper I examine Adam's dream in relation to the other two characteristics and discuss the uniqueness of the Chester Fall play.

Genesis says that God put the man into a deep sleep and, while he slept, he took one of the man's ribs and created a woman (Genesis 2:21). Only Norwich fragments and Chester adopt the biblical accounts to their Creation plays. In York, N-Town and Towneley, God takes a rib out of Adam to create Eve (Spector 24/18—19, Beadle 59/38, Stevens and Cawley 3/186), but there is no mention of sleep made by God nor Adam. Description of sleep may not be an essential factor in these plays, because the audience can see Adam lying in sleep on stage or pageant without being told so. Even in the Norwich Grocers' play, the actor playing God briefly describes his action of inducing sleep (Davis 8/12—13, 13/11—12). In Chester, however, Adam remembers what he saw in his sleep and refers to it in the later parts of the play. To explain the importance of Adam's vision, I first identify its nature and then discuss its function and implication in the play as well as in the whole cycle.

The Chester Adam is aware of his state of sleep and suggests that his dream has a prophetic nature. He says,

A, Lord! Where have I long been?  
For sithence I slept, much have I seen—  
wonder that withouten ween  
hereafter shall be wist. (Mills 31/137—140)

It is interesting that the first speech of the Chester Adam on his dream comes before the famous words of the first human in Genesis, "This is bone from my bone, flesh from my flesh" (Genesis 2:23).

According to the medieval theological tradition, his words at Genesis 2:23 are attributed to God in Matthew 19:4, thus containing a prophetic revelation by God. Later, he identifies his vision as prophecy (35/269, 41/463) and recounts his experience in Paradise to his sons. While sleeping, his spirit was separated from his body and raised to Heaven (441—2), and God gave him this “grace to see things that shall befall” (40/443—4). Traditionally, Adam’s dream is thought to have taken place in an ecstasy or trance, where his sinless spirit is taken to heaven to be shown some divine intention. The Chester Adam, like Scipio in Chaucer’s *Parliament of Fowles*, is shown by God his whole scheme in the universe. His first speech clearly shows the prophetic nature of his dream and his role as a prophet.

The first time Adam mentions his prophecy, the event he predicts has already happened. After being encouraged *easily* to eat an apple by Eve, Adam finds them naked and says to her, cursing,

Yea, sooth said I in prophecy  
when thou was taken of my body  
man’s woe thou would be witterly;  
therefore thou was so named. (35/269—272)

In fact he made no such prophecy and also gave a different explanation for her name. When she was created, he named his companion *virago* (meaning “woman” in Latin) because she was taken out of a man (*vir*). Instead he says that she will be man’s woe, which is why she is called woe-man (woman). Later he calls Eve greedy, gluttonous, his foe and the Devil’s sister (38/353—358). Asked for an explanation by God, he blames her and even says that it is God who gave him the woman as his mate (36/289—292), which is not the case in the other Adam, who admits his sin at once before God. This male chauvinist is a reverse counterpart of Noah, a henpecked husband, who is helpless in the face of his wife with a drinking problem and her refusal to board the ship. When Adam gives the male audience the *useful* advice that they should escape women’s enticement because whoever trusts them will be deceived (37/349—352), there would be laughing, nodding or applauding among the audience, or probably booing from the female audience. Adam’s accusation of his wife sounds like a complaint or frustration of a husband toward his wife in everyday life. In a sense this is a domestic drama about a husband and wife who had to face great trouble because she was a little curious.

On the other hand, this is not just an ordinary couple but the first human couple whose sin causes the long suffering of the human race. Adam’s first reference to his prophecy implies that he knew the Fall as a result of a woman’s sin, even before she is created. Antifeminism is one of the characteristics of the Chester cycle, and more blame is put on Eve for the Fall than in the other cycles. For example, the Chester Adam eats the forbidden fruit without knowing it, while in the other cycles he is aware of it. A serpent-like devil finds Eve easier to deceive than her husband because of a woman’s curiosity (32/185—6), while no such reason is given in the other cycles. His reference to the etymology of her name adds another justification to Eve’s responsibility for the Man’s fall.

Adam’s foreknowledge of the Fall gives the audience the impression that the incident is ordained right from the beginning, not just a consequence of eating the forbidden fruit. This is a significant difference from the other cycles, in which a series of episodes take place chronologically without any reference to the Fall predicted at the creation. It also reminds the audience that this is the start of

conflict between good and evil, which eventually leads to Christ's Passion and Redemption. That is to say, the purposes of the cycle are already shown in the Creation play, thus making the play more didactic and more integrated into the theme of the cycle. Adam's vision is used effectively to show religious significance, maintaining dramatic suspense and entertainment as a domestic drama. We can see the similar function of Adam's dream in the following episode of Cain and Abel.

The Cain episode inserted in the story of Adam and Eve takes place thirty years after the expulsion from Paradise, and the minstrels' playing fills the time gap between the previous scene and this episode. This time Adam does reveal his prophecy to his two darling sons "to make them aware of dangerous circumstances and to keep them from doing trespass" (40/445—6). Dream as a warning sign was a widely accepted theory in the medieval times. In prophecy he tells of the destruction of the world by "water or fire" as a consequence of terrible human sins (41/457—460), and then he recounts the Judgment Day, where "God will come to judge the mankind, the good to Heaven, the evil to Hell" (41/466—9). They are warned so that they "can escape the harm" (41/461—2), and they should "tell this tale to their children" (41/470). Then he gives them instructions on how to earn a living and offer their sacrifice to please God. It is unique that Eve is given speech to show her emotions about the Fall. The mother describes her living in pain and sorrow caused by her own "misdeed" (42/502), and tells them to take her advice and "not to fall in sin" (42/512).

In spite of their parents' warning, however, Cain kills Abel. After condemnation to exile by God, Cain returns to relate his crime to his parents. They learn they lost both sons; one is a terrible murderer and the other is his innocent victim. Following after Adam's words of lament, Eve says in despair,

Alas! Now is my son slain? ...  
 Alas, must I never be fain, / but in woe and mourning?  
 Well I wot and know iwiss / that verray vengeance it is.  
 For I to God so did amiss, / mon I never have liking. (48/689—696)

No other English cycle dramatizes the unbiblical episode of the meeting of the family, and this emotional scene makes the Chester Fall play a tragic family drama. However, Eve's speech also shows the remorse of the first sinner as well as the grave sorrow of the bereaved mother. She is aware that the first murder in human history is a consequence of the Fall caused by her own sin. In addition to Adam's accusation in the previous part, her strong self-criticism indicates a tendency to lay more blame on Eve than on Adam for the original sin in Chester. As Eve's speech can be interpreted in both settings of a family drama and a religious drama, it is necessary to re-examine Adam's prophecy from a theological point of view.

In his vision Adam saw several apocalyptic events. Above all, he mentions the coming of Christ as follows:

God will come from heaven on high,  
 to overcome the devil so sly / and alight into my kind;  
 and my blood that he will win / that I so lost for my sin .... (450—4)

Anachronism of this kind is common in medieval cycle plays, considering its main theme of a war against evil and Christ's victory over it, but it is only in Chester that reference to the Harrowing of Hell is made in the Fall play. At the Harrowing of Hell (Play XVII) Adam will be released from hell by Christ, and the prophecy will be fulfilled. It is also significant that Adam directly connects his own sin with redemption by Christ, that is to say, Man's fall with the Redemption, establishing the cause-and-effect framework of the cycle. Paul says in his letters, "Adam foreshadows the man who was to come" (Romans 5:14) and "The first man is from earth, made of dust; the second man is from heaven" (1 Corinthians 15:47). The Chester Adam does foretell the coming of Christ, the second Adam, and the Harrowing of Hell and Redemption, where finally the sin of Adam and Eve will be forgiven, signifying forgiveness for all men. In this sense the play itself is a direct and indirect prophecy on Christ.

Similarly, the prophecies of destruction of the world and the Judgment Day are related to the Fall. Water and fire signify the Flood (Play III) and burning fire at the Last Judgment (Play XXIV), respectively. They are the first and last destruction of the world by God because of sinful human behavior, which is originated from the sin of Adam and Eve. As he knew the Fall even before it has been accomplished, Adam saw in his vision the consequences of the Fall and the destiny of men right at the Creation, meaning that these events are part of God's plan from the beginning. Therefore, Adam's prophecy is considered not only as a warning to his sons but as a sign given by God to men, to be accomplished later but explained clearly at the beginning. This gives the audience awareness of the main conflict of the drama and the framework of the whole cycle from the Creation to the Last Judgment, thus adding more religious significance to the Chester cycle.

It is ironic that Adam gives a warning to Cain and Abel, because they are the first offspring after the Fall and the first murderer and victim in human history. The murder of Abel is a consequence of the sin of Adam and Eve and symbolizes the sinful human behavior followed by future generations, which leads to the destruction of the world and continues until the Last Judgment, as Adam tells in prophecy. Because of the embedding of the episode in the story of Adam and Eve, the gravity of the Fall and its direct influence on humans are more emphatic than in an independent play. In terms of dramatic effect, it is also effective that the influence of the murder on the family and the laments of parents are emphasized in a family tragedy, so that the audience feels it more familiar to themselves.

At the beginning of the first play, where the origin of evil is dramatized, God says,

*Ego sum alpha et oo,*  
*primus et novissimus.*  
 It is my will it should be so;  
 it is, it was, it shall be thus. (14/1—4)

The "*alpha et omega*" quotation from Apocalypse 22:13 also precedes the second play (*Adam and Eve*) and the last play (*Last Judgment*) and links the beginning with the end of the cycle, making the circle closed. In the second play Adam's prophecy is a sign to show the divine intention or God's intervention in human history, and it links the Fall with the Redemption and Last Judgment, thus making the Chester cycle thematically unified. As Jack says, Adam's prophecy implies that he is the first Christian (35); on the other hand, Adam is very human, and his domestic life as a husband and father

is depicted in the family drama. In this play we can see “two interlocking narrative configurations: the microstructure of the pageant and the macrostructure of the cycle” (Stevens 269).

Stevens compares the Chester framework to “a cathedral window picturing salvation history in a series of twenty-four panels” (271), so that enjoying the artwork people can learn the teaching of Christ. Similarly, on the feast of Corpus Christi Day people remember the Passion of Christ, and at the same time they enjoy a series of plays. The Chester *Adam and Eve* is one of these magnificent “panels” with the double purpose of a Corpus Christi play: entertainment and enlightenment.

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