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Christ as a Worker in the Towneley Cycle

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

CHRIST AS A WORKER IN THE TOWNELEY CYCLE

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

BY

BARBARA I. GUSICK

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This world is an example of the workings of God, because, while we observe the work, the Worker is brought before us.

Ambrose, Hexameron, I, 5, 17

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

As a central character in the Corpus Christi plays, Christ has generated surprisingly little controversy among scholars of medieval drama. Certainly critics have approached Christ from a variety of vantage points, attempting to determine whether he is more human or more divine; whether he is colorless and utilitarian or dynamic and symbolic; whether he is distinctly biblical or contemporaneously medieval; whether he speaks the words of the Church or the language of the townspeople. But they have not yet launched a full-scale study of this sacred character, whose presence extends throughout two-thirds of the Corpus Christi plays.¹ A multifaceted character whose complexity is grounded in biblical narrative, Christ is represented both in an immediate theatrical sense and in an

¹ Robert Potter has noted that Christ is the prime subject of the cycle plays and that two-thirds of the plays focus upon the life of this sacred character (46). He broadly frames Christ's earthly life from the Annunciation to the Ascension. Using Potter's parameters, it becomes evident that Christ predominates in 16 of 25 plays in Chester, 31 of 41 in N-Town, 32 of 48 in York, and 20 of 32 in Towneley.

ongoing soteriological sense. Because of his exceedingly complex nature, we must acknowledge the contradictions which arise as we explore the polysemous ways in which Christ signifies.

Irresolvable though these contradictions may be, inconsistency and paradox demand recognition when viewing Christ as a worker in the Towneley cycle, one of four extant texts of the Corpus Christi plays. Even determining what his work may be said to encompass or exclude in itself presents a quandary. Before the plays have begun, Christ's most efficacious work has already been completed: his death upon the cross in expiation of human sin, the sine qua non of medieval Christianity. Yet as theatrical agent he absorbs and projects a wide range of conflicting meanings within the fifteenth-century cultural milieu. Contradiction seems apparent when he performs one form of work within the context of another: for example, the opus manuum (the work of the hands) superimposed upon the opus Dei (the work of God).² Because of his semiotic richness, some of the

² The opus manuum and the opus Dei are terms derived from Benedictine monasticism. While they should not be considered dichotomous manifestations of work (one often served the other), labor historians substantiate the tenuous relationship between the two. George Ovitt, Jr., for example, points out that the Cistercians established an order of lay brothers, the conversi, whose purpose it was to perform manual labor. Considered "half-monks," they were drawn from the lower classes (144). Also see Lynn White, Jr., "Cultural Climates," 242 n. 99. For a discussion of secular work during the late Middle Ages, see Ovitt, Jr. 164-204.

implications drawn by his enactment of work (or its withholding) are manifestly disturbing: with blessed work appearing cursed, work undone exacerbating humankind's plight, and ambivalent work clouding the issue of exemplarity.

The work of the Savior is multidimensional, having ramifications in the dramatic, social, and theological spheres, all three of which warrant examination. Since this study concentrates extensively upon the dramatic and soteriological aspects of Christ's work, its social repercussions have been largely deferred, an omission mitigated, I trust, by the overview of social consequence provided within the final pages of this Introduction.

The chapters ahead contextualize Christ's work, variously construed and defined but grounded in the cross, by examining its dynamics within key plays of the Old and New Testament sequences preceding the Crucifixion. The Old Testament episodes (Chapter Three) will be analyzed separately from the New Testament plays (Chapters Four and Five). The mystification of Christ has unjustifiably depleted him of dramatic resonance, and the aim of this study is that the contradictory gesture of work will enable a viable reappraisal of this constrained position. Towards this objective, the Introduction establishes why Towneley has been selected as a site of investigation and presents dramatic and social questions raised by the issue of

Christ's work.

Chapter Two, "The Construction of Christ," contributes a summary of critical views toward the character of Christ and reveals that prevailing methodological approaches have resulted in Christ being considered more a critical construction than a medieval one. That he has not been viewed within a sufficiently theological context will be demonstrated through structural analysis.

Chapter Three, "The Construction of Work," employs Ambrose's Hexameron, a commentary on the Creation derived from Genesis, to provide a theological foundation for God's work. Two Ambrosian concepts, God's superabundance and the system of equitable exchange governing the cosmos, will be related to key Old Testament plays: (The Creation, The Killing of Abel, Noah, and Abraham and Isaac), which demonstrate tension between God's superabundance and humankind's undercompensation.

Chapter Four, "Christ's Ministry: Lazarus," depicts the futility of human effort in recouping God's superabundance, which seems irretrievably lost, while appearing to question the agency of any work, even Christ's act of revivifying a corpse. Chapter Five, "Christ's Passion: The Conspiracy," blurs the distinctions between money and blood as systems of exchange and superimposes the opus manuum upon the opus Dei, seemingly reconciling the two forms of work, yet providing a multivalent sign of Christ's

exemplarity. The Conclusion (Chapter Six) discusses the 1992 production of the York cycle, which represents Christ within a contemporary context, and advocates the practice of more polemical discussions of the character of Christ than have heretofore been rendered.

Why Towneley?

Critics have advanced a wide range of arguments justifying cross-cycle or individual-cycle approaches to the Corpus Christi plays.³ Whereas I maintain that the Towneley cycle is especially receptive to research into Christ's work, I neither minimize nor exclude from further study the counterpart cycles of York, Chester, and N-Town. Clifford Davidson has already discussed the York dramatist's glorification of work within the context of northern spirituality. Because of a late-medieval shift in emphasis from the Resurrection to the Crucifixion, Christ's suffering was accentuated; and he came to be represented displaying his wounds, surrounded by symbols of the Passion. Good works became a sinner's offering back to God, a means of tipping the scales against the deadly sins at Judgment Day

³ The two most influential cross-cycle studies remain V. A. Kolve's The Play Called Corpus Christi and Rosemary Woolf's The English Mystery Plays. Critics who have written individual-cycle studies acknowledge Kolve's and Woolf's contributions but offer reasons why cross-cyclical studies do not suffice. To illustrate, Peter Travis, in a study devoted to the Chester cycle, maintains that Kolve fails to address the uniqueness of individual plays and cycles. Woolf, he argues, sacrifices an overarching thesis in order to compare each episode in all four cycles (Dramatic xii).

("Northern Spirituality" 125-151 passim). Since York is most often linked to Towneley because of the city's proximity to Wakefield (home of the Towneley cycle), its corresponding plays, and a mutual emphasis upon Christ's humanity, the York cycle most logically justifies a detailed investigation of Christ's work.⁴

Arguing for an individual-cycle approach, Martin Stevens emphasizes the unique characteristics of each cycle. Each interprets salvation history in a singular way by choosing entirely different options in developing common source material like biblical narrative, Gospel harmonies, or sermons (Four Middle 11). Each is characterized by a distinct voice and point of view. Towneley, for instance, reflects an ethos characteristic of its geographical location in Wakefield, a manorial seat and a country market town (15). Stevens observes that the cycle is marked by discordance. Life is "mean and miserable in Yorkshire"; no place more desperately needs Christ's return than "that bereft countryside and its churlish, crabbed, lying, and thieving inhabitants" (127). Yorkshire's spiritual terrain seems to broadcast the vanity of human labor as a means of

⁴ Because the Chester dramatist emphasizes Christ's divinity, a scholarly investigation into Christ's work in Chester requires formulating a critical strategy for overcoming this inherent problem. N-Town, after York, seems conducive to detailed analysis. The cycle has been noted for its theological sophistication, its learned tone, and its emphasis upon doctrine (Ashley, "'Wyt' and 'Wysdam'" 121-135 passim; Coletti, "Sacrament" 239-264 passim).

righting any imbalance. Indeed, the theme of social protest that distinguishes Towneley from its companion cycles has been frequently noted, most forcefully by Arnold Williams in his monograph devoted to Pilate (37-51).

Besides having a discordant tone and the theme of social protest, the cycle conveys a mood of longing, a sense of heightened expectation. According to Hans-Jürgen Diller, this quality differentiates Towneley from York, Towneley, and N-Town. No other cycle, he argues, so urgently anticipates the Redemption ("Theological" 207). As will be illustrated in the chapters to follow, the dramatist creates this sense of enhanced anticipation, in part, by setting up a system of exchange. Only Christ can reappropriate what humankind has lost through the Fall. Materially, this redistribution is effected through Christ's overplentitude, manifested in miracles like his multiplication of loaves. Spiritually, this reappropriation is achieved by Christ's sacrifice upon the cross, his life offered up in expiation of human sin. Towneley alone contains a Lazarus play which uses spiritual deprivation to enunciate humankind's urgent need of the redemptive sacrifice. Accordingly, this unique play provides an important reason for selecting the Towneley cycle as the primary focus of this study. Christ's resurrection of Lazarus, the only miracle dramatized in all four cycles, was not only Christ's most spectacular and regenerative work, but the miracle that served as a

catalyst, inciting the Jews against him. Unlike York, Chester, or N-Town, the Towneley play provides an uncomfortable response to the timing of Christ's work--both the four-day delay in raising Lazarus and the long-awaited sacrifice--that seems to question his work's efficacy. Moreover, the never-ending quality of work is thrown into sharp relief when even believers appear blind to its intent and reward.

Furthermore, a "stylistic divide" that David Mills points out in Towneley is especially applicable to Christ's work in the cycle. Mills contends that Towneley's mythological and a-mythological characters are marked by a failure to communicate. The mythological characters operate within a ritualistic time zone; the a-mythological characters are unable to synchronize themselves within that zone. Although Mills does not provide character details, certainly, for our purposes, we may consider Christ and the patriarchs (Noah, Abraham) as the mythological and the damned (Cain or Pilate) as the a-mythological. Mills states that because the a-mythological characters are deprived of the self-awareness which enables change, they remain entrapped within their actions. The cycle therefore demonstrates a strong sense of predestination ("Religious drama" 185-186). While I agree with Mills's assessment that characters seem straitjacketed--we cannot ignore this constriction, for example, in the case of Cain or Judas--I

maintain that work as a multivalent signifier enters a medium unaffected by character restriction. Recognizable forms of work like manual labor, for example, become gestures signifying within the here-and-now of the theater, unlike character destiny, which has been irrevocably cast. Moreover, the sense of predestination that Mills notes in Towneley contributes to the sense of urgency within the cycle that I believe predominates. Elsewhere, Mills has argued that Towneley differs from its counterparts in its emphasis upon necessary sin.⁵ As I intend to illustrate in subsequent chapters, Christ's work expresses dramatically and theologically the price that must be paid to expiate the cost of sin.

Dramatic Complexity

The Christ who appears in the Corpus Christi plays is a construct fashioned by dramatists, on one level like so many other historical characters. Similar to the prominent characters in Shakespeare's history plays, Christ has been created anew of existing materials: historical facts viewed retrospectively, contemporary social relations, current language usage. On another level, Christ is a sacred figure who differs radically from his historical counterparts. As

⁵ Mills objects to cross-cycle studies which underemphasize the distinctions between the same episode as it appears in different cycles. Each cycle produces different doctrinal or dramatic effects because of its emphasis upon contradistinct aspects of salvation history: in York human weakness, in Towneley vital sin, in N-Town grace, and in Chester divine purpose ("Approaches" 52 n 10).

the axis mundi connecting all three spheres to which man's soul may be consigned--the underworld, earth, and heaven--he reverberates with contemporary and eternal significance. Even though he has transcended time, he remains recoverable through genres which represent him, such as the drama.

Yet critics have circumvented his exceedingly complex nature. Although the reasons are manifold, I will hypothesize two within this section and then discuss these theories with regard to Christ's role as a worker. First, the hermeneutic gap between content (theology) and form (aesthetics) is so substantial that dramatists have not been able to sustain a coherent portrayal of Christ throughout an entire cycle. Biblical narrative often seems incomplete in what it does not say; for example, the Raising of Lazarus is a key episode in the Gospel of John but goes unmentioned in the other three Gospels.⁶ As a result, Christ is (like his sources) fragmented: a mosaic of ill-fitting parts. Accordingly, critics attempting to synthesize Christ--make a cohesive statement about his role in a cycle-sequence or a cycle-proper--find too many disjointed segments and either consciously or unconsciously suppress the contradictions.

⁶ Even though the primary source for the medieval Christ remains the Bible, a considerable distance between what is being signified (the biblical Christ constructed in Scripture) and that which acts as signifier (Christ filtered through dramatists and actors) emphasize what Karl F. Morrison would call the hermeneutic gap; i.e., the unbridgeable chasm between sacred truths and imperfect forms attempting to convey these truths (28).

To illustrate, Rosemary Woolf, based upon her conviction that "there are no rounded characters in the mystery plays" (English Mystery 98), deems Christ an "uncharacterized teacher and man of authority" in the plays of the ministry (219). John Speirs, noting Christ's passivity in the Passion sequence, chooses mystification; Christ becomes "a masked figure or...a sacred doll or puppet, image of a god" (353).

Secondly, neither dramatists nor critics are quite sure whether Christ is supposed to be biblical or contemporary. If they find Christ biblical but without contemporary relevance, then fifteenth-century topical issues presented within the cycle must be viewed as anachronisms. Invariably, critics separate Christ's biblicality (and his transcendence into eternal time) from his contemporaneity (his relevance to fifteenth-century attitudes or complaints). This leaves Christ straddling both hemispheres, fully occupying neither. David Mills vents the scholarly frustration that arises from attempting to determine who Christ is. Of Christ's role in N-Town's Woman Taken in Adultery, Mills asks: who exactly is this sacred character? "a historical or contemporary figure, a historical Christ or a learned cleric?" ("Characterisation" 15).

Christ's complexity has stymied medieval drama critics and exegetes alike. Even though his multifaceted nature is

established in the Bible, dramatists are faced with the unenviable task of rendering sublime truths into recognizable form. However Christ is constructed over the course of an entire cycle, his form becomes a vehicle for expressing content. And as Hans-Jürgen Diller contends, "our attention is directed to the representation rather than to the represented reality" ("Theological" 204). Toward understanding how Christ resists compartmentalization, I wish to explore his identity as a worker, one of many roles he assumes in the Corpus Christi plays. Monolithic critical analyses, as will be shown, are incapable of capturing Christ's polymorphic nature.

Christ has said, "even though you do not believe me, you should at least believe my deeds" (John 10:38).⁷ Christ was responding to the Jews, who took up stones against him, angered by his refusal to explain his miracles of healing. If we are to believe the works that Christ performs, we must question what these works of the Father may be said to be. Because of the biblical context, we are led to think of Christ's thaumaturgical acts, like his restoring sight to the blind man, a miracle which precedes the Jews' taking up stones against him in the John account. But certainly other actions that Christ performs are indeed work: for example, his preaching. When he was pressed by

⁷ All biblical references and quotations are to the English translation of the Vulgate, New Catholic Edition.

the multitudes who came to hear him preach, he did not even have time to eat (Mark 3:20). And in Samaria he was so weary from preaching he had to sit down near a well (John 4:6).

Although Christ did not demarcate one form of work from another, he sanctioned work through his teachings: he cursed the fig tree which bore no fruit (Mark 11:14) and condemned the slothful man who refused to use his talents (Matthew 25:26). Moreover, he wrought cures in an atmosphere charged with hostility. As St. Augustine comments, the cures that Christ wrought became signs, but the Jewish people confused signs (the healing acts, performed on the Sabbath) with the spiritual things being signified (On Christian Doctrine II, 6). If such a gap between that which was signified and that which acted as signifier existed among the people who witnessed these miraculous acts, we must expect that this gap considerably widens as historical time elapses into contemporary time, and the works become represented dramatically. When Christ was accused of working on the Sabbath, he had responded: "My Father is always working, and I too must work" (John 5:17). This sense of the ongoing nature of God's work, coupled with Christ's transcendence into eternal time, widens the conception of what work may be purported to be. However, the problem remains how Christ's work, completed in the historical sphere, can be represented in the

contemporary sphere.

Christ's works, conveyed in biblical narrative, assume a once-removed context when they are represented in the drama.⁸ Because of this gap between content and form, we must ask whether Christ's works have undergone adulteration; and even if they have, whether the works are any less effective. To illustrate, the biblical Christ washes his disciples' feet to demonstrate humility. When represented dramatically, he performs the same action, but within the view of audiences burdened with ambivalent attitudes towards manual labor. The dramatic Christ may be quite faithful to biblical narrative; but because a wider audience becomes privy to his example of manual labor than biblical narrative intended, we may have a commentary on manual labor, but do we have an accurate depiction of the biblical Christ's work? I suggest that we can move closer toward addressing this issue by focusing upon whether the biblical Christ viewed his work as occasioned by circumstances, tailored to audience, timebound or eternal. Then we may properly assess whether the work itself, and Christ's identity as a worker, has acquired contemporary significance which enhances or corrupts biblical intention.

⁸ This once-removed context will be discussed in Chapter Four within the context of time. Daniel Poteet, in a discussion of the N-Town Passion Play I, emphasizes that eternity is truth, whereas time is illusion (233). What anachronistic references reify, he states, is "the primacy of the constant idea" (240). Also see Davidson, "Space and Time" 39-93 passim.

But how can we define Christ's work when he did not define it himself? We do know that Christ was recognized as a carpenter (Mark 6:3) and that he ennobled work, even choosing a work pattern widely known during his time: that of itinerant rabbi (Schoonenberg 150-151). Spectators viewing the Corpus Christi plays would have recognized Christ as a carpenter surrounded by apostles who were predominantly fishermen, but what he represents certainly extends beyond what audiences see manifested onstage. For example, in the Towneley Scourging, one of the Passion plays, Christ's tormentors denounce him with his works, works that have been witnessed but misunderstood: laboring on the Sabbath, turning water into wine at the Wedding Feast at Cana, healing the blind and leprous, raising the dead. Particularly in the Passion sequences, Christ's works are cited as being so materially productive that they serve as evidence against him. As these condemning acts are recounted in dialogue, and spectators are shown Christ being scourged onstage, Christ is seen to suffer because his works have been too controversial and subversive.

Demonstrated work can be recognized in many ways; for instance, labor is manual, spiritual, martial. However, in the sense of God's ongoing work--the sense spectators would have gained from viewing Christ laboring in the plays--work acquires an ethos as well. But the value of God's/Christ's work, which does not always appear materially productive, is

altogether different from the value of humankind's work, which must be materially productive to assure survival. Nonetheless, Christ is a model for the human worker; his humanity enables the Son of Man's work to be seen as a human model for spectators' own labors. At the same time, the divine work Christ performs--for example, the raising of Lazarus--is also represented onstage. Therefore there are at least two senses of Christ as a worker: Christ the human worker, who performs tasks man is capable of emulating (washing his disciples' feet); and Christ the divine worker, who performs miraculous feats man cannot perform unless indwelt with the Spirit (resurrecting the dead).

The problem of dichotomizing work as being either human or divine creates a sense of ambiguity around the conception of work, even as manifested by Christ. Is his work in the world but not of the world? According to David Meakin, who approaches labor history from a literary standpoint, Christian values are unworldly in the sense that visibly productive labor seems undervalued. Meakin points out that Christ relinquished carpentry and encouraged his disciples to abandon their occupations (3).⁹ This bifurcated view--that the work of the hands exists in the world, whereas the

⁹ While Meakin approaches labor history from a transhistorical perspective, it should be noted that the literary texts he cites include virtually no medieval ones. While he acknowledges the importance of God's work of Creation in establishing divine archetype, he focuses more upon the man-as-master application made of it during the Renaissance.

work of God exists in an intangible, materially unproductive, and indeed invisible realm--suggests the irreconcilable nature of the material and spiritual worlds. There is, in fact, a "doubleness of vision," which Arnold Pacey attributes to western religious tradition. Whereas Christ's kingly status has inspired crusades and motivated conquests, it is Christ the carpenter who is associated with the sick, the lowly, the hungry (173).¹⁰

While dichotomizing Christ runs contrary to Christ's multidimensional nature, the hazards of the dual-perspective must be acknowledged if not overcome. When Christ becomes a theatrical presence, one facet of his signifying potential is unleashed through performance; and his movements, gestures, words, and props assume great significance. He who generates signs is Christ's impersonator, but he who generates meaning(s) remains the eternal Christ. Because of the actor-Christ's visual and aural presence, it is he whose gestures, dialogue, staging, and props must be carefully studied; but it is the eternal Christ who remains the paradigm. According to Glynne Wickham, spectators watching the Corpus Christi plays were able to sustain a "double image": they perceived both the represented Christ and the person representing Christ without fusing the two images (viii). This critical assessment, a view supported by Anne

¹⁰ Erich Auerbach discusses this manifestation in terms of the antithetical humilitas and sublimitas (41-72 passim).

Righter (20-24), poses a dilemma: whose signifying gestures and words were witnessed or heeded? If the eternal Christ becomes fleetingly detectable through the facade of the impersonator, his biblical teaching, ministry, and persecution are communicated. But if the impersonator qua Christ becomes most prominent, the inequities of the current age are communicated: corruption within the Church, social injustices, or economic imbalances.

This overlaid image notwithstanding, one cannot realistically analyze Christ's work in Towneley without effecting a schematic plan (albeit a tentative and fluctuating one) for recognizing "work" when enacted, referred to, signified, or otherwise activated within the cycle.¹¹ Yet dialogue alone cannot suffice as an index: the Towneley dramatist uses the term "wyrk" or "warkys" to describe such a wide array of expended energies that we might deduce that any productive task can be deemed some form of work. Whereas God proclaims during the Creation: "this warke to me is queme [pleasant] (Creation 1. 42), work

¹¹ The "W" volume of the Middle English Dictionary has not been compiled; the Oxford English Dictionary serves as an alternate source. Among definitions consulted relevant to the plays during the fifteenth-century are the following: Work as noun: I.1; II.9, 10; III.32; IV.34; work as verb: pp. 540-544. On the worker, see pp. 547-548; on working, see pp. 549-551; on the workman see p. 552. Under "workman," note 1.a: "a man engaged to do work or (usually) manual labour..." (552). Also informative are the following: "Work, Theology of" in New Catholic Encyclopedia; "work" and "works" in Sacramentum Mundi (Rahner); "labour" in the Encyclopedia of the Early Church, vol. 1.

is also linked to suffering. Christ states: "My fader warkys, for wele or wo, / Thus am I sent for to fulfyll" (The Play of the Doctors, ll. 247-248). Work becomes a catchword, ennobling subversion; during The Conspiracy, Caiaphas declares, "And of oure warkys we must be wyse" (l. 58). And work also turns back upon itself, yielding nothing. One of Christ's torturers proclaims: "The great warkys [Christ] has wrought / Shall serue hym of nought" (The Scourging, ll. 58-59); and Tercius Malus acknowledges that his wicked works have brought him to ruin (The Judgment, l. 26).

Not only does the dramatist convey work through dialogue but he depicts strenuous or physical acts without describing them as work: apparently, audiences needed no verbal cues to help them recognize the action of Cain's plowing as farming or Christ's washing of his disciples' feet as manual labor. The prevalence of work activities in Towneley--whether actions, gestures, or words describing them--does suggest that work, however defined, would have been central to medieval audiences: God's work begun in illo tempore is reified through Christ's regenerative work on earth and emulated to some extent by the faithful. Work as a generative activity honoring God seems therefore noble. Noah bemoans the fact that his creaking old bones will prevent his able construction of the ark, and the elderly Simeon expresses sorrow that he cannot see any work through

to completion. The innate nobility of work appears to remain untarnished by its association with Adam's curse of eating bread in the sweat of his brow, even though that nobility is sometimes reassigned to worldly, spiritually unprofitable endeavors. Accordingly, Simon of Cyrene, a busy merchant, must be coerced to help Christ bear the weight of his own cross.

Social Consequence

That Christ would have been recognized as a worker is readily substantiated through iconographic depiction, thus providing a visual context for how his work might have been comprehended in the plays. When portrayed as Christ the Artisan (or *Sonntagschristus*, *Handwerkerchristus*, Christ of the Trades), he becomes equated with social instrumentality as well as theological efficacy.¹² Yet what this social agency can be proclaimed as being when it is employed within the cycles or practiced in the social realm is less immediately apparent: Christ can be seen as a figure of social reform, a practitioner of the opus manuum superimposed upon the opus Dei, an icon for the glorification of work (or an emblem of its inadequacy).

Art historians have discussed wall paintings discovered in England and on the Continent which, E. W. Tristram has

¹² The iconographic depiction of Christ as a worker is identified in various ways. Saunders, for example, uses the term "Christ of the Trades," 131; whereas Schiller uses both the term Handwerkerchristus (Christ as Artisan) and Sonntagschristus (Sunday Christ), 2:204.

argued credibly, portray Christ as Piers Plowman ("Piers" 135-140 passim; Borenius and Tristram 29-35).¹³ Fourteen or fifteen of these paintings have survived in England; and while variations exist, the central image remains the same. Christ as Man of Sorrows stands facing the viewer, arms raised, palms exposed, displaying the wounds of his Crucifixion, surrounded by a halo of workmen's tools. Tristram explains that one of the most provocative paintings of this kind can be found at Ampney St. Mary's Church, situated at the foot of the Cotswolds, which would be discernible on the horizon from Malvern Hills, the geographical site associated with Langland's visions. In Langland's poem the dreamer envisions Christ distinguished as Piers Plowman, a laborer, and draws the moral that salvation may be gained through one's work.¹⁴ Whether the figure in the painting should be considered Christ or a plowman, and accordingly, the wounds displayed those of the cross or reflections of a laborer's toil, the glory nevertheless proceeds from the work which has been

¹³ Qualifying Tristram's position are R. Ryan, D'Evelyn, and Evans (Appendix, 226). Confirming his view are Schiller (2:204-205) and Saunders (131-132).

¹⁴ The Oxford English Dictionary establishes the theological conception of work during the late Middle Ages. Work consists of "[m]oral actions considered in relation to justification: usually as contrasted with faith or grace" (p. 535, def. I.I.b). The A-text of Piers Plowman (XI.268) is employed to illustrate this definition: "3if I shal werke pe here...to wynne me heuene...panne wrou3te I vnwisly."

completed.

This conception of Christ as Artisan, whether specifically Piers Plowman or an adaptation thereof, has much to recommend it as a visual-analogue for registering the conflicting meanings generated by the gesture of work. Whether the implements of work are represented by tools of various trades, or, as some have maintained, conflated with the symbols of the Passion, these objects can be seen as rather ambiguous. In some versions the tools are depicted as impaling Christ; they are thereby transformed into instruments of torture and persecution.¹⁵ Interpreting this artistic persona as revolutionary is a distinct possibility, an idea reinforced by Tristram, who notes the anticipatory connection between Christ as Piers and the symbols of the crossed hammer and sickle adopted by the U.S.S.R. (Borenus and Tristram 35).¹⁶

Demonstrating the subversive power of the worker, the plowman came to be viewed as a disturbing figure. Not only did plowmen support the aristocracy with their labor, Rodney Hilton comments, but they dared to question how the fruits of their labor were being distributed (176-177). The plowman depicted in a fifteenth-century poem registers a protest against this type of inequity when he complains of

¹⁵ Figure 691 in Schiller, volume 2, illustrates this piercing.

¹⁶ On Piers Plowman, see David Aers, 169-190, and Louise M. Bishop, 191-205.

the clergy, "They have the corn and we the dust..." (Hilton 177).¹⁷ A similar protestation of imbalance is aptly conveyed in the Towneley cycle through the character of Cain, whose plow team won't budge, whose crops remain sparse, and whose Godly model, the Church, has been known to misappropriate money from believers' tithes.

There is evidence for associating this figure of protest with the character of Christ as he is portrayed in the cycle. The fictional Jack Upland, a Lollard engaged in a series of debates with Friar Daw, specifically cites Christ, among St. Paul and others, as a man who worked with his hands. The dominant classes have no grip on the world, he insists, unless they grasp the hands of the body politic. Sarah Beckwith has pointed out that this material version of the body inverts the idealized hierarchical one, investing it with a working dynamism. She maintains that Upland's words do more than exemplify the Lollard attack upon the control of Christ's body by the Church: they do so by invoking the image of the laborer, a faction of the populace becoming increasingly dangerous (22-27).¹⁸

When considering that Christ was conceptualized as a worker, represented through the persona of Piers Plowman in

¹⁷ Hilton's reference is to W. W. Skeat (ed)., 'Chaucer and other Pieces,' a supplement to the Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, 1897. See note 14, page 242.

¹⁸ Regarding the causes and manifestations of this form of social protest in England, see Michel Mollat, 193-300 passim.

medieval art and identified with the laboring class in Lollard tracts, it is reasonable to posit that the dramatist may have used Christ to challenge prevailing social conventions and mores.¹⁹ The ambivalent vehicle of work, enacted by and promulgated through an exemplary character, brings both the sacred character and the disputed gesture into primary focus, however kaleidoscopic that image may appear to be.

While several issues contained within this variegated image are intriguing for their social viability, I wish to address two, which it seems to me pertain to this study: the practice of exclusion and the fruitlessness of human labor. Workers have been marginalized, even from within their own ranks; this motion of exclusion leaves the burgeoning mass (those deemed or deeming themselves central) untransmogrified. Despite treatises of inclusion, workers whose trade or profession is mandated by or practiced through manual labor, find themselves thrust out, and accordingly denied access to conglomerate power.²⁰ For

¹⁹ To illustrate, Theodore DeWelles has argued that the Towneley dramatist exploits the biases and presuppositions of both orthodox and heretical parties to bold advantage. Christ, characterized as a fifteenth-century schismatic, is used to warn audiences against apostasy (his Chapter Six).

²⁰ Significant inclusionary texts formulated during the twelfth century include Hugh of St. Victor's Didascalicon, which ranks the mechanical arts as one of the four branches of knowledge and John of Salisbury's Policraticus, construing workers as the indispensable feet of the body politic. See George Ovitt, Jr. (117-121), Jacques LeGoff (67, 116-117).

example, Gerald Hodgett in his analysis of the textile industry within the context of social history, explains that entrepreneurs who gained dominance in merchant guilds, routinely excluded weavers, dyers, and fullers from their organizations. Because these "blue-nails" dirtied their hands, they were therefore banned from joining the merchant guilds until relinquishing their crafts (139-140).²¹ On a personal level, allowing oneself to be called a manual laborer was tantamount to self-exclusion; as LeGoff informs us, the poor man Rutebeuf protested, "I do not work with my hands" (121).²²

Exclusionary tactics practiced upon the character of Christ are pervasive in the plays, but the opposite impulse (inclusion) provides an equally fertile area for the social agency of his work. In The Conspiracy Christ kneels at his disciples' feet while conducting the footwashing, an act of manual labor. This stigmatized cultural gesture, when performed by Christ, can yield revisionist social meaning(s) elicited by the theological and dramatic contexts. Whether we say that the opus manuum is superimposed upon the opus Dei or that Christ provides an ensaumple of manual labor, the possibility that the dramatist may be employing Christ

²¹ Jacques LeGoff illuminates this issue by explaining that manual labor, when associated with the unclean, violates the taboo of impurity (59).

²² Miri Rubin states that the urban poor were described as "He who by manual labour acquires his meagre daily bread and has nothing left over after dining" (171, 172 n. 6).

as a vehicle for social indictment cannot be readily glossed over. The rich fields of semiotics, stage-centered theory, and cultural criticism offer promising routes of access.²³

Besides the ostracization of manual laborers, the unproductiveness and futility associated with work recommend social analysis. This imploding quality is represented in the plays: productive works give the illusion of failure, while destructive works seem to reap profits.²⁴ Trades and professions manifest this sterility in the social realm. Mark Bailey and Miri Rubin provide the background for employer disgruntlement against workers' shorter work hours, itinerancy, lack of motivation or ambition, and wastefulness. In short, changing demographics after the Black Death resulted in worker-empowerment through increased wages and fringe benefits (Bailey 161-168, Rubin 171-178). If we apply the dichotomized concepts of winner and waster to Christ's social persona in Towneley, it can be viewed as disconcerting that, in the Lazarus play, he (like the

²³ Regarding gestures or other performance-centered issues, the following studies have been extremely informative. Barasch 1-39; Twycross, "Beyond" 589-617 passim; Mills, "Look at Me" 4-12 passim; Mills "Characterisation" 5-17 passim; Davidson, "Gesture" 8-17 passim; Burns 40-65; Blacking 1-28. Most useful to me has been the superb work of Jean-Claude Schmitt, "The Rationale" 59-70; "Gestures," Introduction, 1-28.

²⁴ Christ's work of resurrecting Lazarus, for example, is his most regenerative miracle yet conveys a sense of failure (Chapter Four). On destructive works reaping profits, Judas benefits financially when he sells his master (Chapter Five).

wasters) not only delays working but engages in unproductive work. Lazarus, raised from the dead, is revived; but the fruits of Christ's labors are revealed as decayed.

Further, Christ would seem to exemplify itinerancy; as a wandering rabbi, he appears to have abandoned his trade of carpentry. His social presence is capable of conveying that mendicancy has a higher calling than physical labor, and that the opus manuum is, after all, incompatible with the opus Dei. The implications for Yorkshire are tangible economic ones: contract-laboring and self-legitimated job mobility were enabling tradesmen and other workers to be lured from rural areas toward the city, leaving the infrastructure bereft. Itinerancy poses the threat of eroding the town's economic base through local unproduction. Whatever funds happened to be appropriated for the plays' production would have been deleteriously affected by factors of production such as wealth reduction.²⁵ Indeed, as Carolyn L. Wightman has noted, a town's dependance upon local money was inextricably linked to the plays themselves; it was higher per capita earnings and surplus money creating the economic circumstances that gave rise to producing the plays (133-136).

Being promulgated from the pulpit were a variety of work-related issues which are echoed in the drama: the

²⁵ The Records of Early English Drama (REED) volume on Yorkshire (the West Riding District) is currently in-progress by Barbara D. Palmer and John M. Wasson, editors.

evils of using false weights and measures, the hazards of being a slothful workman, the necessity of tithing, the salutary effects of labor (Owst 210-593 passim). As G. R. Owst illustrates, Towneley characters would have been immediately recognizable as sermon-types: Cain the bad husbandman, for example, or Pilate the unjust judge (491-492, 495). If pulpit use of the term "labor" was ambiguous, as Owst asserts (555), that ambiguity, it appears to me, constitutes an even more valid reason for viewing Christ as an exemplary figure in the plays. The connection between humankind's work and Christ's work was often established in iconography, where, for example, the resurrected Christ can be seen carrying a mattock or spade, in his identity as the second Adam, whose soteriological work, now completed, has successfully reversed Adam's sin (Davidson "On the Uses" 50).

Chapter Two seeks to illustrate how Christ's work, construed primarily as the redemptive sacrifice, is structurally configured within the cycle. Before dealing with ambivalence and paradox in individual plays, it is essential to establish that which constitutes the inerrant and unyielding within medieval Christianity: Christ's most efficacious work remains his death upon the cross in expiation of human sin. The trope of fullness-emptiness facilitates explaining how the agency of Christ's work operates in the plays. Old and New Testament plays

thereafter (Chapters 3-5) clarify the distribution system that keeps things moving: God opens the cycle gathering up the waters of the firmament; Christ closes the cycle dispersing souls into separate camps of sheep and goats. Judas describes Christ as having squandered Mary Magdalene's precious oil; Judas recoups this perceived loss through reappropriating its use. Christ, having been sold, pays for humankind's sin with the price of his blood.

CHAPTER TWO
THE CONSTRUCTION OF CHRIST

Pseudo-Bonaventure's Meditations on the Life of Christ, acknowledged for its pervasive influence upon the Corpus Christi plays, describes Christ's redemptive sacrifice thus: "He emptied Himself as far as the flesh, as death, as the cross" (Ragusa 352). Throughout The Meditations such metaphors of exchange are used frequently when describing the dynamics of Christ's work. This image of Christ, drained of his lifeblood, immediately suggests the converse, God's immense density, or overabundance. The extent to which Christ has been rendered empty is significant only when viewed in terms of the extent to which God can be considered full. Moreover, the distributive agency of Christ's work is implied: with blood shed in the material world understood to mean volume gained in the spiritual sphere.

The trope of fullness-emptiness is commonly used in the narrative lives of Christ, encyclopedic poems, religious lyrics, and sermons--possible sources of the mystery plays--to express the magnitude of Christ's death upon the cross in

expiation of human sin.¹ An otherwise unquantifiable spiritual commodity designating both what humankind has lost and what it needs is made comprehensible through the manifest gesture of work. God's act of Creation brings this overbounteousness into being, and Christ's work of redemption recoups that plenitude lost since the Fall. In Towneley, humankind engages in what appears to be a reacquisition process: striving, seeking, yet not finding that elusive commodity. The struggle to reclaim that fullness sometimes manifests itself in recognizable work activities as when Noah prays to be infused with God's grace before constructing the ark. Yet only the work of Christ proves efficacious enough to retrieve the ambrosia humankind has presumed to forfeit.

This fullness-emptiness dynamic explains how Christ's work functions within the cycle. By proposing an economic model for conceptualizing Christ's efficacy, I plan to demonstrate that Christ has not been comprehended within a sufficiently theological context. Yet this fullness-emptiness trope in its less distributive sense also conveys what has been a critical phenomenon: Christ has been deemed central (or full) from a spiritual standpoint even while he remains marginal (or empty) from a dramatic one. Besides

¹ For a working-out of this fullness-emptiness metaphor, see Bonaventure's "Sermon II" (Hayes 57-75) and Pseudo-Bonaventure's LXXXV (350-358). The common idea of distribution is exemplified in religious lyric no. 100 (C. Brown 149) and in The Golden Legend (W. Ryan, 1: 203-213).

providing a model for viewing Christ's work, this chapter contributes a synopsis and critique of prevailing critic views and argues for a critical reappraisal of this sacred character.

In Towneley this fullness-emptiness dynamic becomes discernible through humankind's collective need to effect spiritual redress through Christ. Characters reinscribe what appears to be a metaphysical emptiness into something more tangible: a carnal-minded quasi-fullness, which they quest for through counterproductive negotiations. These transmutating gestures are often responses to injustices borne within the sphere of work-relations: expended effort netting no gain, wages stolen or misappropriated, the production process halted or turned inward into stasis. To illustrate, Cain the plowman is outraged about not being able to extract any fruits from his labor, while Abel, locked in a right-relationship with God, continually reaps spiritual and material benefits from his shepherding. Withholding a tithe from God enables Cain to protest asymmetry (by withholding from the withholder) but transforms privation into an equally empty state of affairs: a zero-sum game that nets no gain.

Further, Judas responds to Christ's act of forgiving Mary Magdalene's sins by materializing Christ into minted coins. Because Christ has allowed costly ointment to be squandered upon him, representing money Judas could have

stolen from the disciples' purse, Judas translates his own spiritual need into economic impoverishment through the pretext of a depleted purse. By selling Christ, he transmutes what is really a spiritual vacuum into increased monetary holdings, enabling him to reaccess the prized commodity in a debased form.

Among the faithful this conversion-reaction is illustrated most strikingly through Christ's resurrection of Lazarus, where the Savior's wondrous work of bodily resuscitation is transmogrified by the risen man's spiritual degeneration. The Savior's most regenerative miracle accordingly appears somehow faulty. Because the production-process seems to have spiraled inward into stasis, sterility is paraded. Resuscitated, Lazarus can only flaunt his hollowness, creating a certain ambivalence about work's efficacy.

The redemptive sacrifice as represented partakes in this ambiguity. While the work of Savior is seen as an active agent, possessing the efficacy to alleviate unremitting inequity, it is also recognizable as being passive. Because the redemptive work remains undeployed, this work, undone, exacerbates the plight of humankind, thereby calling into question the productive agency of any work, whether divine or human. Whereas the tension between work-undone and work-executed is detectable in the material realm of the drama through concrete manifestation, for

example, through Judas's coins or Noah's ark, a corresponding deprivation-satiation incentive occurs in the realm of the supramundane. Spiritual desire seeks fulfillment on a higher plane and manifests itself subtly though perceptibly.

The Theology of Work: Verticality

By briefly considering how price relates to cost, we may gain a more lucid understanding of the theological ramifications of Christ's work in the plays. Both economic concepts, when considered together, convey the bond between God and humankind in terms of a dynamic verticality.² The price of the atoning sacrifice, believed to have been paid by Christ to God, represents the value of the commodity (death-for-life; or emptiness-for-fullness) placed upon it at the point of exchange. The relationship between God and humankind can be seen as a vertical one, expressed through and in the gesture of (Christ's for humankind's) work, and conceptualized as ascending or descending in the ever-moving fluctuations characteristic of a sliding scale. When the cost of a commodity goes up, the item of trade generally

² The economic model I employ seems a logical extension of Eugene Vance's theoretical approach (111-151). The explanation of the relationship between price and cost formulated in this paragraph is my own theorization based upon economic principles applied to the drama. Further, the price/cost analysis is briefly alluded to in Paul Willis's discussion of the York plays; see 113-114. Atonement doctrines inform my perspective. See Marshall, 407-417 passim; Marx, 20-32 passim; Turner, H.E.W., 20-22, 106-119; Ashley, "The Guiler" 126-137 passim; Jambeck, "Dramatic" 110-127 passim.

increases in value if costs are incurred efficiently and productively towards a useful end. Whereas the cost may be considered negative from the perspective of those incurring expense (Christ), the value-added factor enhances the probability that labor expenditures will be compensated when the product is exchanged for money or its counterpart, equitable goods or services (superabundant harvest of souls). In short, value rises incrementally as the cost of production mounts as long as estimated exchange value rises accordingly. For this to be true, the commodity must operate with utility either within a[n] (otherworldly) system for which it has been created or within (a worldly) one to which it may be more successfully adapted or applied. If the commodity ultimately proves or is forecast as being maladaptive, then cost and value take on an inverse relationship: while production costs may have spiraled, the value-decreased factor makes it unlikely that these expenses will be offset by the purchase price.

Yet in a study which concentrates upon the York Passion sequence, Paul Willis has argued convincingly that the cost of the redemptive sacrifice is never communicated by the action in the plays (113-114). Although characters regularly swear "by Him that me has bough," reflecting the ransoming image, the most prevalent atonement metaphor used by the Church Fathers and medieval writers, the effort behind Christ's salvific work is not ever dramatized. More

representable seems to be the idea of sin as weight and Christ bearing the weight of humankind's sin through the burden of the cross. In the Crucifixion play of the York cycle, Willis demonstrates, the torturers bemoan the heaviness of the cross, a ponderousness one of them attributes to Christ himself. Towneley, unlike N-Town or Chester, contains a corresponding scene in which soldiers haul the cross into position with a rope, but their concerted effort is represented as a game, with no mention whatsoever made about their being encumbered.

Certainly the exertion involved in Christ's death, if not immediately discernible in the plays, is facilely represented in possible sources of the mystery plays. But that which is expressible through the narrative or lyric form is not subject to the visual, aural, or spatial dimensions of the drama. A religious lyric records the dying Savior's words as "I Haue laborede sore and suffered dey3th, / and now I Rest and draw my breyght" (C. Brown 177).³ Notable in these lines is an apparent distinction between the Savior's (possibly prior) labor and his suffering, rendered most sublimely at the point of death. Further, pseudo-Bonaventure's Meditations explicitly link

³ The reference is to religious lyric no. 111, ll. 1-2. The idea of the redemptive sacrifice as labor is also expressed in popular poetry in a dialogue between Christ and Mary; see Hazlitt 2; and in The Miroure of Mans Salvacionne, a fifteenth-century translation of Speculum humanae Salvationis (Huth 116).

the redemptive sacrifice to a wider conceptualization of work, a cosmic view beginning with the Creation and encompassing Christ's ministry as well as his Passion:

In six days He created everything, including you. But for more than thirty years He worked on earth for our salvation. Oh, how much He bore in laboring! The necessities of the flesh, the temptations of the enemy, the shame of the cross-- could He intensify these, or add to the horror of His death?

(Ragusa 352-353)

These narrative descriptions emphasize the cost of redemption from the perspective of the Creator/Redeemer. Yet it seems to me that cost can be determined and evaluated in terms of (humankind's) demonstrated need for the commodity as well as from the vantage point of the supplier's (God's/Christ's) manifest willingness or ability to provide that intangible good or service. Therefore, cost can be represented through human desire. Augustine forcefully explains this concept of human desire in his writings on historiography.⁴ While God has a divine plan for having history unfold, he leaves humankind to its own desires. Misplaced human desire can never satisfy; only the wise are able to discern that objects of desire, configured hierarchically and rising upward, reach fruition in God. Boethius examines a related phenomenon: desire is implanted within one's mind by nature, yet cannot be satiated through

⁴ That human desire seeks its object in God is demonstrated by Augustine in The City of God, Book 10 (Dods 382 ff). See the following discussions on this spiritual initiative: Slater 151-159 passim; Babcock 133-149 passim.

earthly means. Wealth, power, fame, sensual pleasures cannot obtain for humankind that which it seeks, only to be found in God: "That which is higher than the sky / On earth below they seek" (Book III.8) In Towneley human desire is shown sunk to its nadir in Lazarus, where stark deprivation is brilliantly represented as macabre spiritual emptiness. In the play the wages of sin remain death, yet the reward of redemption as life everlasting, never more consequentially, seems inexplicably shunned.

The factor of cost, as I have been employing the term, enables us to discuss God's/Christ's incalculable expenditure and humankind's insatiable desire as simultaneous operations, one superimposed upon the other. Christ's most efficacious work remains his redemptive sacrifice, but the works of his ministry also depict this principle of cost/desire. In The Meditations, for example, the woman with the issue of blood presses through the crowd, seeking Christ's healing. After succeeding in touching only the hem of his garment, she is instantly healed; as this miracle is performed, Christ feels virtue go out of him (Ragusa 167). The woman's gain (satiated desire) is exacted at the expense of Christ's loss (physical/spiritual outlay); such examples of God's bounty achieved at a cost resonate throughout biblical narrative.

Costs incurred from the perspective of God/Christ raise the value of the unacquirable commodity to humankind, thus

eliciting a kind of buyer's panic. Yet the transaction of vertical exchange goes one step further. Whereas rising costs and escalating desire presuppose ongoing production (in that neither can be compensated or assuaged until the commodity is distributed/sold), vertical exchange illustrates more perceptibly how the spiritual connection between God and humankind can be represented materially.

Referring to Hugh of St. Victor's Soliloquium de arrha animae, Eugene Vance explains the relationship between God and humankind as expressed through vertical "money" (113-119).⁵ Humankind should consider the material beauties or utilitarian objects of the world to be earnest money paid by God as the betrothed, to humankind, the recipient. By accepting and loving the material forms, humankind seems to represent a corresponding mystical transaction: the inscrutable means by which God purchases the human soul. These gifts should not be valued above the giver but should serve as reminders of that which humankind owes God.

Hugh of St. Victor's ideas about the economy of salvation reflect a long-standing tradition about verticality, Vance notes. For example, the Eucharist was believed to purchase humankind's sin; the saint's relic was

⁵ See Vance's chapter "Chrétien's Yvain and the Ideologies of Change and Exchange" for a theorization of horizontal and vertical moneys (111-151). Vance's reference to Hugh of St. Victor is noted as follows: ed. M. K. Mueller (Bonn: A. Marcus and E. Weber, 1913); trans. Kevin Herbert, Soliloquy on the Earnest Money of the Soul (Milwaukee: Marquette Univ. Press, 1956) (Vance 114 n 6).

understood to be pignus, a down payment or form of pledge money (114). The resurrected Christ, as depicted on a French cathedral's central tympanum, can be seen flanked by St. Peter on the right, and a beautiful bare-breasted woman on the left. While the woman exhibits an unmarked coin, ostensibly representing the coinage of the secular world, two angels who appear above St. Peter display cruciform-imprinted coins. This sanctified coinage is accordingly seen as money pledged by Christ to humankind, administered through and disbursed by the Church (115).

Inasmuch as money and other material forms can be recognizably represented in the plays, they serve to reify the relationship between God and humankind in concrete terms. Indeed, the minting of money and the acquisition of things through the exchange of money were extremely important analogues used to elucidate articles of faith concerning the Trinity.⁶ What is intriguing is that within Towneley God is portrayed as owing humankind, this despite the fact that humankind was commonly understood to be perpetually indebted to God. In The Meditations this asymmetry is noted as the sinner cries out, "Behold, you bind me with a double debt; for that which you gave and for that which you lost for my sake, I am your debtor" (Ragusa 358). However owing may be construed, whether shown to be

⁶ See Marc Shell's discussion in "The Blank Check: Accounting for the Grail," 24-46, especially 42.

payable upward or downward, the concept of inversion evokes a familiar image of vertical transposition inculcated by Scripture: the idea of the first becoming last and the last becoming first.

The Social Milieu: Horizontality

Insofar as God and humankind are reunited through the redemptive work of the cross, their reestablished connection can be represented through the horizontal analogue as well as the vertical. The theological treatise Jacob's Well, a collection of sermons believed to have been preached during the fifteenth century, aptly depicts one of the outward-reaching implications of the work of the Savior: "Hyse handes on pe cros were opyn, in exauple pat pin handys schulde no3t be lokyn in keypyng pin almes fro pe poore but opyn in largenesse of almesse" (Brandeis 309). That Christ was to be considered exemplary was everywhere apparent, whether through devotional works like the Imitatio Christi, iconographic representations of the Crucified Christ surrounded by workmen's tools, or the numerous ensaumples promulgated through the narrative lives of Christ and the Corpus Christi plays.⁷

Moreover, Peter Travis's argument that the dramatic

⁷ On the importance of The Imitatio Christi during the late Middle Ages, see Giles Constable 238-248. Regarding the artistic rendering of Christ surrounded by workmen's tools, see the discussion of Christ as Piers in Chapter One. The significance of the ensauple will be addressed later in this chapter (Meg Twycross's discussion) and within Chapter Five.

Christ is central within the social sphere illustrates how all-encompassing and controversial the Savior's work may be shown to be. While Travis does not investigate the issue of work, his conceptualization of Christ's body as both central and polysemous is seminal to this study. He maintains that Christ's body is the "axis mundi toward which all other medieval bodies gravitate and from which they are understood to derive their meaning" ("The Social Body" 18). Using John O'Neill's study entitled Five Bodies, in which O'Neill argues that modern society is characterized by a "negative anthropomorphism," Travis illustrates that, unlike modern society, the Middle Ages understood the metaphor of the body as a unifying agent, a means through which separate yet interrelated realities could be both described and comprehended (18). He explores various ways of defining Christ's body: communicants united in Christ through the Eucharist; members of the ideal congregation as visualized by St. Paul; the king's body politic which, unlike his natural body, was not subject to death; Christ's corporal frame (18-22). The crux of Travis's argument is that Christ's corporal frame becomes a vehicle for representing social ills, particularly in the Passion sequences where Christ demonstrates weakness and endures violent assaults. In one sense, his lacerated body becomes "a dystopic image of the city in its most observable material condition." In another sense, Travis suggests, Christ's bruised body

suggests cultural inequities: "Is our nakedness cause for shame? Do we honor our humble members? Why shouldn't they revolt?" (33).

The implications of Travis's statement that Christ's body was the center of the world to the medieval populace should be examined with reference to Mircea Eliade's conception of the axis mundi. Eliade has stated that God's incarnation in Christ is the supreme hierophany, or manifestation of the sacred (11). When the sacred manifests itself, homogeneous space is broken, a new vertical axis penetrates space, and the hierophany (the act of "something sacred show[ing] itself to us") establishes "absolute reality." This absolute reality sharply distinguishes sacred space from the non-reality of surrounding, profane space. If Christ's body is indeed an axis mundi, as Travis maintains, it becomes like a conqueror's banner, an external signal of cosmicized territory and sanctified space, which marks an irruption of the sacred into what would otherwise be a profane world. Furthermore, the axis mundi acts like a conduit, or a cosmic pole, that connects all three realms: the underworld, earth, and heaven (Intro. and Chapter 1).

However, Travis's use of the phrase "Christ's body" is perhaps too restrictive and ambiguous. The thrust of his argument is not, after all, that the Scriptural Christ's body was an axis mundi to his milieu; but that Christ's material form, represented theatrically during the later

Middle Ages, became the center of the world to the general populace. Since Christ's body can be defined in a variety of ways, as Travis himself is careful to point out, we must question how one aspect of body symbolism becomes recognizable over another. Further, Travis posits not only that Christ's body is central, but that his body serves as mid-point within a magnetic field. Other "medieval bodies" are drawn toward Christ's body and derive their meaning from this sacred center. What might this univocal meaning be? Travis limits his study to the torments Christ's body undergoes during the Passion sequences of the plays, but surely other meanings would be generated by the Savior's unviolated body of the nativity plays, or by his unharmed adult form represented in the ministry sequences. If polysemous meaning is possible, however, how can a variety of interpretations emanate from an axis mundi whose nature is fixed and unyielding?

These unanswerable questions illustrate the conflict inherent in Christ. With conflict factored into, rather than out of, the social equation, Christ becomes seen as dynamic: he participates in both the active and contemplative lives (and their corollaries, the opus manuum and the opus Dei), in work that appears cursed as well as blessed, within a worker-demographics including the damned along with the saved, through the very negation of work paralleling its positive counterpart. Not only is conflict

inherent in the hypostatic union (the fusion of godhood and manhood in Christ) but it arises when both biblical and medieval concepts of work are represented through the sacred character. As a social figure, Christ's contemporary relevance is necessarily informed by his biblical one. Therefore the Scriptural Christ, having adopted the work persona of the itinerant rabbi, becomes layered beneath the fifteenth-century Christ, who invariably assimilates and projects contemporary interpretations. We should therefore view the social Christ as a cosmic center, mid-point on a horizontal spectrum, the signified by whose index two polar signifiers are measured. Accordingly, he reflects, mediates, reconciles, or appears to question the extremities. One end of the plane may be tipped downward or upward by the sheer density or weightlessness of the other's substance, yet the immovable center never shifts.

Because I am depicting notable facets of work as endpoints on a horizontal plane, they can be seen as non-hierarchical. Just as conceivably can they be visualized as stratified, or the lesser subsumed within the identity of the greater. What is more important than schematic arrangement is that no social factor or distinction, however prominent, can sufficiently explain the multidimensional nature of Christ's work in the plays. Operating in conjunction with or opposed to one another were a range of social phenomena. Affective spirituality, which is

reflected in Towneley through an emphasis upon Christ's humanity, does not succeed in eradicating the cultural stigma associated with manual labor, in which Christ is seen engaging.⁶ Towns (through their guilds) may have produced plays to honor God, as Mervyn James has shown, yet a Wycliffite preacher finds reason to berate them for wasting time better spent in performing good works.⁹ To illustrate the social complexity of Christ, I wish to link Meg Twycross's argument that Christ is inimitable as he appears in the plays to the broader social context within which his work applies.

Twycross argues for the connection between meditative literature and the mystery plays, explaining that even the illiterate had narratives about Christ's life read to them. Whereas narrative depends upon the imaginative capacity of readers, the plays were able to elicit audience response in concrete ways. Certain episodes of these narrative descriptions of Christ's life, she notes, were designed to

⁶ A profusion of scholarship has been generated about affective spirituality. For example, Atkinson, Chapter Five (129-156); Jambeck, "The Dramatic," 110-127 passim; Sticca 69-87 passim. Particularly beneficial has been Davidson's study "Northern Spirituality" 125-151 passim. On the cultural stigma associated with manual labor, entire works have proven profitable, especially those of Ovitt, Jr.; LeGoff; and White, Jr (Medieval Religion).

⁹ On the reciprocity involved in honor, see Mervyn James 3-29, especially 19n58, 27. God confers honor on a town, ensuring its continued prosperity; townsfolk honor God back through their work of producing the cycles. The Wycliffite treatise will be mentioned in Chapter Six. See Davidson, "A Middle English," 35-36.

lead readers to imitate the moral actions of Christ and other characters. Because of his status as a charismatic hero, however, he is basically inimitable: "He does things we cannot do and feels things we cannot feel; but we do, I think, wish to share in his charisma by reflection" ("Books" 78). Although Twycross emphasizes the importance of imitating the ensaumple, which audiences viewing the plays would have learned from meditative literature, she states that spectators would have been more likely to identify with Mary Magdalene or Peter than with Christ.

Its divine attributes notwithstanding, the Savior's work enables a constitutional reappraisal of this too-prevalent view, exemplified by Twycross, that Christ is inimitable. Viewing his work on a horizontal plane enables us to demonstrate more expeditiously how socially viable he really is. Particularly useful in this connection, as Vance has shown, is Alain de Lille's De planctu Naturae, as discussed by Vance (114-115).¹⁰ Alain's nature-in-conception argument serves as a prologue to a point I wish to make about work-processes being the offspring of the paradigmatic models from which they derive, designed to be recognized as such in the physical realm. He describes Nature as one who propagates like forms from like, thereby

¹⁰ Vance's reference is to Alain's Prosa 4 in the following text: ed. N. M. Haring, in Studi Medievalia, terza serie 19.2 (1978), 797-879; English trans. James J. Sheridan, The Plaint of Nature (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1980) (Vance 115, n. 7).

rendering differentiation manifest in the material world. Nature as God's substitute is prompted by desire to duplicate creation horizontally, within temporal time. As "mistress of [God's] mint," she exercises great care in assuring that each begotten form bears a striking resemblance to its exemplar.

Relating this idea to the social sphere, whatever material configuration God's work-process takes should bear an unmistakable likeness to its own anvil even though the spirit-dimension is often embedded within and is therefore unrecognizably distinct from the manifest form (Noah's ark being one such example). Christ's discernible body in the plays, as Travis has demonstrated, does in fact become a signifying entity. Vance establishes that the medieval populace comprehended Christ as a unique and perfect sign, "one where signifier and signified, Son and Father, were consubstantial and without difference, and wholly adequate one to the other" (x, 190). Despite the inevitable corruption of work-gestures through their enactment within a fallen world, those adulterated actions assume new meaning when performed by him who constitutes the perfect sign. Yet if God's work-process[es] are indelibly replicated through the person of his Son, are there not social ramifications suggested by the (apparent) withholding of his redemptive work? Based upon The Meditations such a response seems likely. Before the launching of his ministry, townsfolk

wonder why such a wise and capable young man stands around idly, doing nothing. They bristle: "He is a useless man, an idiot, a good-for-nothing, foolish, bad'" (Ragusa 95).

Dramatic Complexity: Roundness

Both the vertical and the horizontal planes have been shown to pertain to Christ's work in the plays, yet these linear analogues cannot sufficiently explain how the fullness-emptiness dynamic operates. Indeed, William A. Scally has demonstrated that the time-scheme governing the Towneley cycle is "circuitous," not linear (82). The cycle depicts an "architectronic struggle between the forces of good and evil, unique to this cycle" (81). Inasmuch as the cycle begins with the angels already onstage, they come to be understood as the audience within the play. Yet evil characters thereafter address the audience as cohorts. Not until the Resurrection is this perception reversed, where Christ identifies himself with the audience. While the cycle operates within a circular configuration, Scally states, it is a circle "which goes forward, for we are not the same at Christ's resurrection as we were at the Father's creation" (82).

To reify two related points, one that Christ's character possesses a fullness that extends beyond mythologization, and the other that Towneley is driven by a dialectic of superabundance-undercompensation, I suggest using an aide-memoire. Imagine, if you will, a Latin cross,

resembling the one upon which Christ was crucified, drawn within a circle. The circumscribed cross, so configured, resembles a minted coin yet can also be seen as a cruciform-imprinted communion wafer. This image, capable of being recognized through material form, is a metaphor for describing an otherwise imprecise dramatic and spiritual reality.¹¹

Christ's fullness, through its converse operation of human emptiness, requires, demands, or elicits a human response. Yet because humankind's metaphysical hollowness is often perceived as being irremediable, characters transmute (change the properties of) or convert (transform the invisible into the visible) that most-desired spiritual commodity through the gesture of their own inept commerce. The mystical coin, here viewed as synonymous with God's superabundance, eludes procurement through such quasi-exchange and must therefore be envisioned as immeasurably vast, ethereal, and ungraspable. Closely related to this idea of God's sought-after plenitude is the cornucopian bounty attainable through the Holy Grail, source of the infinitely large and free gift (Shell 24-46).¹²

The cycle-form epitomizes and portrays what becomes

¹¹ Cf. the concept of the "masspenny" in scholarship about The Pearl.

¹² The correspondence between superabundance and cornucopian bounty will be made clearer in Chapter Three, which discusses the commodity of copiousness as manifested in the Abraham and Isaac play.

equated with an appropriating response: God begins the cycle gathering up the waters of the firmament; Christ ends the cycle separating the sheep from the goats. This response is often seen as a logical human reaction to a spiritual galvanizing force. Even when reacquiring what one has lost, one must hoard, disseminate, dispose of, or otherwise redistribute that commodity. Yet this circular configuration, here being viewed as the appropriating process associated with work-activities, has both outer contour and inner density. Whether the inherently circular structure is the cycle, the mystical coin, or the production process, that external shape has no currency without the Cross, which penetrates or impales, stigmatizes, or energizes from within. Bonaventure's concept of God's circular structure and the function of Christ therein is most useful to understanding why Christ has been mythologized in the plays.

In his sermons the Seraphic Doctor conceptualizes God as an "intelligible circle whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere" (Hayes 91, n. 45). While God is the beginning of the circle, man is the ultimum as the last creation; therefore Christ as god-man is both the Alpha and the Omega. Influenced by pseudo-Dionysius, Bonaventure reflects the hierarchic view that the Word descends through levels of reality, reaching its lowest point in the flesh; through emanation, God draws all into

unity with him. Jeffrey Burton Russell explains the Byzantine father's perception of the divine economy, "Desire draws us to God; desire opens us up and lets him into us; the divine desire draws us to itself" (31). In order for us to view this system of layers spherically rather than vertically, we should envision a series of concentric circles, connected by the axis of God.

Two streams of thought contained within Bonaventure's sermons help elucidate the role of the Cross within the metaphorical circle I have conjectured. The first explains the mystification of Christ from a theological standpoint, based upon Bonaventure's understanding of the biblical passage, "In your midst has stood [Christ] whom you do not know" from the Gospel of John. Applying his exegesis to the drama will enable us to see how, but not necessarily why, Christ has been rendered invisible even while he is the central character of the Corpus Christi plays. Within such a construct, the mystical circle with Christ therein can be seen as trajected into space, in much the same fashion as the departed Troilus in Chaucer's romance is imagined as present even when absent: wafting out in space, looking down from the eighth sphere, helpless to intervene in human affairs. Such a mythologized hermeneutic is airborne, and when employed, the issue of Christ's very controversial presence within the plays rises out of reach, having vanished like a helium balloon. A more conducive and

promising interpretive approach arises from the second Bonaventurian principle: that Christ should be viewed dialectically. Christ, Bonaventure says, is both reception and response, fullness and humility; therefore it seems reasonable to ask why all the inherent contradictions that cohere in Christ have not engendered more discursive approaches to his presence in the plays. The implementation of such approaches would dynamize the Cross within the circle, demanding our acknowledgment of paradox, much as the viewer within Dream of the Rood is compelled to confront the conflicting images he beholds even though he cannot adequately decipher them. In the plays the memory of the Cross is everywhere apparent; yet Christ himself, qua dramatic signifying agent, has been somehow expurgated from the conflict he exemplifies.

Bonaventure's sermon-message about John the Baptist's proclamation that "In your midst has stood one whom you do not know" relates to the dramatic reality that Christ has been too often mystified. Christ did not stand apart from the throng of Jews, the Seraphic Doctor explains, but situated himself amongst them. This physical reality signifies condescension: "He is the eternal God in the midst of mortal men, the innocent Lamb in the midst of evil sinners, the glorious Savior in the midst of miserable lost men" (Hayes 97). Further evidence of the Savior's midmost position is found in Luke, where we are told the youthful

Christ was found in the temple sitting in the midst of learned men (98). Because the works and teaching of his public ministry were misconstrued, Christ was expelled from the synagogue by angry Jews, whereupon "He went out from their midst." That Christ deigned to appear as the authentic teacher within the midst of the Jews is not as egregious, however, as human reaction: "You kn[e]w him not" (100).

A quite similar cloud of unknowing has also infiltrated the Corpus Christi plays through a critical tendency to mythologize Christ, which has ironically (though not strategically or purposely) removed him from the theatrum mundi in which Christocentrism is the focal point. Lawrence M. Clopper, in a study concentrating on the Passion sequences, illustrates how Christ's inscrutability has often served to camouflage him. Clopper contends that it is the tyrants and villains who through opposition define "the mystery of Christ's nature." The Old Testament sequences cast "shadows of Christ's reality," and the New Testament sequences affirm his divinity through his performance of miracles, yet he remains nevertheless enigmatic: "We have seen what He does, but do not know what He is; we can understand His acts, but not who He is" (16).

The mystique surrounding and including Christ, as exemplified by Clopper's comments, has often resulted in a critical assumption that the sacred character is (perhaps

unfortunately but nonetheless) one-dimensional rather than round. Indeed, Garrett Epp has deemed the vast majority of characters in the plays "gloriously flat, as they were meant to be" (139), an assessment proceeding from the close association he makes between scholastic thought and the plays. He points out that within medieval realism Ideas constituted the unchangeable reality (as universals); art as mimetic form was capable of imitating only "less particularized, sensible creation" (133). Inasmuch as goodness is consonant with God and the Idea, Epp says, "the better a character (or person) is, the flatter he or she must seem" (137). Characters who appear to change are really only trading one flat persona for another (138). What Epp's argument contributes, then, is a rationalization for a deflated view of Christ, without a corresponding explanation as to why this form of flatness (goodness) results in mystifying him. To illustrate, when another character's perceived flatness is noted, that one-dimensionality need not remove him from the playing field: a case in point is the Towneley Pilate, whose consistent evilness has not rendered him invisible but instead has made him highly conspicuous. Therefore, it seems to me that viewing Christ as central from a spiritual standpoint even while he remains marginal from a dramatic one is more a modern critical construct than a medieval phenomenon.

Bonaventure's model of the dialectical relationship

between God and humankind through Christ, when seen in terms of fluid transaction rather than static opposition, enables a dynamic approach toward Christ in the plays. This paradigm, along with other methodological approaches, will be used to reveal but not resolve the issue of Christ's work in the cycle. Zachary Hayes, Bonaventurian commentator and scholar, explains the relationship between God and humankind as "characterized by a dialectic of fullness and humility. The plan of God [through Christ as mediator] bridges the chasm between fullness of being and nothingness; death and life" (90). A much earlier version of dialectical interplay had already been present in the recapitulation theory advanced by Irenaeus, viewed in terms of God's (Christ's) work. Irenaeus's institution-destitution-restitution dynamic corresponds to its dramatic counterpart in this study: superabundance-undercompensation-reappropriation.¹³

Transactive process is not static; rather, it is characterized by flux: (God's) blessed work becomes cursed only to reaccess blessedness (through Christ), the latter absorbing corruptive signification because of its contamination in the material realm, thereby resuming the cursed momentum. What this hermeneutic enables, moreover, is seeing emptiness as both contained within and eliciting density (Christ's fullness). Accordingly, the attributes of

¹³ Irenaeus advances his recapitulation theory in Against Heresies: 3:19,6; 3:17:6; 5:21:1.

fullness and emptiness not only lean toward but provoke each other. Chapter Three will illuminate this distribution principle as promulgated by St. Ambrose in his Hexameron. Ambrose establishes two important ideas about production that are pertinent to this study: the commodity of God's superabundance (Christ's fullness) and the paradigm of a reciprocal universe, which legitimizes equitable exchange. The extent to which emptiness and fullness provoke each other, vis-à-vis Christ, will become manifest in Chapter Four, which initiates the New Testament section of this study.

A dialectical approach toward Christ affords that which a mythologizing or oppositional stance cannot: a means by which ambivalence may be exposed, rendering Christ dynamic rather than static. Having already demonstrated how the mythologized approach vaporizes Christ, I now wish to address a corollary dilemma: that he may be whisked away through other means; for example, through diammetrical opposition. Whereas viewing Christ from one of two bifurcated perspectives often seems inescapable, the polarizing response makes Christ just as dramatically flat as the mythological model does. This seems to be true whether disparate elements within Christ are split asunder (for example, his humanity viewed as contradistinct to his divinity) or he is pitted against oppositional forces. However Christ comes to be accessed within such a matrix,

the controversy surrounding him is assuredly quashed: ends of the spectrum, being antithetical, do not usually compel or repulse each other. To illustrate, Barry Sanders employs a game/anti-game structure for analyzing Christ's complex role in The Buffeting, in which Christ remains virtually mute and unresponsively passive. Christ's torturers fear him, Sanders explains; their nervousness causes them to depersonalize the sacred figure while treating him sub-humanly. Because Christ refuses to play their game of persecution, Sanders contends, he becomes "more super-human the farther he moves away from those restrictions" (99). Within such a construct, Christ veers sharply toward polar extremity in no sliding-scale increments, I might add. From this delimiting perspective, Christ has been shuffled offstage, which Sanders seems to acknowledge: he "exists outside of the rules and definitions of society" (99).¹⁴

What the dialectical approach allows that the other interpretive models seem to lack is a means by which disparity and ambiguity may be teased out so that problems regarding Christ process outward and begin to be seen. In this study the language of exchange serves as a stimulating conduit for inducing such ambivalences forth. Further, the cross-disciplinary fields of gesture and iconography, both currently undergoing revisionist reconsideration, provide

¹⁴ Further exemplifications of this oppositional stance are McAlindon 323-332 passim and Samuels 343-344.

the justification for a corresponding paradigm-shift in medieval drama scholarship.¹⁵ Two ideas percolating within these disciplines warrant exploration: the ambivalence of gesture and indeterminacy of meaning thereof.

Gesture appears to be a particularly apt vehicle for releasing contradictions contained within the construct we have been theorizing as Christ. Not only is gesture detectible through external manifestation, it is an imitable sign-vehicle Christ shares with humankind. Jean-Claude Schmitt has demonstrated that gestures embody dialectic by linking the soul and body, the invisible inside and the visible outside, in a dynamic manner. The medieval populace believed that gestures reified the tension "between intus and foris since they were supposed to express without the 'secret movements' of the soul within" (A Cultural History 60). However, the body was ambivalent, hampering communication with and comprehension of gestures. Despite this fact, ritualized gestures were often practiced to reaffirm one's role in society (61). Besides their expressive purpose, gestures were also understood in terms of double meaning or "the practical efficacy of technical

¹⁵ Regarding the connection between medieval drama and the New Art History, see Sheingorn "Medieval Drama" 143-162 passim. Particularly relevant are Sheingorn's comments about the unmasking of ideological stances (147), indeterminacy of meaning and polysemous meanings (152-153), contradiction and ambiguity (154-155). Epitomizing a discursive approach toward gesture is Bonne, who theorizes an ambivalent image of Christ represented on a cathedral in Autun (77-95 passim).

gestures" (65).¹⁶ What provides the most promising rationale for using gestures as a means of liberating Christ from dramatic flatness is the indeterminacy of gesture, itself a consequence of the body's ambivalence.

That Christ participates in the contradiction he exemplifies has not been sufficiently probed for its reconstructivist potential. Scholars analyzing Christ's various roles in medieval drama have continued to deem him central from a spiritual standpoint even while he remains marginal from a dramatic one. Such perspectives hollow him out, leaving him mystified, rarified, drained of controversy, paradoxically empty even when full, effectually absent even when present. Work, because it is a gesture simultaneously blessed and cursed, is an ambiguous vehicle and thus one particularly suitable for the task of rethinking Christ's role in the plays. The next chapter, by concentrating upon Ambrose's Hexameron and the Old Testament plays, moves toward situating Christ within a dynamic distributive network characterized by flux. Viewing him as functional within an exchange continuum is not unprecedented, but calling forth disparities and inconsistencies appears to be, however unintentionally these

¹⁶ The ambivalence of gestures, as theorized by Jean-Claude Schmitt and Jean-Claude Bonne, will be discussed in Chapters Five and Six.

contradictions have gone unexplored.¹⁷

¹⁷ To illustrate, Christ treading the Winepress, as depicted and discussed in Schiller, conveys the idea of distribution. See volume 1, 228-229, Plates 808, 810, and 811.

CHAPTER THREE
THE CONSTRUCTION OF WORK

The Towneley dramatist begins his construction of work in The Creation, where he portrays the highest reach of work: God forming the cosmos. God, as worker, establishes the paradigm by which all work within the cycle comes to be measured: his work is bounteous and gratuitous, materially as well as spiritually efficacious. A rich storehouse of patristic literature including hexameral commentary on God's work of Creation served as a theological foundation for the dramatist. One very influential commentary on the six days of Creation, Ambrose's Hexameron, acknowledged for its widespread influence in the Latin West, provides an intelligible understanding of how the primordial God was commonly viewed by Corpus Christi dramatists and writers of the vernacular sources. Ambrose's homilies establish two key ideas about work that are germane to my study of several Old Testament plays to be discussed in this chapter: The Creation, The Killing of Abel, Noah, and Abraham and Isaac.

These Ambrosian concepts, God's superabundance and the system of equitable exchange inherent within the universe, provide the exegetical underpinnings for what the dramatist presents as an inventive and compelling depiction of work

that elicits and culminates in Christ's death upon the cross. Not until the redemptive sacrifice is any work efficacious enough to redistribute God's bounty, including the sacred work performed by Christ's precursors (Abel, Noah, Isaac). When related to the economic model introduced in Chapter Two, Ambrose's ideas provide both a material foundation and a distributive impetus that will serve to clarify how Christ, through the dynamics of his work, functions as a central yet not marginal character within the wider context of the cycle.

Ambrose's commentary proclaims God Creator of the unquantifiable commodity (superabundance) and deems the cosmos a network of equitable exchange. However, the dramatist cleverly prefigures humankind's undercompensation through the collective character of the Cherubim even before the Fall of the Angels.¹ In Chapter Two I introduced this concept of undercompensation in terms of its metaphysical counterpart, human emptiness; I further suggested that humankind seeks to mitigate what is really a spiritual emptiness through negotiations ultimately revealed as counterproductive. Through so doing, humankind compensates itself as a way of bringing about fullness, albeit in a debased form.

¹ I employ the term "dramatist" to designate the "Wakefield author" whom Martin Stevens considers not only the cycle's chief writer, reviser, and compiler, but its dominant editorial voice (Four Middle 156-157). See the first few pages of this study's Chapter Four, and n. 1.

In Towneley's Creation the Cherubim demonstrate an intuitive sense of their own undercompensation. Even though they bask in the presence of their Creator and within an atmosphere rife with ontic substance, as Mircea Eliade has described the cosmogonic scene, the Cherubim perceive their brilliance as being somehow faulty, making God's plenitude appear to be withheld.² This prelapsarian environment, where the Cherubim respond to God's act of fullness, cannot be forgotten in the postlapsarian milieu, even though work in that domain reflects the curse. Old Testament plays to be discussed within this chapter reveal how the dramatist crafts what becomes recognized as a dialectical phenomenon. This dynamic, discussed here for its dramatic efficacy, has already been introduced in Chapter Two for its theological import. There I described humankind's desire for Christ as being transacted vertically or horizontally and the means by which desire is satiated as being circular, imitating the production system.

Within the Old Testament plays, God's fullness appears to provoke a response, whether characters intuit that commodity, transmute it into material form, or conceptualize it as mystical. When characters are viewed horizontally, Cain as the damned can be conceptualized as gravitating toward the left and Abel as the saved can be envisioned as

² My dramatic interpretation of the cosmogony (God's act of Creation) advanced in this chapter derives from Mircea Eliade, 68-113 passim.

moving toward the right. But however flanked or arrayed, both Cain and Abel participate in and react to God's fullness. Yet throughout the cycle, God's bounty is shown as exacerbating humankind's plight, even when the source of the conflict between God and humankind is unrecognized as a spiritual one. However that plenitude is interpreted or construed, humankind nonetheless exhibits a heightened expectation of imminent redress. A building tension between divine fullness and human emptiness is manifested most clearly in The Creation and The Killing of Abel, where God's bounty is shown as both out-of-reach yet tantalizingly accessible, intensifying humankind's desire for redistribution of the longed-for commodity (God's superabundance). Plays representing the patriarchs, Noah and Abraham and Isaac, depict unmerited grace descending from on high, ennobling human labor while emphasizing more pointedly human futility without the gift of divine endowment. Accordingly, these plays represent the vertical dimension most pointedly even though the horizontal dimension is, of course, present through such protestors as Noah's wife.

The anticipatory fervor associated with the work of Christ's redemptive sacrifice, which I will discuss in Chapters Four and Five, cannot be comprehended without regard to Old Testament prefiguration. The work of Christ's precursors, while productive and expansive, is nonetheless

insufficient, as I will demonstrate. Further, Christ's work as enacted within the ministry and Passion sequences cannot be contextualized without reference to God's work, as interpreted through hexameral commentary. This chapter therefore seeks to establish the importance of St. Ambrose's Hexameron by demonstrating how his ideas inform the dramatist's rendering of work. First, God's superabundance, depicted in Towneley as the sought-after commodity; and secondly, the network of equitable exchange, which provides the impetus for the reappropriation response (redistribution of that bounty).

The Importance of Ambrose

The influence of hexameral commentary upon medieval thought has been frequently discussed: Christian exegetes found the six days of Creation, recounted in the first chapter of Genesis, a favorite subject of investigation. According to George Ovitt, Jr., two of the most influential commentaries were Basil of Caesarea's Homilies on the Hexaemeron and Augustine's De Genesi ad litteram (60). The model provided by Basil's commentary was followed closely by Saint Ambrose, who disseminated the work in the Latin West. David Fowler states that Augustine's commentary as provided in The Confessions (XI-XIII) and De Genesi ad Litteram emphasizes the "metaphysical and theistic aspects" of God's work of Creation rather than its physical aspects such as the birds and the beasts. Ambrose's commentary, he argues,

is more biblical than Augustine's and therefore more indispensable to the hexameral tradition (133-134).

Increased circulation of Ambrose's writings during the later Middle Ages enhance the likelihood that the dramatist, whom scholars believe to have been a member of a religious order, consulted Ambrosian exegetical texts.³ Besides there being a documented resurgence of interest in the writings of the Church Fathers during the later Middle Ages, there is an indisputable correspondence between biblical exegesis and the plays. For example, V. A. Kolve explains that the Fathers used figural narrative, which had been employed by Christ himself, as a subject of investigation submitted to formal exegetical analysis; the use of figures is furthermore occasionally conveyed in the plays (64-65). Robert A. Brawer has even argued that the Corpus Christi plays are practically indistinguishable from exegesis in that both forms offer a systematic presentation of history conveyed from a theological perspective ("St. Augustine's" 225).

The prominent ideas established in Ambrose's Hexameron, God's superabundance and the system of equitable exchange inherent within the universe, can be shown as instrumental

³ Exemplifying the belief that Corpus Christi dramatists were members of religious orders is Rosemary Woolf, who states this probability in "Later Poetry" 299. On increased library acquisition of the Church Fathers, including Ambrose, see Kibre 257-297 passim. Also see E. F. Jacob's comments in The Fifteenth Century 666ff., especially 678 and 684, and in "Christian Humanism," 448-452 passim.

to the Towneley dramatist's construction of work within The Creation. John E. Bernbrock has already demonstrated that a close correspondence between Ambrose's homily on Cain and Abel and the Towneley Killing of Abel play can be substantiated (317-322).⁴ Several stage-actions or motivational factors represented in the plays do not derive from Scripture but are amply explained by Ambrose's text: Abel as one who compelled Cain to sacrifice and Cain as one who bore ill feelings toward his brother (318). The play so noticeably parallels these elements, established in Ambrose's commentary alone, that Bernbrock concludes the dramatist undoubtedly employed it as a source (317).

Ambrose's Hexameron, a commentary on the six days of Creation, was believed to have been delivered as a series of sermons during Holy Week 387 (v-vi). In Hexameron Ambrose views God's superabundance as an overplenteous quantity emanating from who God is; his work can be nothing less than expansive.⁵ Biblical narrative establishes God as one who calculates the dimensions of the universe with weights and measures, who sits atop the globe-like earth, surveying its inhabitants (2, 3, 12; 6, 2, 7). In his homily on the third

⁴ Bernbrock contends that critics have overlooked Ambrose's text as a source for the Towneley play and believes that the dramatist drew heavily upon it (317). With regard to the importance of patristic sources in interpreting a variety of medieval texts, see J. M. Campbell 465-478 passim, especially 466-467.

⁵ On the originality of Ambrose's thinking regarding the concept of matter, see John F. Johnson 109-113.

day of Creation, Ambrose explains that God possesses the ability to enlarge space; how else, he asks, could so much water have been gathered up into one place so that the earth was able to appear? (3, 3, 14-15). The first manifestation of God's superabundance is the act of Creation; yet that overplenitude also refers to the uncorrupted physical world, fresh from the Creator's hands. Ambrose delineates the richness of an environment supersaturated with the Creator's presence. The earth yielded bounty of its own accord; "though unplowed, [it] teemed with rich harvests." Inasmuch as no condemnation had yet occurred, the earth spontaneously produced fruits while the "word of God fructified on the earth" and the earth luxuriated in its own fecundity (3, 10, 45; 3, 8, 34). This overbounteous state is a natural outgrowth of God, who can be characterized as "the fullness of the universe" (3, 10, 45). Further, the chief beneficiary of God's bounty remains man, who alone possesses a truth-discerning faculty and a soul, distinguishing him from God's other creations (6, 1, 2).

Besides substantiating God's fullness, Ambrose repeatedly uses the language of exchange. This language relates to the second Ambrosian idea mentioned previously: the equitable relationship inherent within the universe. The earth overcompensates one year for the bounty it has failed to produce the previous year (5, 8, 35). Dangerous plants have the beneficial effect of restoring health;

because of their life-enhancing qualities, they actually increase God's bounty (3, 9, 38-41). God's superabundance is bequeathed to man, but man must return something to the source, more being payable from those blessed most abundantly (4, 2, 5). God, however, owes man nothing. Instead, the unmerited bounty reaped by man places him in a position of indebtedness (3, 17, 70).

Evil fits into this schematic plan only as the privation of good, since evil was not among God's creations (1, 8, 28-32). Whereas God sows good seed representing the kingdom of heaven, the enemy sows bad seed representing sin (3, 10, 44). Man must avoid evil or expunge it within himself before evil subsumes good. This basic principle is comprehended even by animals, who wisely avoid poisonous plants (1, 8, 31; 3, 9, 40).

Despite the destructive nature of evil, which grows in proportion to the space afforded to it, humankind's work still possesses a great potential for reward. Inasmuch as the earth still yields bounteous produce, that reward is sometimes material. However, there is an inverse relationship between material acquisition and spiritual benefit. As material acquisition becomes more bountiful, one's capacity for spiritual superabundance is deflated. Ambrose expresses this most succinctly in a related text, his treatise on Cain and Abel, through the well-known example of Zaccheus, a publican sinner, who scaled a

sycamore tree in order to see Christ entering Jerusalem. After Christ called Zaccheus down, instructing him to make his house ready for Christ's stay, Zaccheus readied his household by reversing the effects of his wrongdoing through making restitution for his avarice and thievery (2, 4, 16).⁶ In the same text, Ambrose depicts a comparable situation within the context of Cain's sacrifice. Cain amasses material bounty when he withholds the firstfruits of his harvest from God, while his spiritual bounty undergoes depletion, a loss equated with deprivation of God's favor (2, 6, 23).

Ambrose views God's superabundance as still accessible to humankind on an intermittent basis: crops sometimes yield produce rather than weeds, work is often rewarded instead of punished, tithing one's surplus occasionally generates even more plenty.⁷ Further, God's oversufficiency must be considered both a physical and a spiritual principle. Whereas man may have lost the full extent of God's plenitude to which he was entitled at Eden, spiritual reacquisition of that bounty is possible through sowing "the seeds of spiritual things." Even though worldly works may reflect the curse, spiritual works do not. As

⁶ Note that Ambrosian scholar F. Homes Dudden uses texts other than the Hexameron to synthesize Ambrose's views on the Doctrine of Creation (2: 380-381).

⁷ Theodor E. Mommsen establishes Ambrose's strong conviction that the relationship between God and humankind is one governed by merit and reward (289).

Ambrose states this principle: "If we sow what is carnal, we shall reap fruit that is carnal. If, however, we sow what is spiritual, we shall reap the fruit of the spirit." (Paradise 15, 77). Evil, the absence of good, shortcircuits the equitable relationship between God and man by shifting one's attention toward physical things, which can only deteriorate. Ambrose's God, like Boethius's, is the Supreme Good in whom happiness lies. As Philosophy expostulates in the Consolatio: "It is impossible for anything to be by nature better than that from which it is derived" (Book 3, 10, p. 101).

Ambrose's consistent depiction of God enables us to comprehend how God's bounty, distributed within the cosmos through a system of rightful exchange, provides both the foundation and momentum for what we observe in the plays. His hexameral commentary furnishes an exegetical model which helps to explain how the dramatist depicts Christ's work within the wider scope of the cycle. Ambrose's explanation of God as overabundant is rendered in distinctly physical terms. Yet that fullness is less concretely representable in the drama; hence, I have been referring to this bounty as the unquantifiable commodity. Further, Ambrose's idea of the universe as a system of equitable exchange enables another conceptual connection. By demonstrating how the cosmos operates judiciously, Ambrose provides a corollary which serves to clarify how the dramatist works all things

together for good through the work-system reduplicated in the plays. Competitive forms of work enacted in the plays become seen not in tandem but for how they transform one another.

Ambrose establishes God's consummate fullness, bequeathed to man and to some degree appropriated by him, thus demystifying the relationship between God's work and humankind's work. Although the distribution of God's superabundance is not enabled until Christ's redemptive work, the Old Testament plays depict an escalating desire for this sacrifice. Before analyzing the Old Testament plays, each of which illustrates this tension differently, I wish to address two critical problems which arise when Ambrose's ideas are applied to the drama.

When Ambrose employs the term "superabundant" to describe God's attribute, his exegetical analysis uses Scriptural reference, physical description, and allegory as ways of explaining the magnitude of that concept. However, the term "superabundant" seems inappropriate when applied to the drama insofar as substantiation is less readily demonstrable. Therefore, I wish to clarify that the negative and superlative prefixes associated with "super"(abundance) and "under"(compensation) enable us to ground God's paradigmatic work in dialogue, describing it and its relationship to humankind. Whereas I employ "superabundant" to refer to God's work and

"undercompensation" to refer to humankind's perception of deprivation, the terms are troublesome. The first problem arises when we call God's work "super"abundant in that no superlatives should be required to describe that exemplar being signified by the word "abundant" itself. The second problem arises when we say humankind perceives itself as undercompensated; to do so implies that the bounty associated with God's work of Creation was not gratuitous. Compensation clearly means something owed or something due. The prefixes do reflect the necessity of establishing a fixed measuring point. Ambrose explains this quite clearly: "Although God is immeasurable, He nevertheless holds the measure of all things" (Cain and Abel, I, 8, 30).

Further, Ambrose conceptualizes God as mythological, a construct that becomes challenged in the drama when God, partly because he is represented, becomes historicized. One of the ramifications of this historicization seems to be an undermining of the mythological construct or, at least, a confusion of its purpose. For example, David Mills has stated that within the mystery plays God must remain coherent; he cannot undergo psychological development. It therefore remains incumbent upon others to reveal God's character. He maintains that Cain, in The Killing of Abel, reveals God through speaking the same language of reciprocity as his Maker ("Characterisation" 13). This approach, while it seems valid, historicizes God--entrap

him within the fifteenth century as manifested in drama--and tends to demythologize him. The tension between God's superabundance and humankind's undercompensation occurs, I contend, at that point of intersection where divine time intersects with temporal time. For example, during The Creation, which I will discuss shortly, it seems to me that the Cherubim recite the cosmogonic myth. Simultaneously entrapped within the mystery plays and reentering sacred time through narrating the myth, they reflect a prefigured underacquisition of which they profess no knowledge. The very moment celebrated in the Creation myth, when God established his superabundance as the primordial model for all work, transforms humankind's work.

Yet without a conduit to effect this transformation, humankind is deprived of apparatus; it has no method of reconnecting with the divine exemplar, of recouping lost bounty. No such axis mundi exists until the Incarnation. While God's work of reacquiring humankind seems to reach forward, inasmuch as the soteriological benefits of Christ's redemptive work reach beyond each current age, humankind's reacquisition of God's superabundance moves backward. In biblical narrative, Christ repeatedly refers the bounty of his work--for instance, the multiplied loaves--toward its reference in the source: God alone.

Having acknowledged these critical problems, both of which will become evident in my reading of the first two

plays within the cycle, The Creation and The Killing of Abel, I now turn to providing an overview of the dramatist's construction of work in the Old Testament plays, which will precede my analysis of the plays. The dramatist strikingly conveys how urgently Christ's death upon the Cross is desired and needed and to what extent humankind is capable of eliciting this salvific remedy through its own inept commerce.

The Towneley Creation enables the dramatist to establish God's work as archetypal, to present the commodity of God's superabundance as recognizably material, and to identify the conflict between God and humankind as represented through the gesture of work. By introducing the theme of undercompensation (through the Cherubim) and equating that deprivation with humankind's need for God, the dramatist sets into motion the fullness-emptiness dialectic which seeks fulfillment through Christ.

The Killing of Abel allows the dramatist to present divergent reactions to postlapsarian work, the initial depiction of which appears here rather than in The Creation play. By portraying Cain as a farmer whose crops yield him no gain and Abel as a shepherd who is locked in a right-relationship with God, the dramatist presents the historical repercussions of work and reveals how humankind tries to reaccess God's superabundance. Ritualistic enactment enables the dramatist to transform Cain's killing of Abel

into a deed promising redemption, which is transacted through exchange.

In Noah the dramatist represents the themes of superabundance and undercompensation through Noah's infusion of God's grace, enabling Noah to overcome his own limitations, resulting in his construction of the ark. By employing typology and reinforcing the fullness-emptiness dialectic, the dramatist anticipates the more efficacious work: redemption. Further, he aligns characters as horizontally arrayed--Noah on the right, his wife veering toward the left--drawing attention to the social ramifications of work and looking ahead to the Redeemer, whose location at cosmic center will prove controversial.

Abraham and Isaac enables the dramatist to represent the unquantifiable quantity, or God's superabundance, through the cornucopian image suggested by the ram. This miraculous gift reifies the Father's promise to sacrifice the Son and renders redemption palpable and imminent. The dramatist appears to transmute the object of sacrifice into the ram by focusing attention offstage and therefore portrays bounty as accessible even if inexplicably timed.

The Towneley Creation

The Towneley dramatist begins constructing the model for God's superabundance and humankind's prefigured undercompensation during the play's first scene. During that scene, set in heaven, God begins creating the cosmos,

proclaims his work pleasant, and accepts joyous praise from the Cherubim. But he inexplicably leaves his throne before the Creation of man. In speech parodying God's, Lucifer vaunts himself as brighter than the sun, and seats himself in God's throne. Scenes Two and Four, set in hell, are actually one extended scene, interrupted by God's Creation of Adam and Eve in Scene Three. Scenes Two and Four dramatize the fallen angels, who bemoan their lost brilliance, and Lucifer who, in Scene Four, bristles that the station he has lost is now occupied by newly created man. England and Pollard explain that the concluding 12 leaves of the play's manuscript have been lost, presumably containing Satan's temptation of Eve, and Adam and Eve's subsequent expulsion from Eden (9).⁸

The overbounteousness of God's work, as will be demonstrated, serves as a paradigm which creates tension between God's oversufficiency and humankind's legacy of undercompensation. God's work of Creation is imprinted upon spectators in a ritualistic manner through the Cherubim's recitation of the cosmic myth, which will be discussed as theorized by Mircea Eliade. Not only does the recitation of the myth invite reentry into the realm of the sacred and transcend the realm of the drama that nonetheless evokes the

⁸ The recent edition of the Towneley plays by Martin Stevens and A. C. Cawley was not available when the substantial portion of the research for this study was being conducted.

myth, it establishes (the primordial) God's model of work as exemplary. Related to this exemplarity is the associated attribute of the work, God's bounty. Within The Creation the production-process begins manifesting itself through the unquantifiable commodity, gains momentum by projecting that commodity as withdrawn yet retrievable, and escalates to trigger a sort of buyer's panic, seen most manifestly in Lazarus (Chapter Four), which mandates the redemptive sacrifice.

The economic model which I have provided in Chapter Two theorizes how God's bounty, which appears to be withdrawn during the opening play, is strategically employed as an exacerbating principle, which ultimately elicits Christ's death upon the Cross. Inasmuch as critics have not employed this model, their readings of The Creation play necessarily exclude this concept of the production-process. Critics have, however, addressed The Creation's language, typological patterns, and structural design.⁹ For example, Martin Stevens maintains that God's language in The Creation is simple, artless, and contains a certain "homely eloquence." Stevens notes that God and his followers speak in the simplest stanzaic forms, their language being

⁹ There have been less traditional approaches to The Creation play. For example, Maris Fiondella faults scholarly approaches which are written in sympathy with the Christian faith and therefore fail to investigate how the plays promote logocentrism. Fiondella's Lacanian psychoanalysis of The Creation approaches the play as discourse which does the work of Christian ideology (401).

effectively parodied by Lucifer in corruptions of those forms. Agreeing with E. Catherine Dunn's argument that the static voice throughout the cycle is the "voice of the Church," Stevens cites the rhythmic, lyrical quality of God's speech, which sharply contrasts with the dissonant speech of the worldly or demonic characters (Stevens, "Language" 102-104, "Four Middle" 158-160; Dunn 483-487). This prevailing static voice, Dunn has stated, is detached, philosophically aware, and collectively wise (483).

Furthermore, a typological approach has been undertaken to explain the significance of The Creation's initial scene. Walter E. Meyers observes that a type of Christ does not exist until God creates Adam in Scene Three. Meyers notes the rapidity with which God's work of Creation is accomplished, each cosmic labor being performed within the span of a stanza or two (21). This sense of condensed work, I suggest, does not detract from God's superabundance, which redounds praise to the maker from the Cherubim, Adam, and Eve. Nor does the rapid compression of macrocosmic events deemphasize the paradigmatic model, which resounds throughout the cycle, most explicitly during God's reappearance--say, during The Annunciation--where he makes manifest that he intends to make recompense for the immense bounty humankind has lost (ll. 1-76).

Jeanne S. Martin's investigation into the cycle's archetypal patterns is directly related to this study's

concern with how work is constructed in Towneley. Martin contends that individual plays within the Towneley cycle relate to one another paradigmatically, not developmentally. The cycle reflects Eusebius of Caesarea's view of history as a series of recurring patterns rather than Augustine's view of history as a linear, one-directional process (128-129). Whether Augustine's or Eusebius's historiographical views prevail in the cycle extends beyond the aim of this chapter. Yet Martin's comments on The Creation remain instrumental to the economic model I have proposed for what they serve to reveal about "the relation of the ontological order to its creator" (129).

The model for a recurring pattern of equitable return is established during The Creation. Martin states that God and the Cherubim use language of "reciprocity and solidarity" to establish the "unitary nature of the creation" (129-130). Lucifer, declaring himself the source of his own brightness, sets up an asymmetrical relationship with God (131-132). When we apply my model to Martin's construction, the Cherubim, who are collectively represented as one character, would bask in a supersaturated atmosphere, spokespersons for a closed-circuit system characterized by reciprocity and solidarity. Yet, as I will reveal, this apparent reciprocity is undermined when exploited by the dramatist, who introduces the idea of undercompensation. Martin notes the lexical repetition in the Cherubim's

language. For example, she points out the Cherubim's use of the phrase "myrth and lovyng" (ll. 62-63) to describe both "the creation's response to its creator and...the creator's response to the creation" (130). As Martin describes them, the Cherubim do seem to be joyful observers of God's work of Creation and apparent recipients of its bounteousness.

Before taking issue with Martin's contention that the relationship between God and the Cherubim is one of reciprocity and solidarity, I wish to focus momentarily upon an attribute of the archetypal worker: the superabundance in which the Cherubim appear to participate. God's sense of overgenerativity is captured in the cycle as Deus proclaims: "All maner thyng is in my thoght, / Withoutten me ther may be noght, / ffor all is in my sight" (ll. 13-15). This all-encompassing, all-expansive vision precedes the act of creation. God's oversufficiency seems to explain why, in a less generative sense, he proclaims his work pleasant (l. 42) with only a portion of his work completed. In a dramatic sense, he can be seen as initiating and engaging in the production-process. Moreover, his foreknowledge seems related to this overextensive phenomenon, which can be economically construed as a forward-propelling, goal-achieving system. For example, God blows the breath of life into man; and before Adam can arise from the earth, God announces that Adam will know both good and evil (ll. 165-170).

Insofar as reciprocity implies a mutual giving and getting, it is true that God gives material form and receives praise while the Cherubim give praise and receive joy from basking in the overabundance of the material forms. But the relationship is not really one of reciprocity. Even though the asymmetrical relationship between God and Fallen Man is not explicitly prefigured until Lucifer parodies God, there is a sense of undercompensation reflected through the Cherubim. Specifically, this is indicated when they mention Lucifer's extreme brightness (ll. 67-68), which Martin states is a potential differentiating factor which poses no threat to the divine order insofar as it is revealed as subordinate to inclusion. She points out that no sooner do the Cherubim mention that God has created Lucifer brighter than the others than they emphasize their own brightness (130).

It seems more likely that God's overplenitude, having manifested itself in the angelic population, creates a certain tension, perhaps not recognized as such by the Cherubim themselves. Thomas J. Jambeck explains this phenomenon through relating Thomas Aquinas's Summa Theologica to his reading of the play. Aquinas, having been influenced by Anselm, provides an explanation for the Cherubim's underacquisition: "the cherubim intuit, albeit obliquely, that a further bliss is possibly theirs, a beatitude which promises a direct and immediate

participation in the divine life" ("Anselm" 121).

The overendowment of brightness upon Lucifer can only be attributed to God. Because it is mentioned in the context of God's act of Creation, Lucifer's overbrilliance seems to suggest an overflow of ontic substance. Martin's analysis of the lexical repetition in the Cherubim's speech does not take into account the structural pattern of the lines (ll. 61-76). In the stanza's first section (ll. 61-66), the Cherubim praise God and express their mirth and love. These initial lines affirm the all-encompassing nature of God, document his generative power, and express the unending joy the Cherubim have received from their Creator. Directing new words of praise to God in the stanza's second section, the Cherubim shift their emphasis away from the physical properties of God's work (heaven and earth) and toward its overabundant quality, which ostensibly manifests itself in Lucifer's distinguishing overbrightness (ll. 67-74). These lines substantiate that it is the "sight" of Lucifer which generates "grete ioy" within the Cherubim, not whatever attributes might be associated with the differentiating brightness itself. Lucifer's superbrightness, their lines suggest, might result in an overexpressive, reciprocated love: "we loue the, lord, bright ar we, / bot none of vs so bright as he" (ll. 69-70). Concluding the stanza, the Cherubim direct the utmost thoughts of love they can muster toward their Maker (ll. 75-

76).

The Cherubim link Lucifer's distinguishing luminescence to God's might: "Lord, thou art full mych of myght, / that has maide lucifer so bright" (ll. 67-68).¹⁰ However, they mention their own (under)brilliance in language of compensation, suggesting underacquisition: "we loue the, lord, bright ar we" (l. 69). These words appear to contain an apology; it seems they protest too much. The attribute of their brightness should have no bearing upon whether God reciprocates their love; and certainly as their Creator he knows exactly how bright they are. Rather, their words seem to convey an awareness that the less-bright have less-love to bestow than the brighter; further, they hint at a desire for remediation. Therefore the imbalance noted by the Cherubim results in a reacquisition process. God's overbounteousness, not having been appropriated equally among the angels, creates tension demanding resolution.

The Cherubim's perception that they suffer from underendowment helps to explain humankind's compulsion for satiation which drives the cycle, but does not address

¹⁰ Or as Louis Charles Stagg queries about the complicated play written by the Wakefield dramatist, why "would the Almighty, 'the Alpha and Omega, the Life, / the Way, the first and the last' create a Prince of Light, a Lucifer, the most beautiful of all creatures, to whom the Angels sang 'Sanctus' after his creative efforts?" (13). Moreover, Robert A. Braver notes that the Cherubim praise God most of all for having created Lucifer, thereby prefiguring the heavenly schism ("Dramatic Technique" 357-358).

another integral purpose they serve as narrators of the cosmic myth. Stage directions do not indicate whether they appear together with Deus at the beginning of the play.¹¹ Even if they do, their response to God's work of Creation clearly serves some purpose other than demonstrating the reciprocity and solidarity which, Martin maintains, dominate the play's opening scene. God does not respond to their words of praise and instead leaves the scene, a theological impossibility since God is omnipresent. It is God's departure that enables Lucifer to represent him and signals, as one critic has said, "Let there be drama" (Hanning, "A Theater," 116). While God's leaving can be explained by dramatic necessity, his not responding to the Cherubim, as will be shown, is rather curious.

The Cherubim narrate the cosmic myth, as will be shown, but they cannot be considered the "voice of the Church" inasmuch as they are not detached, philosophically aware, or collectively wise.¹² Throughout the opening scene of The Creation Deus neither responds to nor acknowledges them; this is quite unusual within a cosmos reflecting reciprocity

¹¹ William A. Scally contends that the angels are already onstage when the play opens. They therefore constitute an audience within the play who witness God's act of Creation. Spectators of the play therefore see the Cherubim as much like themselves, Scally states (82).

¹² Although it is arguable whether the Cherubim fall under Dunn's category of the "voice of the Church," they do, as R. W. Hanning points out, confirm God by singing the Te Deum. Their song moves The Creation more in the direction of liturgical celebration ("You Have Begun" 146).

and solidarity. This lack of acknowledgment could suggest many things: that Martin's argument about solidarity is erroneous, that the Cherubim serve as a non-participatory audience within the play, or that their ritual function is being emphasized.

It seems most conceivable to me that the Cherubim serve as contemporary mythtellers, who rather rhythmically and euphoniously tell what happened ab origine. This role transcends but does not expunge the prefigurative function they also serve; it also explains how the prototype for work becomes implanted in spectators' minds. God's work of Creation, as Mircea Eliade has shown, demonstrates "a superabundance of reality" brought about from "an excess of power, an overflow of energy...a surplus of ontological substance" (45, 97). However dramatically effective God's work of Creation may have been, it is the narration of that Creation myth which establishes the myth as truth (Eliade 95).

All Creation myths explain how the amorphous mass of chaos is transformed into matter. For example, in the Babylonian creation myth Enuma Elish, the god Marduk slays the monster Tiamat, creating the sky with one half of her slain corpse and the earth with the other half (Heidel 9). Since the Judaeo-Christian God created the cosmos ex nihilo, the Cherubim evoke a familiar iconographic image, the syndesmos gesture, where God is seen with extended or raised

arms, perhaps holding the mappa mundi. Art historians establish the close connection between this expansive gesture and the lexicological term associated with the image, God's "bidyng" (Sheingorn "The Visual" 182; Davidson "Stage Gesture" 474; Anderson 141). The Cherubim imprint the image by connecting the well-known gesture to cosmic density: "thou has made, with thi bidyng, / Heuen, & erth, and all that is" (emphasis mine, ll. 64-65).¹³

The incantatory rhythm of the Cherubim's opening lines and Deus's refusal to acknowledge their presence does, in itself, suggest that their purpose extends beyond reflecting the majesty of God and the splendor of his work. The "supreme function of the myth," Eliade indicates, "is to 'fix' the paradigmatic models for...all significant activities," one of which is work (98). Through their recitation of the cosmic myth, the Cherubim invite the audience to reenter the supersaturated cosmos being represented. Further, they "fix" God's overplenteous work as a paradigmatic model for all work.

The tension between God's superabundance and humankind's legacy of undercompensation is heightened whenever postlapsarian man despairs over the immense bounty he has lost. Even Towneley's Lucifer, having been cast down to hell, bemoans the inequity: "Who wend euer this tyme

¹³ God earlier proclaims this abundance through the idea of forms within forms: "Out of the erth herbys shal spryng, / Trees to florish and frute furth bryng" (43-44).

haue seyn? / We, that in sich myrth haue beyn, / That we shuld suffre so mych wo?" (ll. 250-253). As expressed by Lucifer, the deprivation is both physical and spiritual. God's overplenitude is physically manifested in material forms but spiritually manifested through fellowship. For example, in Towneley God blows the breath of life into Adam, states that he will know both good and evil, and describes the luxuriant setting in which Adam will "walk...in this worthely wone, / In all this welthly wyn" (ll. 184-185). In his homily on Paradise, Ambrose questions whether it was equitable for God to provide Adam with a helpmate who then jeopardized his legacy, and decides: "the Lord must have gained more pleasure for Himself in being responsible for all creation than condemnation from us for providing the basis for sin" (10, 47). When we consider Ambrose's sense of equitable return, the correlation between God and man suggests an indelicate balance: with God's consummate pleasure at his overall work of creation seen as overriding humankind's disgruntlement over his provision of Eve.

Because the remaining 12 leaves of the Creation are no longer extant, the influence of God's paradigmatic model upon humankind's postlapsarian labor must be analyzed with regard to The Killing of Abel, the second play in the Towneley manuscript. Cain perceives God's overabundance as a withheld commodity, and his own sense of underacquisition is everywhere apparent. Not until Christ's death upon the

cross will the tension between God's superabundance and humankind's undercompensation be ameliorated in the spiritual sense.

The Killing of Abel

While evil cannot corrupt God's overplentifulness by contaminating the paradigmatic model set into motion during the Creation, it does engage humankind in a system of asymmetrical return. Cain views his own underacquisition as being imposed upon him by a bounteous God. Therefore, his non-productive land, his recalcitrant plow team, and his insubordinate servant are testimony to that withheld bounty, to which he feels entitled. In The Creation the Cherubim, who prefigure humankind's underacquisition, accept God's work of Creation as overplentiful in ways they can not adequately fathom. Cain, on the other hand, views God's overbounteousness as a withheld commodity. Ambrose has discussed the fact that Cain's status as a tiller of the soil was lower than that of Abel, who herded sheep (Book One, 3, 11). This social stratification translates into a sort of "superbrilliance" manifested by Abel. Not only does Abel's tithe consist of a fat, sleek sheep--and Ambrose clarifies that living things are superior to inanimate things (I, 10, 42)--but his tithe offers return for return. Abel's own relationship with God is clearly one of quid pro quo, and he exacerbates Cain's plight by calling attention to his brother's unproductive land: "god giffys the all thi

lifyng" (l. 98) and "all the good thou has in wone / Of godis grace is bot a lone" (ll. 116-17).

Abel's superbrilliance recalls Lucifer's overbrightness, a distinguishing characteristic which could only have been bestowed upon him by God. Whereas Lucifer exalted himself above God, being so presumptuous as to seat himself in God's throne, Abel dreads and reveres God (ll. 244-245, 257-258). This right-relationship with God seems to prime the pump of God's blessings, assuring future plenty. Yet Cain, through no reason of his own, has been consigned to the soil like his father. He, like the Cherubim, perceives himself as "underbrilliant"; that is, underendowed.¹⁴ Embittered, Cain projects his own underbrilliance upon God. Instead of conceptualizing God seated on high as Abel envisions him, Cain treats God like a puppet in a Punch-and-Judy show, answering God's call with: "Whi, who is that hob-ouer-the-wall? / we! who was that that piped so small?" (ll. 297-298).¹⁵ This rag-doll God, no bestower of bounty he, is a mockery, but remains at third-removes from the God Cain is really angry at. Cain's insulting attack on the represented God fails to resolve the more serious issue of why the eternal God distributes his

¹⁴ That God has not given Cain anything contributes to his withholding of a tithe; see Dorrel T. Hanks, Jr., 52.

¹⁵ Eleanor Prosser points out that this line would have generated laughter, not at Cain but at God. God lacks stature, she explains, and is ineffective even as the "omnipresent truth" being signified by the play (79).

overabundance so inequitably.

Critics of the Towneley play have often mentioned that the dramatist inveigles spectators into siding with Cain by considering themselves "Cain's men," as Garcio suggests (l. 20).¹⁶ Specifically, spectators would have sympathized with the injustice of a subsistence farmer being pressed to return a tithe to God which only ends up in the priest's pockets (ll. 104-105). But the material reality of the ecclesiastical authorities' unwise use of God's funds does not excuse Cain from the obligation of tithing. As G. R. Owst explains, medieval preachers repeatedly warned their parishioners against withholding their tithe or tithing falsely (365-366).¹⁷ However, Cain sees the induced tithe as an external manifestation of a more complex problem than compliance with ecclesiastical authority (or with God himself). Cain's sense of undercompensation, I suggest, is just as spiritual as it is material. As he proclaims to Abel: "ffor I am ich yere wars then othere" (l. 109). Although he cannot articulate the source of his grievance, it is obvious that the farther he strays from Eden (out of God's blessing) the more diminished his return will be. Gregory the Great has asserted that only Adam, who was once

¹⁶ Regarding this type of tropological entrapment, see Robert W. Hanning, "A Theater" 119-120.

¹⁷ On the connection between preachers, their admonitions regarding tithing, and humankind's consignment to hell for failing to heed warnings, see J. D. W. Crowther 19-24.

entitled to God's bounty, would distinctly remember what he had lost (Book Four, p. 189). Thus God's superabundance, bestowed upon Cain's father but distant to him, deteriorates into Cain's sense that a zero loss is somewhat better than a zero return. He is protective of, although not reconciled to, the status quo; this is evidenced when Abel insists that Cain tithe, and Cain reacts: "it is better hold that I haue / then go from doore to doore & craue" (ll. 142-143).¹⁸ In rather bizarre fashion, Cain moves forward chronologically but backward ritualistically. In historical time Cain moves from a memory of surplus toward an action of deprivation. He accomplishes this by moving forward from the (indistinct) memory of possessing God's superabundance toward the status quo, where he loses nothing but gains nothing, and, finally, forward yet again toward withholding bounty from God. This logical temporal progression situates Cain in a downward spiritual spiral, which ends in a plunge into hell: the progressive course taken by many of the doomed characters; for example, by Judas.

Whereas the chronological movement is detrimental to Cain, the ritualistic movement he enacts is efficacious to humankind. Earlier I noted the Creation ritual whereby a pagan god kills an adversary, from whose blood the universe is created; in the Enuma Elish these figures are the god

¹⁸ On the theme of spiritual rent and Cain as the unfaithful husbandman of the parable in Matthew 21:33-41, see David Lyle Jeffrey 70-73.

Marduk and the monster Tiamat. This cosmogonic act is strikingly reenacted with Cain playing God and Abel playing overgenerative victim, whose spilled blood energizes the universe. This cosmogony, as reenacted by Cain, does not contradict the ex nihilo Creation, in which the Judaeo-Christian God forms the cosmos from an amorphous mass. Rather, this primordial murder demonstrates--powerfully and unequivocally--the need for reappropriation.¹⁹ The catalyst for this reappropriation remains Abel, whose typological significance as a figure for Christ would have been instantly recognized.²⁰ Not until Christ's death upon the cross, which Abel prefigures, will God's superabundance be again accessible to humankind.

If this slaying failed to be recognized as a cosmogonic act, its significance would have certainly been recognized within the context of the plow play. Edmund Reiss discusses this folk drama enacted in England on Plow Monday, the day following Epiphany. Actors in disguise (mummers) performed the plays, associated with a fertility ritual, "to celebrate

¹⁹ Louis C. Gatto discusses the Slaying of Abel in relation to the ancient tradition of blood revenge. Abel's blood, calling out from the ground, places obligation on Abel's kin to avenge his unjust death (87).

²⁰ As Ambrose stated in Cain and Abel, the murderer Cain served as a prototype of the Jews; Abel served as a prototype of the Christian (I, 2, 5). Numerous artistic renderings reinforce these typological connections. For example, Ruth Melinkoff documents Abel's murder in moralizations, a fifteenth-century manuscript Rohan Hours, and the English Peterborough Psalter ("Cain" 19-24).

the return to work after the Christmas festivities" (12). The key moment of the play turned on the slaying of an innocent victim, who (unlike Abel) was later revived by a Doctor, after which a collection-plate was passed among the audience. Reiss explains that the Towneley play closely parallels this thematic structure; after Abel is slain, Garcio, Cain's servant, begs food and drink from the audience (13). Equally as interesting as these ritualistic enactments is the figure of the plow, which remains onstage during the course of the play. Whether it should be interpreted as suggesting a type of the cross, as Christ the plowman who will deliver the land from its thorns, or as a social instrument, the unbudgeable plow nonetheless serves as a concrete reminder about how fruitless human labor can be.

Cain's negotiation with God through the action of withholding his tithe externally manifests how asymmetrical he perceives his relationship with God to be. Therefore vertical exchange is represented, yet social exchange appears to be left out of the dynamics: Cain does not seize Abel's offering of a fattened lamb, substituting it for his sheaves of corn. Yet social exchange is in fact represented through transposition. Abel's plenty, a manifestation of his social status, shifts to the ulterior pole, becoming dearth, the end of material production. Cain's dearth, a similar consequence of social status, shifts over to the

productive extremity, enabling acquisition and harvest. These social transpositions belie what transpires in the spiritual realm, where, in that context, Abel, dying, lives; and Cain, living, dies.

Although spectators know that Abel will be liberated from hell by Christ, it is quite disturbing that his work, however keenly aligned with God's plan, is nonetheless inadequate. What Abel cannot effectuate is amelioration of humankind's spiritual plight, which will remain unalleviated for over four millennia. However, as a precursor of Christ, Abel has been viewed as successfully fulfilling his mission. For example, Kolve and Woolf both discuss the double typological significance of Abel. The lamb which he offers as a tithe typifies the eucharistic sacrifice, but the most important typological connection is Abel's death, which prefigures the Crucifixion (Kolve 66-67; Woolf, English Mystery, 124-125). Indeed, Kolve states that "Abel's place in the drama depends above all on his murder" (66). Despite his acknowledged figural importance, Abel is not the hero of the play; Woolf explains that Cain, not Abel, receives more dramatic attention, even during his slaying of Abel (124-125). Critics have viewed Abel's mission as sufficient in that Abel accomplishes all that is possible for him to do. But when we consider Abel's effectiveness as an appropriator of superabundance, I believe that he falls short. Abel's blood, crying out from the ground for vengeance, goes

unheeded for almost five thousand years (ll. 328-329). The implication that the contributory efforts of the faithful die with them in the ground is disquieting and taunting, demanding remediation.

In the plays of the patriarchs, Noah and Abraham and Isaac, grace descends from on high, ennobling human labor by imbuing both Noah and Abraham with supernatural strength to overcome physical frailty or spiritual weakness. While for Noah this suffusion of grace manifests itself through the recognizable work-gesture of carpentry, for Abraham his belief produces exchangeable commodity: Isaac the Son is spared by the ram, whose horns (cornu) have entangled him in the bushes. Divine intervention attunes spectators to the prospect of a saving commodity, and the cornucopian plenty suggested by the ram becomes analogous to the concept of God's bounty.

Noah

In Noah God's overbounteousness arrives in the imperceptible form of grace, much like a priceless commodity, acquired through the patriarch's prayer. Only through the indwelling of the Spirit does Noah acquire surpassing power, enabling him to overcome physical and spiritual limitations: old age, feebleness, and a conviction that he is unworthy to perform the daunting task of constructing the ark. Noah's opening prayer bears some resemblance to Christ's prayer to the Father at Gethsemane:

both invocations lament human weakness and gain an immediate response from God, fortifying flesh and spirit.²¹ While the typological significance of Noah as a type of Christ constructing the ark as a type of the Church has often been discussed, typology cannot explain what becomes evident as a conflict between ability and desire.²²

Noah's opening prayer expresses humankind's desperate need of salvation and conveys its collective desire for a Redeemer: "Oyle of mercy [God] Hus hight / As I haue Hard red, / To euery lifyng wight / that wold luf hym and dred" (ll. 46-47).²³ As Hans-Jürgen Diller has demonstrated, the patriarchs of the Towneley cycle, unlike its counterpart cycles, convey "something like a desire for the coming of Christ" ("Theological" 206). This "mood of longing,"

²¹ Iconography clearly depicts Noah as a type of Christ. To illustrate, fol. 8 in The Holkham Bible Picture Book portrays Noah emerging from the highest level of the ark, arms outstretched and raised, evoking the image of Christ on the cross (Hassall 74-76). His grasping a dove in his right hand and a raven in his left is meant to convey Christ's crucifixion between two thieves, one good and the other evil.

²² On the typology of Noah, see Danièlou 69-102, especially 81, 92. The Flood typifies Christ's death, the sacrament of baptism, and the Last Judgment. Noah's being delivered from the Flood signifies second birth and victory; for example, Christ's resurrection, the Christian's emergence from the waters of death through Christ, and deliverance during the last judgment through the ark of the Church.

²³ See Thomas Ramey Watson's argument that the dramatist uses the reference to the Oil of Mercy, which carries a sacramental meaning, to link Old and New Testaments (5-6).

whether conveyed through dialogue indicating anticipatory desire or reified through actions leading toward its fulfillment, consistently permeates the cycle (204-206). Further, it seems to me that desire becomes analogous to emptiness and may be communicated to spectators through action, dialogue, or gesture.

Specifically, Noah conveys his protracted desire for the Redeemer, a yearning which has been left unabated, by proclaiming his unflagging faith in God's fullness (l. 1, 65). This seems to be expressed through what Noah describes as his own withering away, his deflation: "And now I wax old, / seke, sory, and cold, / As muk apon mold / I widder away" (ll. 60-63). While elapsing years, decades, or centuries often serve to quantify in the cycle that which remains incalculable, the extent to which humankind needs a Savior, Noah's sense of withering away seems to mirror humankind's worsening condition. Deus, heeding Noah's call, repents having made man (l. 91), whom he characterizes as having transmuted emptiness into a debased form of fullness: "full low ligis he, / In erth hymself to stuf / with syn that displeasse me" (ll. 84-86).

That God's overabundance can transform the human agency of work is illustrated when Noah surmounts his limitations through the act of carpentry. As the ark takes shape according to God's blueprint, it resembles a medieval ship, reinforcing the pride and importance of the shipwright's

craft. Lynn White, Jr., confirms the rising status accorded to carpenters during the fifteenth century, an outgrowth of the enhanced image of Joseph, which was promulgated through the cult bearing his name ("The Iconography" 185).

Therefore the social order is represented in and through Noah's pride in his craft.

Inability exacerbated by desire intensifies Noah's plight. Only an influx of grace brings forth a sign of divine assistance (ll. 253-256). This infusion of God's imbuing strength is aptly depicted in The Holkham Bible Picture Book through a tree curving downward with Noah as he leans over to perform his work (Hassall, fol. 7, 72). Yet doubts mitigated by desire impose themselves upon his construction of the ark; the patriarch bemoans his breaking back, his doddering old age, and his brittle bones (ll. 264-265). As Diller states, the Towneley dramatist depicts the process of Noah's work rather than its static result. Not only is he portrayed as tiring by degrees, but we are able to discern the very moment when satisfaction arises in him as the perfected ark takes shape (l. 276), despite his limitations as a craftsman ("The Craftsmanship" 248).²⁴ As Chapter Two has established, labor expenditures are compensated when a product is exchanged for money or its counterpart, equitable goods and services; but estimated exchange value of a commodity is based upon a presumption of

²⁴ See Kajal Sengupta's comparable analysis (118).

utility. This transactive language is employed by Noah after having completed the ark: "This will euer endure / therof am I paide; / ffor why? / It is better wrought / Then I coude haif thoght" (ll. 283-286).²⁵ Through its forecasted utility of being able to withstand the flood, Noah's ark is indeed a fitting and finished work.

The co-mixture of worldly and mystical work in Noah seems to enunciate the vanity of human commerce when deprived of God's bounty. While the external manifestation of Noah's mission, the ark, will survive the deluge, souls produced in the postdiluvian world will join those lost in the flood. Noah's sacred work does not sufficiently compensate God for humankind's sin, nor does it offer hope that sin can be ameliorated through the vessel alone. God makes a covenant with Noah after the flood, as established in Genesis 9:8-17, that he will never destroy humankind with rains again. But sin continues to inundate the earth. Deus tells Abraham in the following play that the patriarch's ancestors have continued to fall prey to pride and other sins (ll. 49-52). Only God's overbounteousness can expiate human sin, sentiments Noah seems to convey in his closing

²⁵ Josie P. Campbell emphasizes God's friendship and humankind's obedience in the play. Citing these lines, she states that Noah "grasps intuitively something of the force that preserves life" after learning not to browbeat his wife as an exercise of his authority (83-84). Relevant to this study's emphasis upon work, Campbell reveals that "[h]usband and wife now work together...Uxor freely tends the helm, while Noah takes soundings of the depths of water" (83).

lines. Asked by his wife whether those lost can escape the pains of hell, Noah is uncertain but invests his faith in God's grace (ll. 550-558). Diller explains that the Old Testament patriarchs convey "uncertainty about the fate of their forebears and a vague hope of salvation," feelings that link them to the audience" ("Theological" 207).

As critics have discussed the typological importance of Noah, the just man's mission is seen as adequate to its purpose: his work is good enough. For example, Woolf in considering Noah a type of Christ and the ark a type of the Cross and the Church, states that "conflict between virtue and vice" is absent and the purpose of the Noah episode is to foreshadow the Redemption (English Mystery 133). Were Noah's work sufficient enough, in Towneley, a protestation of this assurance would exist. Yet in the subsequent play, Abraham, the devout patriarch signals to the audience that he, like Noah and his ancestors, will be incapable of effectuating what is most ameliorative to humankind. These disturbing sentiments are clear in Abraham's prognostication that, however faithful he may be, his work seems a futile gesture: "Now help, lord, adonay! / ffor, certis, I can no better wone,/ And ther is none that better may" (Abraham ll. 46-48).

Abraham and Isaac

That Abraham sacrificing Isaac would have been recognized as typifying the Father offering up his Son was

frequently emphasized in a range of sources.²⁶ A sermon in John Mirk's Festial reinforces the connection: "by Abraham 3e schull vndyrstonde pe Fadyr of Heuen, and by Isaac his sonne Ihesu Crist" (Erbe 77-78). That the redistribution of God's superabundance is close at hand becomes depicted in this play through the ram, which the Church Fathers established as a type of Christ.²⁷ The ram becomes further intriguing because it is equated with miraculous intervention through God's mercy. Isaac asks why no animal accompanies the pair as they ascend the hill (l. 167-168), yet spectators cannot help but note that the beast is nonetheless there (l. 262).²⁸ God's plenty is furthermore portrayed in the play as accessible; in order to propagate, Isaac must survive. God's promise to Abraham that his descendants will be as numerous as the stars contains within it an assurance of the Son's survival. Yet the spiritual counterpart of this projected bounty, a corresponding

²⁶ On the typology of the Sacrifice of Isaac, see Daniélou 115-130. Abraham believed that God desired him to kill Isaac but that God would miraculously do what he was capable of: resurrect the child (123).

²⁷ Note that Rosemary Woolf substantiates that the emotional component of the ram appearing in Isaac's stead is usually glossed over: "the release of Isaac with the sacrifice of the ram is normally represented in a markedly perfunctory manner, and without the emotional emphasis which on the ordinary level of the story it would seem to deserve" ("The Effect" 824).

²⁸ Whether a live animal was used to represent the ram is unclear. Rendall suggests that a doll might have been employed to represent the ram inasmuch as slaying a sheep onstage would have been a "messy business" ("Visual" 230).

harvest of souls, remains a distant hope without a Redeemer.

The redemptive sacrifice is further evoked through the stage-action of Isaac bearing a bundle of sticks upon his back. Whether the enactment of shouldering a burdensome weight was recognized as work or not, its theological import would have remained clear. The compendium of biblical typology Miroure of Mans Salvacionne establishes that "ysaac on his awen shulderes / wodde mekely bare & broght" and makes the typological connection: "crist bare on hys shuldres / a cross fulle hevvy and lange" (Huth, XXIIm, p. 80).

When we remember that Isaac is a type of Christ, Abraham's offering-up and receiving-back can be recognized as the Passion and Resurrection (Danièlou 123). Inasmuch as Isaac escapes from immolation and a ram is substituted in his stead, patristic commentary reassigns the type of Christ as now signified by the ram.²⁹ This typological link has been much discussed, but the cornucopian plenty suggested by the ram has not.³⁰ That bounty is suggested in the play in

²⁹ Danièlou clarifies Tertullian's patristic commentary. While Isaac carried his own bundle of sticks to the site of sacrifice, he was also saved by the wood through the ram, whose "horns (cornibus haerens) in a bush [were] offered instead." This pertains to Christ in that not only did Christ bear the cross upon his shoulders but hung "from the ends (cornibus) of the cross, with a crown of thorns on his head" (124-125).

³⁰ My argument is based upon Shell's chapter "The Blank Check," only one sentence of which specifically mentions the ram as an emblem of cornucopia (41).

several ways through the horns of the ram. The ram becomes entangled in the bush because of his horns; God's bounty remains present although unseen. The horns as cornucopian emblem represent the projected multitudes now enabled through Isaac's blood-line; that is, Isaac will survive and propagate because of the horns. In a less discernible way, the horn of salvation is suggested, which anticipates the substitutionary atonement as being the only sacrifice efficacious enough to yield soteriological plenitude to humankind.³¹ What saves Isaac from certain death is the ram, which unlike the animal Abel has been viewed as offering up to God, inexplicably becomes visible as though created or produced; that is, as a gift. Marc Shell describes the cornucopia as the infinitely large gift which can be distinguished from Pauline grace in that it does not convey the sense of being free (24). Certainly legends about the Holy Grail, as narrated within vernacular literature, provide points of intersection with the idea of cornucopia reified by the ram in the Towneley play. Inasmuch as the ram typifies Christ, both symbolization and production, as Shell explains them, would be represented within the play.³² The controversial issue of how a thing

³¹ On the significance of the horn, within a Christian context, see Shell 41 n. 45. He cites Luke 1:69 and Psalm 132:17; we may add Revelation 5:6 as substantiation.

³² Shell describes production: a horn is a member of the group of worldly things; it is "homogeneous with its products and produces itself...a horn of plenty may produce

may both symbolize all things and remain the source of them is explained theologically through etymology in the Gospel of John (1:1-2): "Before the world was created, the Word already existed; he was with God, and he was the same as God." Production becomes manifested through God made flesh in the Son (41).

While the horn of salvation symbolized by the ram in the Towneley play is not a worldly thing, the ram itself is and through its immolation ceases to have reduplicating value. God's own promise that he will help humankind, the first proclamation of assurance he utters in the cycle, conditions spectators to expect to receive God's bounty (l. 49). Further, there is no question that Isaac is equated with the ram; and as has been substantiated, the ram was well-known to have signified Christ.³³ Deus commands Abraham at the outset: take with the, Isaac, thi son, / As a beest to sacryfy" (l. 70-71). The transmutation of substituting victim for victim trains spectators to interpret the ram, whose horns have entangled him in the bush, as one whose literal substitution for Isaac assures the blood-line of Abraham's descendants. But more mystically and fortuitously for humankind, the ram signifies

a horn" (40). Yet the horn is also symbolic; it is not of this world (40-41).

³³ Danièlou explains that Isaac signified Christ's divinity whereas the ram signified his humanity (130). The typology of the Passion is "as it were divided between Isaac and the ram" (126).

the more efficacious atonement which lies ahead: Christ's death upon the cross in expiation of human sin.³⁴

Only Christ's redemptive work will effectuate the release of God's bounty; therefore, Isaac's sacred work is not plentiful enough. While he is the beneficiary of God's overabundance, he is not capable of producing that commodity himself. For example, Kolve explains that even if Isaac been sacrificed, his death would lack the efficacy to aid humankind, whether the living or the dead (74). Even if desirous of doing so, Isaac cannot pay the price of human sin and therefore cannot perform work that is sufficiently salvific. However, critics who discuss Isaac's typological significance generally view the sacred work of Isaac, precursor of Christ, as adequate. While Isaac cannot bear the cross to Calvary, he can carry a bundle of sticks upon his back to the site of sacrifice. Although he cannot die for humankind's sin, he can submit to the Father in willing acceptance of certain death. There is no question that within this typological construct he is heroic. Woolf notes that Isaac, and not Abraham, is the hero of the medieval plays. While the main point of the episode is to convey Abraham's test of faith, the dramatists seem to concentrate upon Isaac's consent, she states ("The Effect" 813). Moreover, Kolve establishes that the fulfillment of Christ's

³⁴ Further explanation of the ram may be found in Robert M. Longworth (119) and Thomas Rendall ("Visual" 229-231).

redemption depends upon Isaac as a figure (74). Inasmuch as my focus upon work in the cycle evaluates work as it pertains to reacquiring God's bounty, I view Isaac and other precursors of Christ like Abel or Noah as coming up short in their labor. Within the construct I employ, the typological system poses limitations. Unlike the typological system which gives hope and deems the patriarchs faithful workers whose contributions suffice, the compensatory system which I have posited reveals that unless God's superabundance is released, all work, at times including Christ's work before the redemptive sacrifice, is clearly inefficacious.³⁵

The Towneley dramatist creates a sense of heightened tension which seeks alleviation through Christ's redemptive work on Calvary; he therefore draws attention to the enormous bounty humankind has lost. By portraying the supersaturated universe being represented in the cycle's opening play as fraught with potential for reacquisition, he invites spectators to identify with work as a means of reaccessing that plentiful state. This work, already accomplished by the worker-exemplar God, has been lost by, and therefore must be regained through, humankind. Not until Lazarus speaks out in bitterness and pain for all those suffering spiritual deprivation does this

³⁵ Pamela King demonstrates that the figural approach to medieval drama is static (47). She urges scholars to develop approaches that acknowledge "the moving, changing combinations of signs where the figural describes only the static" (57).

unameliorated tension reach crisis proportions. Staunchly faithful, consummately productive Old Testament figures like Noah or Abraham, appear to have worked in vain, their works woefully insufficient as evidenced when the patriarchs land in hell.

CHAPTER FOUR

CHRIST'S MINISTRY: LAZARUS

During the heightened negotiations that take place in The Conspiracy, the first play in Towneley's Passion sequence, two of Pilate's soldiers hazard a striking testimonial to Christ's power. In admiration they deliver an eyewitness account of Christ's most regenerative miracle: his raising of Lazarus from a four-day-old tomb (ll. 126-129). This tribute to Christ's potency, inappropriately delivered to Pilate in his own stronghold, is compounded by what they report of the miracle's effect: people are praising Christ all over the land (ll. 130-133). The soldiers' uninhibited enthusiasm for Christ's charismatic power is nonetheless not as embarrassing as Pilate's response: he must simply endure the insult. Without apparent reason he allows himself to be seen as impotent before the ecclesiastical authorities Caiaphas and Annas as these soldiers clearly testify at risk to their own lives.

This incident from The Conspiracy demonstrates how thoroughly Christ, through the fullness of his works, has already outmaneuvered his enemies. By infiltrating their sphere of power, he has transmuted what should be a mere report of an adversary's exploits into an unexpected

concession to that foe's unstoppable. This point is not made clear during Towneley's ministry sequence, which contains only John the Baptist and Lazarus and appears to exclude Christ's adversaries. The Passion sequence amply illustrates the double perspective that the Towneley dramatist develops on Christ's ministry: as Robert A. Brawer has noted, though his primary audience is really the faithful, even his enemies cannot help proclaiming his inexplicable power ("The Dramatic Function" 172).

In The Conspiracy Christ's efficacy is reaffirmed by the soldiers who go unpunished for their unwise words and by Pilate, who fails to protest enough. While an affirmation of Christ's power exists in the ministry play which historically precedes The Conspiracy and in which his resurrection of Lazarus is actually staged, that affirmation is curiously understated. Of the 114 lines which Lazarus utters, only 13 offer praise and glory to Christ (ll. 103-110; 212-216). That so few lines have been allotted to Lazarus's praise of Christ cannot be satisfactorily explained as one of the consequences of multiple authorship. As Martin Stevens has shown, the "Wakefield author" should be considered the cycle's chief writer, reviser, or compiler, and its dominant editorial voice.¹ Rather, this

¹ Besides writing the five plays normally attributed to him, the Wakefield author is responsible for revising nine plays (including Lazarus) and reworking a number of plays from the York cycle. See Martin Stevens, Four Middle English Mystery Cycles, 156-157. Stevens contends that the

startling underrepresentation of God's glory in resurrecting Lazarus makes one think that the dramatist uses Lazarus to illustrate some more general human shortcoming or cognitive failure. In the play a resurrected corpse issues forth from the earth, briefly acknowledging Christ as worker of the miracle, but then delivering a gallingly ungrateful monologue characterized by haughty self-display and unrighteous condemnation. Exhorting bystanders to behold his corrupted body and their own degenerate souls, Lazarus seems more like an enraged mummy ejected from his sarcophagus than a recipient of new life. Moreover, the unappreciative, unredeemed Lazarus calls into question how successful Christ's work can really be in a material world totally at odds with the spirit. Despite being the beneficiary of Christ's superabundance, Lazarus broadcasts macabre emptiness. Not only does his display of ingratitude make work appear to turn back upon itself, revealing Christ's miracle as defective or controversial, but it concomitantly leans forward toward the redemptive sacrifice, eliciting that redistributive act. Within the social milieu, the depiction of a believer undervaluing Christ's work while his adversaries esteem it further suggests a potentially threatening transversal of social order.

While the close correspondence between medieval

Wakefield author's "editorial hand must be present everywhere, even if merely in what was retained and what was rejected in the final version" (157).

preaching and the Corpus Christi plays has led some scholars to view Lazarus's lengthy oration in terms of its sermonic content or technique, an analysis of the speech when detached from the miracle of revivification leaves important questions unanswered. For example, Gerald R. Owst establishes the almost verbatim relationship between Lazarus's declamation and Bromyard's sermon on the fate of the dead in Summa Predicantium (487). Inasmuch as sermons and plays share the same subject matter and hortatory objectives, some comparisons may be warranted, Marianne G. Briscoe suggests. Yet the sermons should be considered far more important as disseminators and upholders of "traditional scriptural truths and exegetical interpretations" than as "sources of literary invention or topoi" ("Preaching and Medieval" 150-172 passim).² In Towneley, the spiritual implications being drawn through Christ's resurrection of Lazarus are what appear so disturbing. If all will be as Lazarus is, must even believers (l. 90) quake with fear at the prospect of the second death?³ While Lazarus is an anomaly, the dramatist

² According to John W. O'Malley, S.J., by the late Middle Ages three different styles of preaching were being practiced: the university sermon, the popular preaching of the mendicants, and the homily. See his "Introduction: Medieval Preaching" 10.

³ During the late Middle Ages memento mori objects and transi tombs were inscribed with the sentiment, "I was like you, and you will be like me." This observation was designed to appeal directly to the spectator and derived from moralistic writings or sermons of the twelfth to

seems to pose this question by exposing humankind's spiritual condition as devastatingly hollow and then counterpointing this emptiness against the known plenitude of the Savior.

The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate that Christ's work is largely misunderstood in this cycle, even by believers, and that the Towneley dramatist uses the resurrected Lazarus to speak in anger and confusion for all those caught in his position: doomed without Christ's redemptive sacrifice. By depicting human desire sunk to its nadir, the dramatist utilizes stark deprivation to enunciate desperation. When humankind's hollow core is flaunted, humankind is revealed as hopelessly lost without the Cross. That emptiness is ultimately revealed as eliciting fullness through the reappropriation of overbounteousness enabled by Christ's death. The Savior's work is misunderstood in the cycle because it is performed on two irreconcilable levels: the divine and the human. Yet the gap between his divinely ordained work and human interpretation of that work can be expressed through the element of time. Frank Kermode has drawn distinctions between chronos (passing time), the time-scheme of fallen humankind, and kairos (fulfilled time), the time-scheme of the Father, which remains "charged with a meaning derived from its relation to the end" (35-64 passim,

fourteenth centuries. See Kathleen Cohen, Metamorphosis, 44.

especially 44-49, and 86-87).⁴ Elapsing temporal time becomes equated with a progressively unmitigated emptiness in that Christ appears to be not working. In Towneley humankind views Christ's work as characterized by delay, disbelief, or confusion, but from the timeless synoptic perspective of the Father, the work of the Son is approved and construed to perfection.

Earthly confusion about Christ's work is most conspicuously represented in Lazarus's ungrateful and intemperate speech, but the dilemma of his work's timing is also manifested in other episodes of the play. After providing an overview of the play's structure, its placement in the manuscript, and its critical history, I will briefly discuss patristic commentary on the Lazarus episode as exemplified in the treatment of Augustine. After examining the opening episode in Perea, where Christ's disciples attempt to dissuade him from moving toward the increasingly dangerous vicinity of Judea, I will analyze the episode in Bethany, where Martha and Mary express disappointment at Christ's late arrival. Both of these episodes depict Christ operating as the axis mundi on the social plane, a leader flanked by followers, a lord among friends. Finally, I will investigate Lazarus's reemergence into an earthly plane which to him appears much worse than the hell from which he

⁴ Regarding St. Augustine's Book 11 of The Confessions, see Paul Ricoeur, Time and Narrative, 1:5-30 passim.

has been delivered. Because his sermon sharply departs from Scripture and underrepresents the glory associated with Christ's most regenerative miracle, the hostile oration seems to undo the beneficial results of Christ's work by revealing it as a futile gesture in a hopelessly corrupt world. Further, within the wider scope of the cycle, Lazarus's speech draws attention to the incompleteness of the truly efficacious work, Christ's sacrifice, and seems to mandate it, which contributes to bringing redemption forth.

That Christ's work is integral to the structural design of Lazarus is indicated by the position of the miracle within the wider framework of the play. Christ's resuscitation of Lazarus links the first part of the play, which closely follows the Gospel of John, to the second part, which departs from Scripture by reflecting the fifteenth-century belief that Lazarus, raised from the dead, delivered an eyewitness account of the torments of hell.⁵ Initially, Christ appears as a central character: surrounded by his disciples in Perea, and then approached, separately, by Martha and Mary in Bethany. Following his raising of Lazarus, Christ recedes into the background while Lazarus predominates. In this second part of the play Lazarus

⁵ See Edward J. Gallagher, "The Visio Lazari" 331-339; Clifford Davidson, "The Fate of the Damned" 41-66, especially 56.

delivers a chilling warning from the grave.⁶ The text's bipartite structure makes it clear that Christ's miraculous work of resurrecting Lazarus, situated at the center, is the keystone of the play.

Because the Towneley compiler has placed Lazarus at the end of the cycle's manuscript, rather than in its correct chronological order after John the Baptist (Play 19) and before The Conspiracy (Play 20), several scholars have argued that its significance must be viewed with relation to The Judgment (Play 30), the play that precedes Lazarus (Play 31) in the manuscript.⁷ For example, James W. Earl maintains that Lazarus effectively concludes the cycle by depicting a supra-historical eighth age, that epoch into which each soul moves upon death (452). Further, George A. West contends that Lazarus's speech does not look ahead to Christ's Passion but rather ahead to death and judgment, thus providing the cycle with its second Judgment play (325-326). Contrary to Earl and West, most scholars hold the view that the Towneley Lazarus has been copied out of historical sequence in the manuscript and that its rightful

⁶ The genre is the soul's address to the body. All dialogue formulated between the body and soul has as its source St. Paul's epistle to the Galatians in 5:16-17.

⁷ The Hanging of Judas (Play 32) appears to be the last play in the manuscript. However, as editors England and Pollard indicate, the play is written in a sixteenth-century hand, 393 n. 21.

location is at the end of Christ's ministry.⁸ Earl and West, who disagree with the theory that the drama has been misplaced, use Lazarus's concluding speech on death and judgment to prove their arguments. But by focusing upon judgment, mentioned only by Lazarus in the last half of the play, these scholars deemphasize the first half, during which Christ is preeminent. I side with those who argue that chronological sequence is essential to the cycles and that Lazarus should therefore be considered Towneley's concluding play in the ministry sequence.⁹

Scholars have generally focused upon Lazarus's speech, which they view as setting the tone for the entire play.¹⁰ This type of approach extrapolates backwards, assuming that spectators would have imposed Lazarus's concluding speech upon their interpretation of earlier events, which derive from Scripture. Even if the contemporary were superimposed upon the Scriptural, the quandary of how the second is

⁸ Full-scale studies which consider Lazarus a play of the ministry sequence are the following: V. A. Kolve, The Play Called Corpus Christi 79-81; Rosemary Woolf, The English Mystery Plays 227-231; Peter W. Travis, Dramatic Design in the Chester Cycle 160-162.

⁹ The problem with the placement of the play within the manuscript has caused one scholar to exclude the play from her discussion of Christ's ministry. See Lauren Lepow, "Drama of Communion" 412 n. 1.

¹⁰ Scholars whose arguments extend beyond (or possibly exclude) Lazarus's speech include the following: Clifford Davidson, "The Visual Arts" 45-64; Seth Daniel Riemer, "The Dramatic Significance" 37-47; Kevin P. Roddy, "Epic Qualities" 155-172.

causally related to the first remains. For example, Kathleen M. Ashley argues that Lazarus's speech deemphasizes Christ's miraculous act by focusing upon death and the preparation of one's soul for death. Lazarus's homiletic oration is directed to the audience, not the actors, and therefore "takes us out of the biblical framework entirely and puts us in fifteenth-century England" ("The Resurrection" 234). Within this chapter I view Christ and his work in a linear progression. When seen from this perspective, Lazarus's declamation can only be rendered interpretable with reference to Christ, whose most miraculous work appears to have gone mysteriously awry. Using the economic model posited in Chapter Two enables us to comprehend Christ as referent: the immovable center who, having physical presence, is nonetheless discernible as moving through passing-time. Christ, through his resurrection of Lazarus, metamorphoses temporal (horizontal) time so that its eternal (vertical) significance becomes seen.¹¹ It is notable that Lazarus's speech reveals the degeneracy of any worldly work when severed from God's production system. Therefore, the risen Lazarus appears to

¹¹ The concept of verticality in regard to time made sacred is derived from Eliade, particularly Chapters One and Two, 20-113. The idea of Jacob's ladder as the gate of heaven illustrates this verticality (26). Eliade would constitute Christ's resurrection of Lazarus as a hierophany, where the sacred manifests itself through Creation (11). Moreover, Kermode discusses chronos, or passing time, as being more qualitative, whereas, kairos is constituted as "critical time" (49).

be a deconstructed, imperfect work. Yet by referring (or not referring) to (the lack of) Christ, the completed work-as-sign refers ahead as if in anticipation of completion, becoming both a physical and a spiritual phenomenon.

Patristic commentary on the Gospel of John, formulated by Augustine, establishes two exegetical traditions which underlie the Lazarus episode.¹² Although the extent to which the Towneley dramatist was influenced by patristic commentary cannot be proven, these traditions provide insight into how Christ's resurrection of Lazarus was understood theologically.¹³ Augustine states that the resurrection of Lazarus prefigures Christ's own resurrection, and ultimately, the resurrection of humankind.¹⁴ He further views Christ's raising of Lazarus as an allegory of confession and penance. In this sense, Lazarus's four-day burial represents the most entrenched type of sin, Christ's call to Lazarus is a call to

¹² See Allen J. Frantzen, "St. Erkenwald" 157-171, especially 159-161. Frantzen cites Towneley as a version of the exegetical tradition in which Lazarus can be seen as a type of the resurrection; however, I believe that the other tradition, in which Lazarus can be seen as a fallen sinner, is also present in the play.

¹³ On the influence of the Church Fathers during the fifteenth century as reflected in library collections, see Pearl Kibre 276-280. According to Kibre, the writings of St. Augustine were particularly prevalent, p. 279. See also E. F. Jacob, The Fifteenth Century, 678, 684.

¹⁴ All references to Augustine use the following source: Homilies on the Gospel of St. John, and his First Epistle, vol. 2 (Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1849). See Homily 49.

confession, and Lazarus's walking free from his funeral garments signifies release from his sins.¹⁵ Both of these traditions undergird what audiences see when Lazarus, raised from the dead, emerges from his tomb. But neither tradition can resolve what here is a dramatic dilemma: the apparent disjunction between Christ's miraculous work, characterized by its consummate fullness and performed to engender belief, and Lazarus's unsettling monologue, marked by an abject emptiness and succeeding in engendering fear.¹⁶ As I hope to show, the clash between these disparate realms, one delivering a message of love and the other a message of fear, can best be seen by analyzing all of the play's episodes, not exclusively the final episode during which Lazarus emerges from his tomb as a malcontent.

Christ's disciples figure prominently in Lazarus's opening episode, where he informs them they are to leave Perea for Bethany (ll. 1-4). Socially conceived, they can be equated with any horizontal configuration governed by Christ, who remains fixed as cosmic center. The dramatist has omitted Christ's earlier conversation with his disciples as established in the biblical account (John 11:4), and the Towneley play begins rather abruptly with Christ's stern command that they must leave at once for Bethany. In the

¹⁵ Augustine, Homily 49, 24.

¹⁶ West states that the play "shows love and elicits fear," but he focuses entirely upon the fear aspect of the play as demonstrated by Lazarus's concluding speech, 320.

Gospel of John, Christ's relationship with Lazarus and his sisters has been described as one of love (John 11:3, 11:5); and upon receiving word from Martha and Mary that Lazarus has fallen ill, Christ has reacted by saying, "The final result of this sickness will not be the death of Lazarus; this has happened in order to bring glory to God..." (John 11:4). Inasmuch as Lazarus will rally from his illness, Christ's statement is true in the literal sense, but certainly Lazarus will ultimately die again. Further, Christ's miraculous act of raising Lazarus from the dead will serve as a catalyst to arouse outrage against him, leading to his death upon the cross.¹⁷ On another level, Christ's resurrection of Lazarus will promote belief, thereby preventing spiritual death. As Augustine explains, Lazarus's sickness "was not for death, but rather for a miracle, which being wrought, men should believe in Christ, and avoid the true death" (Homily 49, 6).

In the Towneley play Christ's relationship with his disciples is effectively compressed into this introductory scene, important as the first and only representation of them in the ministry sequence. Even though they demonstrate considerable misunderstanding about the timing of his work, their befuddlement is partly the result of the enigmatic language of the Savior. However, harmless confusion about Christ's work deteriorates into recrimination and animosity

¹⁷ See Brendan Byrne, S.J., Lazarus, 39-40.

as the play moves from the insular domain of the disciples toward the hazardous domain of the Jewish mourners, and outward yet again toward the cosmic domain of a Lazarus-indicted unrepentant humankind. Employing the spherical model from Chapter Two enables us to conceptualize Christ's expanding dimension of influence.

Christ opens the play by commanding his disciples: "Commes now, brethere, and go With me; / We Will pas furth untill Iude, / To betany will we Weynde, / To vyset lazare that is oure freynde" (ll. 1-4). Although Christ and his disciples are only to "vyset" Lazarus, there is an urgent tone to Christ's request. As W. H. Cadman points out, Christ is supernaturally aware that Lazarus has already died (426). The Son's purposeful delay, which Martha and Mary sorrowfully communicate through an intensified and unabated desire in the next scene, is established at the outset of Lazarus, indicating that his work is enacted within God's time continuum even while it is rendered interpretable and thus seems grounded in the temporal sphere.

According to Sandra M. Schneiders's account of the Gospel according to John, Christ's delay in Perea follows a pattern that characterizes his ministry. Delay within the Towneley play underscores how urgently humankind desires Christ. At the Marriage Feast in Cana, Mary had registered the crowd's need for wine, to which the Son responded: "You must not tell me what to do...My time has not yet come"

(John 2:1-4). At Galilee a nobleman whose son was dying in Capernaum had asked the Savior to come immediately to heal his son, whereupon he replied, "Go; your son will live!" Having believed Christ's words, the nobleman went his way, later to pinpoint the hour of healing as that very hour when the miracle worker had declared his son healed (John 4:46-53). And in response to his disbelieving brethren, who had invited him to perform his works in Judea at the feast of the tabernacles, Christ told them: "The right time for me has not yet come" (John 7:2-8). Schneiders points out that all of these refusals or delays "emphasize the sovereign independence of Jesus' action in relation to human initiative." This sovereign independence, she argues, is especially important in his resurrection of Lazarus because the incident becomes "Jesus' culminating self-revelation on the eve of the passion" (47-48).

Throughout the Towneley Lazarus it becomes increasingly apparent that the work of the Savior aligns itself with God's, not humankind's, timing. His work is expressed through material form in the human dimension but is not grounded in that dimension. Rather, Christ's work manifests divine time intersecting with human time through the paradigmatic gesture of work. Passing-time (chronos) becomes suffused with meaning when the Savior's resurrection of Lazarus (kairos) cuts through linear time on a vertical

axis.¹⁸ Furthermore, the miracle demonstrates how God's fullness distributed through physical regeneration implodes without a corresponding spiritual transformation. In a subsequent scene Mary and Martha react to Lazarus's death and their own desire for spiritual satiation in different ways. Mary's tears of sorrow and gesture of submission at Christ's feet are not dramatized in Towneley; yet her conflated identity as the repentant sinner who anointed Christ's feet (Luke 7:36-50) associate her with the transformative power of human faith, the spiritual benefits derived from conforming to the time-scheme of the Father, and the public sphere of expression. Martha, however, renders the Father's time mystical and deems faith a cognitive choice to be expressed in the private sphere. By intellectualizing faith, she converts a sublime spiritual quality into a facile yet insufficient mental aid. Accordingly, she distinguishes between Christ the human worker, from whom she expects immediate redress and Christ the divine worker, from whom she expects a more distinct eternal remedy.

Because Christ's work falls within a time frame that is

¹⁸ Studies on "time," variously defined, have been conducted from a diverse range of perspectives, among them the theological, mythical, narratological, and social. Particularly helpful to this chapter have been the following: Mircea Eliade, The Sacred and the Profane, 688-113 passim; Frank Kermode, The Sense, 3-89 passim. Regarding medieval drama, see William A. Scally, "Four Concepts," 81-82; and Michal Kobińska, "Historic Time," 180.

known to Christ but unknown to man, his disciples cannot fathom why he now commands them to enter Judea, a dangerous zone from which he has narrowly escaped death. Peter cautions Christ against leaving Perea for Judea: "The Iues halden you for thare fo; / I red ye come not in that stede, / ffor if ye do then be ye dede" (ll. 8-10). John reminds them that past clashes with the Jews have proven that they cannot be trusted (ll. 11-15). And Thomas recalls earlier incidents in Judea, where Christ was almost slain (ll. 15-16). The disciples' sense of foreboding about moving toward Judea is based upon what they have seen and heard: the Jews have denounced Christ and have twice attempted to stone him (John 8:59 and 10:31). Because the disciples cannot conceptualize the spiritual nature of the Savior's work, they view this mission from the standpoint of bodily harm.

Biblical narrative records Christ's response to his disciples' sense of pervading doom: are there not twelve hours in the day? During daylight, he explains to them, a man cannot stumble (John 11:9). What Christ tells the disciples here has been told to them before: his earthly work must be accomplished while the time allotted to him remains. This image of opportunities ebbing away recalls the paradigm of deflated volume associated with the redistribution of God's bounty. After restoring sight to the man born blind, Christ had told his disciples: "we must do the work of him who sent me; night is coming when no one

can work" (John 9:4). There is also the sense, as Augustine has remarked, that Christ is the spiritual day and his disciples, who represent the twelve hours in the day, must concede his sovereignty and follow him: "[t]he hours follow the day, not the day the hours." They should not only follow him but invest their faith in him, expelling all doubt, which is the night" (Homily 49, 8). Night can also be construed as death of the soul, and Augustine explains that the night in which no man can work is an eternity in hell. Therefore he tells believers, "if we work now, this is day, this is Christ" (Homily 44, 6). All of these interpretations pertain, to various degrees, in Lazarus. Rapidly elapsing temporal time imposes an earthly limit on Christ's work, and encroaching night (both doubt and eternal death) threatens the soul. Emptiness suffuses itself upon the enterprise.

The timely movement that is so characteristic of Christ's ministry is conveyed in this dramatic episode; there is no refusing his request to move on. When his disciples fail to understand the wider meaning Christ seeks to convey by telling them, "[L]azare oure freynde is fallyn on slepe" (l. 20), he must bluntly tell them that Lazarus is dead (l. 30). Just as Christ's disciples do not understand that sleep signifies death, they cannot comprehend the nature of Christ's work. Thus they must be spoken to brusquely: "There I say you now at last / leyfe this speche

and go we fast" (ll. 31-32). Christ's suggestion that deeds are preferable to words anticipates the juxtaposition of the active Martha and the contemplative Mary in the following scene, thereby evoking the social work-milieu. As Christ and his disciples leave Perea, Thomas's fainthearted pledge illustrates the level of his commitment to the work of Christ ahead: "I hope to god ye shall not fynde / None of vs shall lefe behynde; / ffor any parell that may befall / Weynde we With oure master all" (ll. 35-38). By contrast, the biblical Thomas utters words conveying not only a sense of destiny, but also a willingness to participate in that unknown: "Let us all go along [to Bethany] with the Teacher, so that we may die with him" (John 11:16). The disciples' expressed fears illustrate their lack of transcendent faith, a spiritual attribute not quite achieved by Martha in the subsequent scene.

As Christ approaches Bethany, the grieving Martha, desirous of amelioration through Christ's fullness, rushes forward to meet him, saying: "help me, lorde, and gif me red! / lazare my broder now is dede," (ll. 39-40). Martha, signifying the active life, and her sister Mary, representing the contemplative life, were standard representations of lives sanctioned by Christ in Luke 10:38-42 and made known to audiences through such works as Meditations on the Life of Christ (245-290). Through their connection to antithetical forms of work seen operating in

the social milieu, they can be viewed as representing the polarities on the horizontal plane of the economic model, which I proposed in Chapter Two. This bipolar social distinction does not pit one form of work against the other but points inward toward Christ, the referent, whose work has been urgently sought.

Since Lazarus's fate has already been decided, Martha reaches for spiritual understanding that will assuage her own intense grief. Christ's failure to respond to her brother's illness is deeply wounding; the sisters' message had conveyed the expectation that Christ would assuredly aid them: "Lord, your dear friend is sick" (John 11:3). As Augustine interprets the passage, the sisters' assumption of redress reveals their faith: "Enough that [Christ] know it: for Thou dost not love and forsake" (Homily 49, 5). Martha's acute distress is intensified when she sees Christ approaching because, as she views it, he has forsaken her in her hour of need. But respectful even in her grief, Martha judiciously stops short of reproaching Christ for disappointing her and instead invokes the memory of Christ's love for Lazarus: "[Lazarus] was to the both lefe and dere; / he had not dyed had thou bene here" (ll. 41-42). Although Christ's apparent refusal to heed the sisters' message has not diminished his stature, his presence keenly exacerbates Martha's grief. Her words seem to convey the regret that Christ, who possesses life-generating power, has arrived too

late to deploy that selfsame potency. In terms of the economic model proposed earlier, Christ as social agent can be envisioned as both working and not-working. That he contains within himself the ability to enact an extremely productive work but (seemingly) refuses to perform that work directs attention to the contradiction inherent within him.

Yet even now, Martha states in the Gospel, she knows unequivocally that whatever Christ asks of his Father will be given to him (John 11:22). This statement of enduring faith despite present circumstances is not a direct petition that Christ raise Lazarus for "how knew she whether it would be expedient for her brother to rise again?" (Homily 49, 13). Certainly when Christ later directs bystanders to remove the tombstone, Martha's protestation reveals that she does not expect Lazarus to emerge revived (John 11:39).

When responding to her honest appraisal that Christ's presence in Bethany could have saved Lazarus, the Towneley Christ consoles her: "Martha, [M]artha, thou may be fayn, / Thi brothere shall rise and lif agayn" (ll. 43-44). As Augustine explains, Christ's proclamation is ambiguous because he does not explicitly say that he himself will raise Lazarus from the dead (Homily 49, 14). Because Martha misunderstands the Savior's timing, she both mystifies and demystifies his work. That she does so seems to illustrate how humankind transmutes into interpretable terms truths it fails to comprehend. Inasmuch as she attributes Lazarus's

death to Christ's absence from Bethany, she equates him with efficacious remedy. This connection between Christ and immediate results harkens back to the episode in Luke, where Martha expects him to reprimand Mary for indolence (Luke 10:40-42). By demystifying his labors, she renders his actions knowable: his work is viewed on the human plane as active, productive, and responsive to believers' needs. On the other hand, Martha also deems his mission mystical. Her sense of "even now" is more a confirmation of transcendent faith than a plea for corrective action (John 11:22). Even her interpretation of Christ's statement that Lazarus will rise again is projected into the inconsolably distant future (ll. 45-50). Martha's confusion about her Lord's timing hampers her ability to rise to the next level of understanding.

After Martha misconstrues Christ's proclamation that Lazarus will rise again, Christ arrestingly turns to the audience, saying: "I Warne you, both man and wyfe, / That I am rysyng, and I am life" (ll. 51-52). Whoever truly believes in him, he enunciates, will be granted eternal life despite the certainty of physical death (ll. 53-56). These words implicate spectators by referring them to the social-construct of marriage, both partners of which must look inward (invest faith) in Christ, cosmic center of that bond. Further, as J. D. Jones explains, Christ's "I am" expresses what is inherent in himself; it is not anything he has to

effect (112). Christ's exhortation to believe in him alone is reminiscent of the Bread of Life discourse, where he had told clamorers after miracles: they sought him not because they witnessed the multiplication of the loaves but because they satiated themselves on the bounty of bread. Christ had told the crowd: "Do not work for food that spoils; instead, work for the food that lasts for eternal life" (John 6:24-29). Martha's result-oriented conception of work has clearly caused her the most sorrow. Like the clamorers after Christ, she has not ascended to the sublime level of faith and therefore cannot express what she now expects from him. In the biblical account it is Martha who is privy to Christ's self-revelation and who is privately asked to reaffirm her faith (John 11:26), but in Towneley "both man and wyfe" are compelled to join her in this manifesto of belief (ll. 51, 58-60). Christ's startling admonition to the audience creates a mood of fear and immediacy, making it clear that the failure of spectators to comprehend the spiritual principle of non-contingent faith will have disastrous consequences. That humankind will be forever deprived of apparatus to effect its own redress is accordingly emphasized.

Although Martha affirms her faith, deference prevents her from articulating what she cannot conceptualize (ll. 58-60). This limited understanding is shown in the Gospel account, where she professes belief in Christ by citing

conventional messianic titles (John 11:27); he is the Christ (Messiah), the Son of God, the One who will come into the world (Byrne 53-54). In Towneley, Martha becomes a cerebral spokesperson for the disciples, who, after the opening episode, recede into the background. As one who can render grief intellectual, she poses a sharp contrast to Mary, whose role is condensed in Towneley. Unlike Martha, Mary will bring a crowd including in its numbers fault-finding mourners who will later report Christ to the Pharisees (John 11:31, 46). Furthermore, she will throw herself, weeping, at Christ's feet (John 11:32). Finally, Christ will respond to her tears of despair by shedding tears of his own, an act eliciting condemnation from those among the Jewish mourners who revile him (John 11:35, 37).

Mary's entrance signals a convergence of forces: the believers represented by Martha and Mary, Christ's disciples, and the Jewish mourners who undergo conversion; and the adversaries represented by the Jewish mourners who scoff at his tears.¹⁹ Christ's widening sphere of influence invokes the circular structure, posited in Chapter Two, which theorizes how Christ is processed theologically, socially, and dramatically. Here we may observe that the social demographics of Christ's work is represented. As I

¹⁹ The convergence of forces is clearly signaled in the play, as will be discussed, by Martha's reference to a "bande" of mourners, who accompany Mary onstage. Biblical narrative and medieval sources establish that some of these mourners revile Christ, while others praise him.

have illustrated, when Christ's work is viewed from a social (horizontal) perspective, it encompasses both the damned and the saved and reconciles (or questions) dichotomous forms of work. Whether these social groups are identified as active or contemplative workers, detractors or believers, the undeniable point of reference nonetheless remains Christ.

Both Christ's believers and his adversaries misunderstand the timing associated with his mission as manifested in inexplicable delays and baffling refusals. However, his adversaries use the timing of his deeds to incriminate him; for example, his labor upon the Sabbath, which they see as a violation of Mosaic law, or his four-day delay in aiding Lazarus, which they see as a sign of impotence. Not only do these antithetical forces converge as Mary runs toward Christ on the road, but the ministry reaches forward toward the Passion. According to Robert A. Brawer, a ministry group within a cycle must fulfill two dramatic functions, both of which, it seems to me, are set into motion by Mary. First, Brawer contends, the plays must represent Christ as the redeemer to a representative group of believers and unbelievers ("The Dramatic" 167). Not until Mary unwittingly brings the mourners onstage do unbelievers appear in the ministry sequence. To the contrary, John the Baptist and the beginning episodes of Lazarus are completely dominated by believers. Secondly, Brawer maintains, the plays must make manifest the grounds

against Christ, which justify the conspiracy against him. Prior to Mary's entrance, with her entourage of Jewish mourners, no hostile eyewitnesses have been set into place to condemn Christ, for this, his most wondrous miracle.

Having come for Mary, Martha makes it clear that the Jewish mourners have no business with their master, who has sent for Mary alone: "Sister, lefe this sorowful bande, / Oure lorde commys here at hand" (ll. 63-64). The Passion sequence will represent this social contingent, this "bande" of representative detractors, as ecclesiastical and civil authorities. Besides the privacy of the sisters' grief, there is good reason to exclude these oppressive companions: they are divided among themselves regarding the person of Christ. Biblical narrative establishes Mary's reaction to Martha's summons: she rises up hastily, and, followed by the mourners, reaches Christ on the road, whereupon she falls at his feet (John 11:31-32). Mary sorrowfully repeats Martha's regret that had Christ been in Bethany, Lazarus would not have died. Her reiteration of Martha's earlier words suggests that the sisters had discussed Christ's delay, a great source of anguish to them, but that they had found no resolution. Unlike Martha, who voices her grievance in private, Mary publicly expresses her disappointment (ll. 69-74). That Christ has now arrived, only to intensify Mary's grief by sending for her, underscores the irony. He who ignored her summons to save

life now summons Mary only to grieve death.

Christ's tears, called forth by Mary's poignant display of sorrow, elicit protests from some of the mourners, as biblical narrative makes clear. These tears in Towneley (l. 88), which Rosemary Woolf suggests might not have been played, justify the polarization of the mourners (English Mystery 395 n. 37). Whereas some among them are moved by Christ's weeping, seeing in his tears a profound expression of his love for the departed (John 11:36), others say, "He gave sight to the blind man, didn't he? Could he not have kept Lazarus from dying?" (John 11:37). The dramatist does not give these skeptics dialogue but their presence in Towneley would have been well known to the medieval populace, serving as a keen reminder that other influential figures will excoriate Christ in the Passion sequence. Further, two issues which illustrate the conflict between God's time-scheme and humankind's are strategically raised. First, the cynicism expressed by Christ's detractors at the site of Lazarus's tomb reverberates an earlier charge against Christ: that he defied Mosaic law by restoring sight to a blind man on the Sabbath (John 9:1-41). This defiance of Jewish law will be repeatedly cited as evidence against Christ during Towneley's Passion sequence. Secondly, the sardonic remarks call attention to the delay associated with Christ's mission, underscoring his emptiness or ineptitude by contrasting it with substantiated evidence

of his fullness. Seeing Christ's tears as a symbol of his impotence, the skeptics speculate why, if Christ were the renowned miracle worker, he waited four days before acting, thus allowing Lazarus to die in the first place.

Christ lifts his eyes to his Father and prays "I know that you always listen to me, but I say this for the sake of the people here, so that they will believe that you sent me" (John 11:42). That the raising of Lazarus was to be performed for the purpose of promoting belief is promulgated early in the Gospel account. Yet in the play protestations of belief substantiating Christ's overabundance and affirming his efficacy are underemphasized. To the disciples who did not understand why Christ desired to move toward Judea, especially after Christ plainly told them that Lazarus was dead, the biblical Christ had declared: "for your sake I am glad that I was not [in Bethany] with him, so that you will believe" (John 11:15). Despite Christ's proclamation that he wishes to engender belief, Lazarus's tomb offers nothing but a grim view of a decomposing corpse, a point enunciated by Martha in dialogue which the dramatist reassigns to Mary (ll. 81-84). According to prevailing rabbinical belief, after three days of burial had elapsed, no hope remained of reuniting a person's soul with his body (Brown 424 n. 17). During the late Middle Ages a bonafide fear of live burial, possibly the source of tales about vampires, resulted in requests from the living for delayed

burials. An extreme example is John, Duke of Lancaster, who stipulated that he not be buried for forty days (Finucane 41-42; Gittings 30).

Heeding the call of Christ's authoritative voice, Lazarus issues forth from his tomb like Adam from the earth, a glorious testimony to Christ's regenerative power (cf. Genesis 2:7). Lazarus accordingly becomes the first manifestation of Christ's material efficacy that we observe in the cycle. A stark figure swathed in wrappings from head to foot, Lazarus emerges rigid: immobile, grave clothes binding, eyes deprived of light, limbs motionless. Unlike Christ who will arise and mysteriously free himself from his own burial clothes, Lazarus remains dependent upon the community, whom Christ instructs to participate in his work (Suggit 107; Trudinger 262; Jones 174). Unless the bystanders unwrap Lazarus, he will remain constrained: suffocated, paralyzed, more dead than alive. Yet Lazarus's imminent liberation, in Augustine's view, signifies much more than an extrication from bandages: it will loose him from his sins (Homily 49, 24). Even though the divine function of Christ's miraculous work is indeed acknowledged, as I will demonstrate, the dramatist chooses not to emphasize its importance. In Towneley the sins of Lazarus resonate in every fiber of his resurrected body and soul, as revealed in his diatribe to follow, making Christ's most wondrous work appear peculiarly defective. While work

turning inward upon itself seems to self-destruct, leaving a hollow core, such an implosion actually brings forth an infilling of volume. Emptiness, despite its negative capacity, therefore serves to bring forth fullness.

Like the Lazarus who appears in York, N-Town, and Chester, Towneley's Lazarus glorifies God: "Lorde, that all thyng maide of noght, / louyng be to thee, / That sich Wonder here has Wroght" (ll. 103-105).²⁰ By sanctifying this time and place, Lazarus reifies Christ's work as spectacular and regenerative. In so doing the resuscitated man accords praise to Christ, whose resurrection he prefigures. Upon being raised, Lazarus acknowledges and praises Christ: "Gretter may none be" (106). Because Lazarus was helpless in hell, only Christ could deliver him: "When I was dede to hell I soght, / And thou, through thi pauste, / Rasid me vp and thens me broght" (ll. 107-109). When considered together with Lazarus's closing words (ll. 212-216), these laudatory comments proclaim Christ's majesty and acknowledge his might and authority. Lazarus's concluding lines, to be delivered some 100 lines later, reestablish Christ's power to help humankind: "If ye will

²⁰ Likewise in York, Chester, and N-Town (*Ludus Coventriae*), Lazarus utters words of high praise after being raised from the dead. Cf. *York Plays*, XXIV, ll. 186-187 (Smith); *The Chester Plays*, XIII, ll. 455-461 (Matthews); *Ludus Coventriae*, XXV, ll. 425-428 (Block). Note that each of Towneley's counterpart cycles reinforces the sense that Christ's raising of Lazarus is to be considered a sign: York ll. 190-191, Chester ll. 478-481, N-Town (*Ludus Coventriae*) ll. 449-150.

dwell with [Christ] / that can gar you thus go, / [he will]
 hele you lith and lym" (ll. 209-211). These opening and
 closing lines demonstrate that the dramatist ratifies the
 divine function of Christ's saving work in resurrecting
 Lazarus. Indeed, David Bevington has considered the
 Towneley play, along with its counterpart plays in N-Town,
 Chester, and York, as exemplifying "the great miracle of
 Christ's ministry and a central antetype of the
 Resurrection" (470). For several scholars besides
 Bevington, the prefigurative function of Lazarus becomes
 seen as paramount. Yet Ashley takes issue with scholars who
 emphasize the typological function of Lazarus and argues
 that no one meaning of the dramatized episode can be
 considered dominant; "the late medieval cycles and mystères
 embody a `cultural rhetoric' in which producer, author(s),
 audience, biblical text, exegetical tradition, and
 contemporary fifteenth-century texts are all implicated"
 ("The Resurrection" 228).²¹

Although Lazarus proclaims Christ's work as splendid
 and restorative, this praise seems curiously undermined by
 the paradox of an enshrouded figure speaking about

²¹ Ashley cites Bevington, Kolve, and Happè as
 emphasizing the prefigurative function of the resurrected
 Lazarus. See "The Resurrection" 227-228 and 227 n. 1.
 However, she points out "a close reading shows that Christ's
 own resurrection does not provide most Lazarus episodes with
 their chief spiritual raison d'être (228).

reanimation.²² As Woolf points out, despite Christ's instructions that Lazarus should be freed from constrictions, the resurrected corpse was undoubtedly portrayed "standing with stillness in his grave-clothes, arms wrapped across his body, and facing, not Christ, but the beholder" (Woolf, English Mystery, 396 n. 44).²³ Lazarus has lauded Christ as sovereign in the spheres of heaven, hell, and earth: he is the Creator who, having wrested Lazarus's soul from hell, performs the thaumaturgical act here and now (l. 103-110). But in spite of his words of praise, Lazarus's mummified figure tends to undercut the exhortation "Behold and ye may se" (l. 110) so that it means much less than glorification. What spectators actually see is a grotesque facade of a man who has not overcome death: he will, after all, die again. What they also see is the chilling effect of Christ's purposeful delay: physical deterioration and, as Lazarus will eventually reveal, spiritual embitterment.²⁴ These riveting images impress upon spectators that which can no longer remain ignorable in the cycle: Christ must expiate

²² During the fifteenth century shrouding was common practice. See T.S.R. Boase 110-113. As a guide to numerous illustrations of enshrouded corpses, see Cohen's Appendix 196.

²³ For a confirmation of this view, see Thomas Rendall, "Liberation from Bondage" 666-668.

²⁴ Cf. Proverbs 13:12: "When hope is crushed, the heart is crushed."

human sin before all is lost.

This somber character poses a sharp contrast to the biblical Lazarus, whose only appearance is at a post-resurrection supper honoring Christ (John 12:1). There too Lazarus is beheld and seen, but as a concrete manifestation of Christ's supernatural power (John 12:9). Accordingly, the biblical Lazarus is marveled at, whispered about, and targeted for death. By contrast, the Towneley Lazarus deemphasizes the wonder of Christ's miracle by focusing upon the triumph of decay and corruption. He seems to reveal the production-system as faulty. However, a fifteenth-century fascination with death manifested through Lazarus cannot expunge the hope for believers encouraged by the faith-message of the first half of the play. The dramatist's shifting of the Scriptural perspective makes Lazarus seem more a spokesperson for Christ's adversaries than a living testimonial to Christ's unsurpassable power.

Instead of celebrating Christ's miracle of regeneration, Lazarus offers a panoramic view of humankind, all strata of which remain subject to death: "Ne kyng, no kynght, no Wight in wede, / ffrom ded haue maide hym seese, / Ne flesh he was wonte to fede, / It shall be Wormes mese" (ll. 115-118). This proclamation that time marches on unimpeded, only to wreak havoc on human flesh, is a particularly unenlightened observation from one who has just been wrested from hell. Worm-infested corpses, or transi,

appearing in late medieval tomb sculpture, could have conveyed this point just as clearly.²⁵ Lazarus's four-day entombment, having elicited intellectualized grief from Martha and demonstrative anguish from Mary, has produced precious little insight into the mystical nature of Christ's saving act. Further, Lazarus's obsession with decaying flesh, although faithful to the medieval sermon in the Bromyard tradition (Owst 487), disparages Christ's restorative deed. Despite Christ's triumph over temporal time through the reversal of its deteriorative effect, his work is revealed as an ultimately futile gesture in bringing redress to humankind. Because the Towneley dramatist exhumes Lazarus only to submerge him again, he moves backward in time. Now resurrected, Lazarus memorializes the tomb. By contrast, in the Scriptural account, Lazarus's resurrected body becomes a manifest sign of Christ's preeminence. Just by viewing him, many Jews undergo conversion; the revived man is thus marked for death (John 12:10-11). In Towneley, Lazarus's retrograde sermon produces just the opposite effect. Instead of manifesting God's glory through the regenerative act of his Son, this Lazarus subverts the work of the Savior by presenting himself as an unappreciative, ungracious recipient of

²⁵ During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries the emaciated transi were dominant in England; however, enshrouded figures were also portrayed. See Cohen 1-11 passim.

renewed life.²⁶ In terms of the economic model established in Chapter Two, Lazarus denies the Cross within the circle by failing to acknowledge Christ as central to the production-process.²⁷

This subversion begins with Lazarus's bleak dictum that observers should consider him a reflection of themselves: "youre myrroure here ye loke, / And let me be youre boke, / youre sampill take by me" (ll. 120-122). By the late Middle Ages the mirror metaphor was frequently used to convey death. A spectator looking into the mirror of the Danse Macabre saw himself metamorphosed--that is, not as he was but as he would become (Taylor 29-43). On the most blatant level, Lazarus is referring to decomposition, which is confirmed by his morbid reminder: "ffro dede you cleke in cloke, / sich shall ye all be" (ll. 123-124). However, his decomposing body may alternately be conveying a hope of resurrection, as exemplified in services for the Office of the Dead.²⁸ These conflicting ways of interpreting

²⁶ Cf. the legions who speak from the madman of Gadarenes in Mark 5: 1-20.

²⁷ This concept is expressed by biblical commentator L. Paul Trudinger, who asserts "The raising of Lazarus is a resurrection without a cross" (201).

²⁸ Kathleen Cohen states that tomb plaques like those of John Funteyne of Narford, England, were inscribed with the hopeful words from Job 19:25-26: "For I believe that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth; once more my skin shall clothe me, and in my flesh I shall see God" (112-113). On late medieval sermons, see Susan Powell and Alan J. Fletcher (195-228 passim).

Lazarus's raised body provide evidence that Christ, viewed from the perspective of his work, should be deemed controversial as well as central. What nonetheless seems disturbing is Lazarus's exemplification of spiritual putrefaction. Reprimanding onlookers for their sins, he only reveals his own. Glowering, he revels at the prospect that the grave will humble the proud. Not only will "garmentes gay" disintegrate, but former dignity will be mocked (ll. 125-144). Like Adam and Eve banished from Eden (ll. 155-157), sinners, stigmatized by the soil, will end up being feasted upon in some maggoty Eucharistic feast (ll. 151-152).²⁹ What Lazarus savors is so perverse that spectators, who take him as their "sampill," cannot help but note that he whom Christ has resurrected is spiritually dead. This paradox of death-in-life runs counterpoint to Christ's proclamation that they who believe in him will have life-in-death (ll. 55-56). As Augustine eloquently states, "Whence death in the soul? Because there is not faith....Consequently, the life of thy soul is faith" (Homily 49, 15). Thus, Lazarus's resuscitated body requires a converted soul: a solemn reminder that while Christ's earthly work can reverse the deteriorative effects of

²⁹ Lazarus's resemblance to the Old Adam is unmistakable. See Cohen on the familiar image of Adam shown rising from his coffin under the cross. She states: "The dead Adam came to be considered not only as the symbol of man's fall and death, but also as a symbol of man's redemption and of God's mercy" (96-119, especially 105).

temporal time, his redemptive work lies ahead.

The idea that humankind awaits redemption, or that desire seeks its object, reverberates throughout Lazarus, but nowhere so palpably as in the disoriented sermon that Lazarus delivers. Indeed, the speech can be interpreted as conveying an escalating and increasingly intolerable buyer's panic, inasmuch as humankind has gone too long and incurred too incalculable an expense waiting for a Savior. Yet his rambling monologue, characterized by shifting perspectives, prompts us to ask not only who Lazarus is but how he relates to the Passion ahead. Initially exalting Christ for his work, next symbolically returning to the soil like Adam, and finally rising up in eschatological anticipation--Lazarus is recognizably a voice crying in the wilderness. The intriguing questions are: whose voice does he affect, what tidings does he bring, and what redress does he implore?³⁰ A dramatic oddity, Lazarus sometimes bears a strong resemblance to Christ's adversaries--for example to Herod or to Pilate. On the other hand, his identity as a figure or parody of Christ cannot be discounted inasmuch as Lazarus's resurrection prefigures Christ's own (Kolve 79-80). Ultimately, he adopts the persona of the Rich Man of the Dives and Lazarus parable in Luke; this affectation brings the images of both biblical Lazaruses (one resurrected, one

³⁰ Lazarus appears distended in Time, like all mortals, mentioned by Augustine in The Confessions, Book 11.

nestled in Abraham's bosom) before the audience, which seems to fuse the earthly and spiritual spheres, reaffirming Christ. But even in that context, the person of Christ remains strangely inaccessible, recalling Christ's earlier reticence and his inexplicable four-day delay.

In Luke's parable, Dives, having descended to hell, looked longingly upward at Lazarus, a beggar he had known, now nestled in Abraham's bosom. Would Abraham send Lazarus to his brethren, Dives asks, so that they might repent and be spared the torments of hell? Glumly, Abraham responds: "If they will not listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone were to rise from death" (Luke 16:19-31). As T.S.R. Boase informs us, the Lazarus from the gospel parable was sometimes conflated with the Lazarus of Bethany as illustrated on a tympanum of a cathedral in Autun (30).³¹ In Towneley, as if in answer to Dives's petition, a resuscitated corpse preaches repentance. And as if in fulfillment of Abraham's prophecy, forces galvanize against Christ, ending his ministry and launching his Passion. These dramatic developments are external manifestations of a corresponding mystical incentive, which propels the cycle forward as a means of satiating spiritual need.

In the final section of his rambling speech, Lazarus

³¹ For the significance of Abraham's bosom, see Pamela Sheingorn, "The Bosom of Abraham," 273-295 passim.

reminds spectators that once they are buried, their loved ones will forget them. They must adopt a posture of mistrust as a way of preventing, or at least mitigating, this future injustice. Neither wives, nor children, nor executors will honor their memories by offering masses for their souls or by administering their estates fairly (ll. 157-173). One purpose of these warnings is undeniably the reinforcement of the "full circle of reciprocity" practiced during the late Middle Ages: while alive, one's purgatorial suffering was being reduced by good works on behalf of the dead; after one's death, others were reducing their own poena in the same manner (Burgess 56-84 passim, especially 66-67). From the Scriptural context, however, this admonition is unreasonable and unmotivated unless Lazarus now poses as Dives. Certainly Martha and Mary, who demonstrate heartfelt grief over Lazarus's death and intense concern about his soul, have not engendered such skepticism. However, the avaricious Dives, because he knew his brethren were as corrupt as himself, anticipated their future sins, sure to be as grievous as his own (Luke 16:19-21, 25). Lazarus, as Dives here, sees in reprobate humankind what he sees in himself; he now looks into the mirror.

Unlike Lazarus's earlier appeal that spectators take him as their "sampill," which exposed his own degeneracy but did not offer a means of liberation for them, his present exhortation to "Amende the, man" purportedly offers a

salvific remedy. But in stark contrast to his intimate knowledge of the ravages of the tomb, Lazarus displays a startling unawareness of the spiritual counterpart to earthly deterioration. This spiritual vacuity is echoed in Dives who, even at the pit of hell, seeks recourse without failing to see that he should have repented of his sins. What Lazarus ends up proposing, then, is that men physically and intellectually prepare themselves for earthly loss and the rigors of Judgment Day. Regrettably, he remains buried in the earth, awaiting full release.

Lazarus's failure to recognize the sublime level of Christ's work echoes Martha's earlier misunderstanding. Because she has misinterpreted Christ's promise that Lazarus would rise and live again as a consolation for the general resurrection, Christ turned to the audience in warning (ll. 43-56). The consequences of not having heeded that warning manifest themselves in this final section of Lazarus's oration. Christ had warned the audience that belief in him assured eternal life despite the appearance of physical death. As Christ made abundantly clear, Martha's (and the audience's) profession of belief in this spiritual principle was instrumental to his performance of the miracle. Or put another way, humankind's spiritual work had to precede Christ's earthly work. Accordingly, all emphasis seems shifted to what humankind can do besides desire the redemptive sacrifice.

Lazarus's proposal of earthly remedy has no discernible correspondence in the spiritual realm. Of the Last Judgment, he advises the audience: "Thynke thou on the dredefull day / When god shall deme all mankyne. / Thynke thou farys as dothe the wynde; / This warlde is wast & will away" (ll. 176-179). By appealing to the spectators' sense of visceral fear, he elicits a physical--not really a spiritual--response. What spectators should do spiritually is left unexpressed. It is in the same sense that he invokes the image of worldly possessions--money and acquired goods--without saying what men are to do in regard to them (ll. 182-197). Nowhere does he state that goods should be relinquished or that they should be subordinated to the needs of the spirit. Further, he alludes to Lazarus of the gospel parable by suggesting beggars have drawn a sad lot, yet demonstrates he has learned nothing at all from being consigned to hell (ll. 194-195). What is most ironic about this final section is Lazarus's failure to acknowledge the spiritual remedy that is so glaringly visible: Christ himself, the embodiment of superabundance, who has remained onstage throughout Lazarus's chaotic monologue.

As Robert A. Brawer aptly notes, Christ remains the dramatic focus during Lazarus's sermon because of his very presence "as Lazarus extols Him as an agent of mercy and judgment" ("The Dramatic Function" 174). That Christ does not speak renders him an even more evocative sign in much

the same way that the silent Christ of The Buffeting is a poignant symbol of the inexpressible. Although I disagree with Brawer on the issue of extollment--Lazarus seems to accord Christ more ingratitude than praise--his point about silent presence is well taken. Similarly fraught with significance is the post-resurrection Lazarus as depicted in John, where the very sight of the resurrected man simultaneously engenders belief and marks him for death (John 12:10-11).

In Towneley, Lazarus does not recognize Christ as his redeemer, even though Christ stands in his midst. The Cross within his sphere has been rendered invisible. Because Lazarus cannot conceptualize Christ or the spiritual truths he represents, he appears spiritually dead. This deprivation makes Lazarus strike out in anger at a world without a Savior, making him a controversial but uniquely fitting spokesperson for a play that bridges the ministry to the Passion.³² His most resounding proof of the efficacy of Christ, verified in Christ's wresting his soul from the agonizing torments of hell, is, regrettably, glossed over (ll. 198-207).³³ Nonetheless, on the spiritual level,

³² Cf. with the voice of captive humankind who speaks in the Parliament of Heaven pageant in N-Town (Ludus Coventriae), ll. 1-6. See Meg Twycross's discussion in "Books for the unlearned" (82).

³³ That so few lines have been allotted to Lazarus's experience in hell is, in fact, remarkable. Audiences would have been quite familiar with the Visio Lazari made known to them from a Pseudo-Augustinian sermon. See Gallagher, "The

forces are set into motion. As Mark C. Pilkinton argues, Satan reacts to Anima Christi's rescue of Lazarus's soul from hell by inciting the Jews against Christ (53). On the earthly level, it is fitting that Lazarus ends up where he began: praising Christ as one who can work miracles (ll. 209-216). Lazarus's concluding lines reassert the divine function of the Savior's work: Christ is praised as "a lord of grace" whom spectators are to "pray hym, full of myght" to keep them "in this place" and "in his sight" (l. 212, 214-216).

Because of the uncomfortable fit between the initial episodes of Lazarus, dominated by believers, and the final homiletic harangue, launched by Lazarus, it is difficult to discuss the figure of Christ in any comprehensive way. Yet the controversy surrounding his characterization nonetheless becomes evident. As George A. West points out, Towneley diverges sharply from the other Corpus Christi cycles in its dramatic treatment of Christ. Whereas York, N-Town, and Chester end their Lazarus plays by allowing Christ to evoke his imminent Passion, the Towneley dramatist eliminates direct reference to the Sacrifice ahead (320-321). Therefore it seems to me that the dramatist depicts profound emptiness, as reflected through Lazarus, to mandate and elicit a response. Within the Passion sequence humankind's need for reappropriation of God's bounty gains momentum when

Visio Lazari," 332.

two incompatible systems of exchange, money and blood, operate together to bring about redistribution.

In The Conspiracy, first play in the Passion sequence, Pilate and his cohorts react to Christ's inscrutable feats of power. Throughout Lazarus both Christ's believers and his adversaries strive to comprehend the nature of his work, rendered more mystical by inexplicable delay. In the earthly sphere, exemplified by Lazarus in the ministry sequence, his baffling delays cause immediate grief and misunderstanding. But in the spiritual sphere, most sublimely represented by the Passion sequence ahead, Christ's work becomes fraught with cosmic significance. This sense of otherworldliness is what renders Pilate inexcusably mute in his own hall as his soldiers excitedly report the resurrection of Lazarus, who, if not for Christ, would still "lay stynkand in a sted" (Conspiracy, l. 127).

CHAPTER FIVE

CHRIST'S PASSION: THE CONSPIRACY

Throughout the Passion sequence Christ's adversaries repeatedly cite his raising of Lazarus as an indictable offense: as a manifestation of his prowess (The Conspiracy or as proof of his sorcery (The Buffeting ll. 100-103). In The Scourging that miracle's efficacy is reaffirmed, even though it is now meted out against him, as whips lash down upon his bleeding flesh (l. 175). At the Crucifixion a torturer notes the incongruity that Christ, known for his regenerative power of resurrecting Lazarus from a four-day-old tomb, now appears utterly powerless to help himself (The Crucifixion l. 575). In the Meditations Pseudo-Bonaventure explains that Christ's enemies had been inflamed with envy and anger over his good works, especially his raising of Lazarus (Ragusa LXIX, 302-303). And Caiaphas, responding to the Pharisees and chief priests who report Christ's growing influence, can only prophesy, "Don't you realize that it is better for you to have one man die for the people, instead of having the whole nation destroyed?" (John 11:50).

The spiritual reality that Christ must die for the people has been strategically and compellingly portrayed throughout the Towneley cycle. While each of the plays in

the Passion sequence conveys redemptive necessity, none conveys it as wide-rangingly as The Conspiracy. The play encompasses a broad range of biblical episodes: the conspiracy against Christ as orchestrated by Pilate, Caiaphas, Annas, and Judas, followed by the Last Supper, the Washing of the Disciples' Feet, the Agony in the Garden, Christ's healing of Malcus's severed ear, and Christ's capture. With the exception of the Last Supper, which is condensed, each of these episodes will be discussed.

This chapter seeks to demonstrate that the dramatist employs the idea of the marketplace in The Conspiracy, which becomes a central forum for evaluating Christ's work. Two systems of production, or ways of producing meaning and value, are depicted as intersecting in the marketplace. During the early scenes of the play, Christ's adversaries predominate while he remains unseen; and a secular system prevails. To Christ's detractors (Pilate, Caiaphas, and Annas), meaning and value consist in worldly acquisitions; for example, wealth and power. Not until Judas appears with an offer to sell his master does the otherworldly system of production intrude upon the secular one. When Christ's adversaries recede and he predominates, the mystical system of production prevails; within that construct, meaning and value consist in him alone. Insofar as Christ is bought and sold for money, the secular sphere of power intersects with the mystical in the marketplace. Yet in the mystical

context it is his blood, not secular money, which proves most efficacious to humankind.

Before exploring these complex dynamics within episodes of the play, I want to contextualize the marketplace as it relates to what the dramatist has been crafting throughout the cycle: an escalating sense that Christ must die upon the Cross to redistribute God's bounty. The broad outlines of the economic model posited in Chapter Two, as related to the superabundance thesis advanced in Chapter Three, will be briefly summarized. After providing this contextualizing information, I will analyze episodes focusing upon individual roles or group-identities: first, Pilate; then Caiaphas and his father-in-law, Annas; followed by the Knights, and finally, Judas. This substantial section of the chapter focuses mainly upon Christ's adversaries, who evaluate and interpret his work. After that discussion, I will proceed to examine two key episodes in which Christ predominates, surrounded by his disciples: the Washing of the Disciples' Feet and the Agony in the Garden. Within that sacred sphere of influence, Christ's work conveys sublime meaning, the significance of which seems to elude his disciples. As a practitioner of both the opus manuum and the opus Dei, one performed in the context of the other, the distinctions between the two become blurred; this conflation recalls the dynamics of the marketplace, where conflicting systems intersect. Finally, the Capture will be

discussed, the only episode in the play which merges the secular and sacred forces.

As I have demonstrated in Chapter Three, the Old Testament plays have created the expectation that the tension created between God's superabundance and humankind's undercompensation would be ameliorated through Christ's redemptive work. Yet while manifestations of God's bounty have been present, for example, through the cornucopian ram in Abraham and Isaac, as late in the cycle as Lazarus, humankind's profound spiritual emptiness remains unabated. Even though Lazarus contains within himself the hope of salvation through prefiguring Christ's Resurrection, he fails to recognize the reappropriator himself, who stands in his midst. In The Conspiracy Christ's efficacy, as interpreted through the agency of his work, can no longer be ignored. Yet his work comes to be seen ambivalently because the marketplace is in itself competitive and therefore governed by conflict.

Christ's adversaries participate in a temporal and local marketplace, which nevertheless has global and eternal implications. Buying and selling Christ enables them to transmute his work into quantifiable terms, for example, by equating his miracles with money that he is allegedly accepting for them. They seek to offset their grievances against him by using money as a medium of exchange; secular coinage may be transferred hand to hand. While this earthly

system of production competes with the mystical one, it is not incompatible with it inasmuch as both move toward bringing about redemption.

Even though Christ's disciples strive to comprehend his work on a spiritual plane and seek redemption through blood as a medium of exchange, their reactions to Christ's work seem counterproductive. At Gethsemane, they lapse into stupefaction; during the Washing of the Disciples' Feet, Peter recoils from participating in an act of manual labor that he construes as demeaning to his Savior. It is within these central episodes of the play that the economic model established in Chapter Two seems most apparent. That model provided the vertical, horizontal, and spherical analogues for explaining how central yet dynamic Christ should be viewed in the plays. At Gethsemane, Christ's prayer to the Father exemplifies vertical exchange; during the feetwashing, Christ's washing the feet of the saved (Peter) along with the damned (Judas) demonstrates horizontal transaction. Further, both scenes illustrate that distribution of God's bounty must be effected through Christ's shed blood upon the Cross (the spherical analogue).

Before Judas enters the conspiratorial proceedings, the dramatist seems to portray the marketplace from an entirely secular perspective. Because the opening scenes are dominated by Christ's adversaries, Christ himself, as mere referent, seems shuttled offstage. This purposeful

exclusion has much the same effect as Lazarus's dismissal of Christ in the ministry sequence, miracle-worker that he was. Even though the dramatist creates such a sharp divide between the mystical and secular spheres of power, he imposes two important precepts from the mystical realm onto the secular, which transform the dynamics of the marketplace. These precepts of God's bounty and the Logos, which are intuited by Pilate, serve a dramatic purpose by reinforcing the Creation and its associated plenitude. But that these precepts can be fathomed by one whom critics have consistently acknowledged as evil seems to flaunt human futility in effecting its own production and creates ambivalence about the social efficacy of work, as later construed within the mystical circle of power.

Pilate opens the play by revealing the nebulous and shifting parameters of his own secular realm of influence: threatening physical harm to the noisy crowd (ll. 1-9) and proclaiming his potency (ll. 10-18). Thus commences his identification with the unjust judge, a figure well known to the medieval populace. Well-known for his double-dealings, he welcomes the company of "fals indytars, / Quest mangers and Iurers, / And all these fals out rydars" (ll. 24-27). Such a persona enables the dramatist to convey the theme of social protest through revealing how an earthly hierarchy, here construed as the judicial system, administers God's law. As Edward Powell has documented, fifteenth-century law

operated upon three fundamental maxims: law originated in God, it was to be administered in accordance with reason, and justice consisted of "giving each man his due" (31). Moreover, Pilate's violation of these principles, it seems to me, has economic ramifications. During the later Middle Ages, justices of the peace were charged with the responsibility of regulating economic activity. As one manifestation, they enforced labor legislation which regulated wages after a decreasing population, attributable to the Black Death, empowered workers by driving wages up (Powell 32). We have seen that Christ epitomizes the worker as conveyed through medieval art and discussed in Chapter One. As portrayed in wall paintings, he became identified with Piers Plowman (or Christ the Artisan); Lollard writings called him a manual laborer, who represented the hands of the body politic, without which the dominant classes would have no grip on the world. Pilate would be comprehended as a worker-oppressor, were he operating in accordance with God's law, which he inverts. Instead, he promotes divine justice by undermining civil law, liberating the worker in a mystical sense. Within his less-predestined persona, however, he broadcasts human sterility in the production-process, creating doubts about work's efficacy as a socially-redemptive gesture.

Despite his protestations of omnipotence and success in corruption, Pilate reveals his concern about a "lurdan

ledyr" who is widely rumored to be a prophet (ll. 31-33). This "future false ihesus" had reportedly claimed that he will destroy all law, to which Pilate refers in the collective sense (ll. 37-38). Arnold Williams has already established that Pilate's identification with the Jews conflates his two identities; while that depiction is not biblically correct, it certainly makes for good dramaturgy (21). What that conflated identity enables, moreover, is a conception that Pilate represents both Roman and mosaic law, or as contemporaneously rendered, civil and ecclesiastical jurisprudence.

Although Pilate refers to Christ disparagingly, he admits he is frightened because Christ performs virtuous, not destructive or punishable, acts (l. 39). The virtuous works Christ has performed, reported to Pilate but not witnessed by him, render him immobile through fear, causing him to regret that "[n]o fawt can on [Christ] bere" (l. 40). This fear is unmotivated when we consider how consistently critics have reinforced Arnold Williams's contention that Pilate conforms to the evil-Pilate tradition.¹ Moreover, his fear recalls what Mircea Eliade has described as humankind's irrational "feeling of terror" when confronted

¹ Critics have not acknowledged that Pilate's fear is unmotivated. For example, Clopper states that he is "motivated by the fear of losing his [earthly] power" (15-16); Brawer and Williams take essentially the same view (Brawer, "The Characterization," 291; Williams 45). Among critics who view Pilate as consistently evil are Woolf, English Mystery, 246; Clopper 15; Meyers 85; Kolve 233.

with the mysterium tremendum of the sacred "in which perfect fullness of being flowers" (9).²

Moreover, it is the virtue associated with Christ's acts, rather than their destructive potential, that renders Pilate immobile. One cannot help but recall the important exemplification of God's bounty as depicted in The Meditations within the context of Christ's ministry. As discussed in Chapter Two, the woman with the issue of blood pressed through the crowd to reach Christ, seeking healing for her malady. After succeeding in touching only the hem of his garment, she was instantly healed, as Christ felt virtue go out of him (Ragusa 167). However, Christ has claimed he will destroy the law, a subversive statement which should override Pilate's feeling of trepidation and galvanize the civil servant into immediate action.

Because Pilate equates Christ's words with his works, it remains unclear why Pilate fails to retaliate against one who has openly threatened his law. Certainly he believes that Christ's words will come to fruition in deeds (ll. 51-52). Christ has proclaimed that three persons will dwell together in one godhead, that he was born of a virgin, and that he will die on a tree to save man's soul (ll. 46-49). While Pilate demonstrates no understanding of the wider meaning of these words, he declares, "If [these

² Eliade is referring to Rudolf Otto's Das Heilige (The Sacred), in which Otto emphasizes the irrational aspects of humankind's reaction to the sacred.

proclamations] be true in deyd, / his shech [speech, doctrine] shall spryng and sprede" (ll. 51-52). "If" here attributes a certain efficacy to Christ's words. Pilate senses that Christ differs radically from earthly rulers like himself, who openly boast that there is no correspondence between words and deeds. Furthermore, he exhibits a keen awareness of the Logos, as theorized by Eugene Vance, who discusses its implications in French medieval drama.³ Pilate intuits the generative potential contained within the Word, as demonstrated through its nature-conforming image of springing and spreading. But he does not understand the cosmic significance of an immaculately-conceived Savior dying to save mankind. Rather, he thinks in terms of Christ usurping his power through public acclaim.

Pilate's social conception of work is founded upon destruction rather than production. While he believes that his system of production places meaning and value in wealth and power, things that amass and spread outward, this burgeoning phenomenon is not borne out in his deeds. Therefore he seems to turn his own cycle of production

³ See Vance's Chapter 7, in which he discusses Logos and the Language of Man as pertaining to Mystère d'Adam (184-229, especially 189-194). Vance's discussion is based primarily upon Augustine's On Christian Doctrine and De Ordine. Also see page 211, in which he states that language may be offered as a kind of human logos.

backwards, as if upon itself.⁴ In his work milieu of reinforcing the law, Pilate threatens to break bones in order to uphold civil order (ll. 8-9).⁵ Retribution against Christ will be meted out in the same manner: "on [Christ's] bonys it shall be boght, / So shal I venge oure rightys" (ll. 44-45). This visceral image renders Christ's body the vehicle through which justice is administered. Christ's work is regeneration (he heals bones), and that work is retaliated against through degeneration (Pilate breaks bones).

Within the theological construct, humankind's rights are regained through Christ's redemptive work upon the cross, brought about by Pilate's work of defending civil law. When Pilate attempts to exculpate himself by washing his hands in The Scourging, this simultaneous transaction is reinforced (ll. 215-217). As Augustine states, Pilate's handwashing is "a forecast of the fact that our sins are washed away by the Blood which the Jews shed" (Sermons...Liturgical, "Sermo. 199, 2). But within the social construct, viewing Christ from Pilate's perspective

⁴ Eliade demonstrates what happens when humankind loses a sense of the religiousness of the cosmos, "cyclic time becomes terrifying; it is seen as a circle forever turning on itself, repeating itself to infinity" (107).

⁵ Besides the obvious reference to Christ's bones, which were not broken after his Crucifixion, the image is a generative one, as illustrated in Genesis 2:23. In that passage Eve, having been made from Adam's rib, becomes bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh.

enables him to be seen as a fifteenth-century subversive, a (miracle) worker who would be king, usurping the prevailing king, whose toppling would render him a worker. This transposition recalls the insurrectionary image of Christ as the hands of the body politic, mentioned in Chapter One. Williams's argument that Pilate and Christ are bipolar opposites, a dramatic strategy which Kolve faults (Williams 34, Kolve 233), does not adequately express the inverted (rather than polarized) relationship between the two men. In The Scourging Pilate reacts to a counselor's statement that Christ calls himself king by boasting about his own power. Christ responds that Pilate has no power to work his own will except that which is given to him by God (ll. 107-117). While Christ is being mocked as a king, Pilate is being mocked as a worker. This sense of an overturned hierarchy becomes noticeable in The Conspiracy, where a total inversion of work milieus is suggested. Pilate, as strong arm of the law, reinforces his political work through word-lies and threats of destructive action. And Christ, whose law benefits the weak, advances his spiritual work through word-truths and virtuous deeds.

Whereas Pilate's fears were a reaction to the otherworldliness of Christ's miraculous acts, the virtues of Christ's work do not mitigate what Caiaphas and Annas consider to be his open defiance of the law, which to them Christ's work flouts. That Caiaphas and Annas would have

been represented as evil ecclesiastical lawyers, Bishops of the Old Law, as conveyed through mitres and rochets, hoods and tabards, has been established by G. R. Owst (496-497). As will be shown, their charges against Christ are translated into material terms. Unlike Pilate, Caiaphas and Annas exhibit no residue of the mysterium tremendum and skillfully manipulate Pilate so that he too is convinced that Christ's works are sufficient cause for putting him to death. Moreover, they refer to their own subterfuge as "work," as if ennobling it. Throughout the negotiations that ensue, the conspirators and Pilate's knights cite miracle after miracle like so many irrefutable proofs presented in evidence against an incorrigible criminal. However, the superproductivity of Christ's works is not revealed as inauthentic and instead makes the conspirators aware of a counterfeit form of undercompensation. This deviant form of deprivation impinges upon, but does alter, the mystical paradigm which transcends it.

That humankind transmutes Christ's work into earthly terms is a medieval commonplace. A Middle English sermon establishes this transmutation-reaction through onlookers' reactions to Christ's miracle of expelling demons from a man. When Christ cast the demons into swine, who then drowned themselves, the townspeople prayed that he would depart from them: "for pei were yll pleysed of pe losse of here swyne, desiryngge rapur to be traveyled with devels and

haue rychese pan litell good and no desese with devels" (Ross 98). Therefore, Caiaphas can only appeal to the conspirators' joint interest in upholding the law and maintaining personal wealth, a deviant form of quantifying Christ's threat to existing structures. Within his first stanza, Caiaphas utters the word "oure" four times, establishing what he already knows to be their common concern about Christ, the "tratoure strang," who is a threat to "oure law" and "oure welthe" (ll. 56-65). By depicting law as inextricably bound up with wealth, he validates hierarchical structures the law supports, assuring that wealth will continue to flow to aristocrats and be withheld from other segments of the population, including the one to which Christ belongs. Moreover, the conspirators' distributive impetus is constrictive; it excludes, unlike the expansive system of production which Christ represents.

Known to spectators was the horizontal ideology of exchange as enacted within the material realm. Alain de Lille had expressed this phenomenon through Nature, by whose means God assured that forms proliferated themselves in time.⁶ Further, we have seen that Pilate expressed God's Logos, or his generative power, by means of nature-evoking imagery. That this horizontal propagation was to be regulated closely and expressed through the analogue of

⁶ See Vance's discussion of Alain de Lille's De planctu naturae and horizontal exchange 115 and n. 7.

minting has been discussed in Chapter Two. While the conspirators are deprived of the conceptual understanding of what they seek to gain by transmuting Christ's works into coins, I wish to consider this ulterior quest as it impinges upon the mystical search.

God's bounty, reacted to in various ways throughout the cycle, has been discussed as being reaccessible through Christ by means of vertical exchange. That superabundance (or mystical coin) has been described as immensely vast and dispensable throughout the ages: souls not yet born will derive its benefits. Insofar as minted coins, transacted horizontally, bear the imprint of the exemplar, as Alain de Lille establishes, they offer like for like. Marc Shell has stated that whether a coin is counterfeit may be determined by examining its issuing authority, its point of origin (160).⁷ Because civil and ecclesiastical structures are revealed as unabashedly corrupt, their coins can only resemble the exemplar. Whereas the mystical item of trade (fullness) increases in value and assures that (Christ's) labor expenditures will reflect the value-added factor, the secular commodity, a debased form of fullness accessed through wealth and power, actually decreases in value. With

⁷ Shell explains that Christ, during his ministry, did not ignore the political problems stemming from the concept of issuing authority. He had said, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's." He points out that Christ did not say, however, whether the metal, from which the coin was minted, was Caesar's or God's (161 n. 16).

Judas's returned coinage hurled down in the presence of the authorities, an episode not dramatized in Towneley, this regression into a zero-sum dynamics becomes more meaningful. That is, Judas has neither gained nor lost, in a material sense.

Caiaphas's charge that Christ fails to observe Mosaic law is a pretext; he recognizes Christ's virtuous deeds for their revolutionary power. Christ's works are seen as signs conveying a blatant disregard for written Mosaic and civil law, a devaluing of currency by the performance of charitable acts, and an invalidation of socially sanctioned authority. Constructed law, legislated wealth, and imposed hierarchies are therefore undermined by Christ, whose works suggest societal overthrow. This image of Christ as social subversive, even though touted by a corrupt churchman, does not effectively fade when scenes dominated by Christ's adversaries yield to episodes depicting Christ's sphere of influence.

Annas contends that Christ tells flagrant lies which generate fear among the general populace (ll. 66-67). But despite this fear, throngs are drawn to him. As a charismatic figure, Caiaphas argues, Christ "turnes oure folk both euen and morn" (l. 80). As the conspirators view Christ's miracles, danger lies in what appears to be forming: a groundswell movement which could provide the impetus for an overthrow of authority. Revolution or social

upheaval, as discussed in Chapter One, was no idle threat during the fifteenth-century. Lollard attack upon the Church, as controller of Christ's body (the Eucharist) invokes the dangerous image of the laborer, whom Christ epitomizes.

Caiaphas, Annas, and later two knights, besiege Pilate with a chorus of evidence in response to Pilate's admonition: "Bot yit som fawt must we feyll, / wherefor that [Christ] shuld dy" (ll. 88-89). Further quantifying what he cannot conceptualize, Caiaphas declares Christ has performed "a thowsand wonders, and well moo," including healing crooked men of their infirmities (ll. 92-97). Audiences viewing The Conspiracy might have recalled numerous healings Christ had performed, among them: the healing of the centurion's servant (Matthew 8:5-13) and the restoration of the palsied man (Luke 5:18-25). These works demonstrate Christ's defiance of earthly authority: "he legys again oure law, / tempys oure folk [in various ways] and turnys vs fro" (ll. 96-97).

Just as Caiaphas represented Christ's healings through the example of straightening the crooked, Annas cites Christ's healing of the deaf and dumb. The audience might have remembered, as one example, the deaf man with a speech impediment who, after Christ put his fingers into his ears and touched his tongue, was cured (Mark 7:32-35). Annas claims to have witnessed such deliverances himself, an

assertion that gives impetus to the conspiratorial proceedings (ll. 98-99). Annas, too, establishes the intricate relationship between Christ's works, defiance of the law, and personal wealth. Speaking of the deaf and dumb who have been cured, he charges: "fful hastely [Christ] makys theym hayll, / And for sich warkys as he is went / of ilk welth he may awayll, / And vnto vs he takys no tent" (ll. 101-104). When we recall the clerical abuse registered in Chapter One through the plowman, that clergy have "the corn and we the dust," this accusation can be envisioned as turning upon the Churchman himself.

Annas appeals to his fellow conspirators' love of wealth, suggesting that Christ is becoming too rich to heed their law. The very idea that Christ may be profiting arouses Pilate's wrath, his first emotional outburst in the episode (ll. 106-107). This charge is an accurate one, when considered from the spiritual perspective. Sermons substantiate that not only did Christ come for our profit but wept on the Cross when considering unrepentant humankind, who did not profit by his suffering (Ross 273, 317).

The connection Annas makes between the public's money and Christ's work evokes the mystical construct, whereby a price must be paid to expiate human sin. Christ is depicted as engaged in a system of exchange. Even though the acts he performs are charitable, his works are recognized for their

marketability. Virtuous deeds are seen as meriting prized coinage. Moreover, the mystical system of exchange, as transmuted, excludes the existing ecclesiastical power structure represented by Annas and is responsive to the changing and diverse needs of the public. Work profits Christ and is beneficial to the populace at large. This interdependent relationship between Christ and the faceless masses who benefit from his work is acknowledged rather than disproven. The conspirators neither suggest that Christ's works are valueless, nor do they imply that he practices exclusion. Yet they can only gauge his work's efficacy by equating it with what it may be exchanged for in the earthly realm: commodities like money, goods, or property.

Because Pilate's wrath has been provoked, all that remains to assure that the conspirators' "warkys...be wyse" is for the ecclesiastical authorities to cite egregious instances of Christ's work. Caiaphas has heard that Christ shamelessly works on the Sabbath day (ll. 110-113) and that he refuses far and near to work at their bidding (ll. 114-115). This important charge against Christ, cited repeatedly throughout the Passion sequence, refers to the various times during which Christ performed work on the holy day: allowing his hungry disciples to pluck ears of corn (Matthew 12:1-8; Mark 2:23-28; Luke 6:105), curing the woman with a bowed back (Luke 13:10-16), restoring health to a man who had the dropsy (Luke 14:1-4), delivering a man from

paralysis (John 5:5-9), and restoring the sight of a man born blind (John 9:1-4). The specific violation of Mosaic law that Caiaphas cites, work upon the Sabbath, gives credence to the idea that Christ threatens all law. Further, because Christ has subverted one kind of work, work mandated or forbidden by ecclesiastical authorities, Caiaphas uses that violation to suggest that Christ poses a threat to other forms of earthly work (ll. 112-115). Within the play's central scenes where Christ is depicted as engaging in work, these charges take on new meaning through social indictment.

Two of Pilate's knights add to the testimony with an account of Lazarus's resurrection. One knight reports that Christ has "rasyd [Lazarus] bodely / the fourt day after he was ded" (ll. 126-129) and the other announces that "[t]he people hym full mekyll prasyd / ouer all in euery place" (ll. 128-129, 132-133). Because the knights have no power within the proceedings of the inner circle, and Christ's death will net them no personal gain, they can merely chronicle what they have seen and heard: Christ's miracles are progressing from healings to resurrections, and the masses praise him in every land.

As Robert A. Brawer argues, the knights' report makes Pilate look quite preposterous because their wonderment is an indication of "how thoroughly Christ has beguiled his enemies" ("The Dramatic Function" 172). In a study of

Towneley's ministry group, Brawer discusses Pilate's authority. The dramatization of Pilate in The Conspiracy, he contends, makes clear "God's future judgment of those who presume to judge and thereby pervert their earthly authority" ("The Dramatic Function" 171). Brawer emphasizes that not only is Pilate's pride damnable, but his coercive power is revealed as ineffective (172). The knights' work, I might add, is to reinforce prevailing civil authority. Yet Pilate does not punish them for failing in their capacity as agents of the law, who should be touting Pilate's and not Christ's accomplishments. Again, the total inversion of work environments is evident. Whereas Christ's work occasions a conspiratorial assembly at the highest ecclesiastical and political levels, Pilate's work has sunk to its lowest level, revealed as inoperative by his own protective agents within his own sphere of power.

Besides revealing Pilate's impotence, the knights are important because they represent the general populace whose support the civil and ecclesiastical rulers hope to gain. Having infiltrated the ranks of the powerful, the knights demonstrate that Christ's influence cannot be contained. Even the normally shrewd Caiaphas and Annas reinforce the knights' boast about Christ's growing influence: Annas saying that townsfolk hold Christ to be God's son, and Caiaphas asking for the pledge of a handshake since "lord, ye knew neuer sich an othere" (ll. 134-137, 142-145). When

imposing figures like Caiaphas and Annas corroborate Pilate's knights, who are clearly subordinates, the point is well illustrated that the usurpation of power which the conspirators fear has already begun.

Judas's entry into the negotiations signals the intrusion of the world of believers into a play thus far dominated by unbelievers. Through his character, the mystical and secular circles of power intersect in the marketplace. That he is initially repulsed seems a dramatic commentary upon the infusability of the mystical and the secular. Annas recognizes Judas as one of Christ's disciples (ll. 188-189), Pilate is agitated at the disturbance in their negotiations and wants Judas hurled from their presence (ll. 190-191), and Caiaphas suggests Judas be set on buffets to disgrace his master (ll. 194-197). Only after Judas offers to sell his master for "a bargain" do the conspirators admit him into their profane world and allow him to cite his grievance (ll. 208-209). Because he has signaled to the conspirators that his master has exchange value, Judas is accepted not as a cohort but as marketer of a valuable commodity. He is understood as a worldly worker who trafficks in human flesh. Further, Christ's inscrutability and the political threat he poses are temporarily diffused: the prophet's value, after all, consists of coins.

Judas is outraged at an incident that has occurred in

Simon's house between his master and a repentant woman, whom the audience would have recognized as Mary Magdalene. While Judas and Christ were at Simon's, Judas recounts, Mary approached Christ, bearing a jar of precious ointment and weeping because of sins she had committed (ll. 252-257). Seen through Judas's eyes, the scene resonates with visual, olfactory, and tactile images which belie his self-professed interest in money alone:

She weshyd [Christ] with hir terys weytt,
 and sen dryed hym with hir hare;
 This fare oyntment, hir bale to beytt,
 upon his hede she put it thare,
 That it ran all abowte his feytt;
 I thocht it was a ferly fare,
 The house was full of odowre sweytt;
(ll. 258-264)

In response to this lavish waste of ointment, Judas expressed his indignation. This precious oil could have been sold for 300 pence, and the proceeds could have been wisely spent upon the poor (ll. 270-272). This charitable act would have been possible even after Judas expropriated 30 pence from the 300, the ten percent share he was accustomed to stealing from the disciples' purse (ll. 274-279). Since Christ has caused Judas to lose 30 pence, the conspirators' payment of this sum in exchange for Judas's betrayal of his master is sufficient recompense (ll. 280-281, ll. 300-301).

According to Kolve, Judas is usually used to convey the sins of covetousness and wanhope, and the complexity of his betrayal is not usually explored in the Corpus Christi plays

(224). In Towneley this emphasis upon Judas's covetousness is shown during his negotiations with the conspirators but is undercut by his narration of Mary Magdalene's gift of precious unguent. Judas appears to recognize the immense value consisting in Christ alone, separate and distinct from the ointment he allows to be lavished upon him. When we recall the concept of the mystical coin posited in Chapter Two, Judas's narration becomes self-revealing. God's bounty, which humankind seeks, cannot be acquired by denying the Cross within the circle. While Judas seems to recognize Christ as central within a distributive system, he transmutes that Cross into a currency-sign. To illustrate, Judas charges Christ with having caused him to lose money, but this material charge is shown to be a pretext. Since Judas has been entrusted with the purse, he could have compensated himself for a perceived loss at any time as St. John Chrysostom has stated (Homily 65, p. 211). The ten-percent share that Judas normally stole from the collective funds is not, in fact, substantiated in the biblical accounts.⁸ Kolve mentions that the figure of ten percent

⁸ This figure of 10% is undoubtedly a synthesis of several biblical accounts. In the Luke account, which the Towneley dramatist uses as his model, Simon the Pharisee protests Christ's act of allowing a sinful woman to touch him. In response to Simon's protest, Christ asks Simon which of two debtors would owe a forgiving creditor the most: the debtor who owes 50 pence, or the debtor who owes 500 pence (Luke 7:41). This ten-percent figure is also suggested by considering the account in Matthew 26:6-13, which mentions 30 pieces of silver, together with Mark 14:3-9 and John 12:1-8, which mention 300 pence.

was sometimes used in medieval sources like Jacob's Well to represent dishonest tithing to God (225). This figure becomes subsequently more meaningful with Pilate's hearty endorsement of reverse tithing and with Caiaphas's practice of the activity in paying Judas.

It is significant that Mary's unguent is not bestowed upon Christ in return for services offered: the gift precedes the act of Christ's forgiveness and is not contingent upon work performed. The oil is not a reward and thus not to be considered bounty for the disciples' collective purse. The cause of Judas's disgruntlement, that Christ has sanctioned waste, is not borne out in his narration: "I thogt [the anointing] was a ferly fare / The house was full of odowre sweytt" (ll. 263-264). Instead of manifesting anger at the lost funds the oil represents, he demonstrates a vicarious satisfaction in describing Christ's work of forgiveness. The fact that he places a higher, non-monetary value upon Christ is indicated by his sense-provoking narration of the anointing, which, he seems to intuit, involves work of a spiritual nature.

According to Augustine, Christ used signs to communicate. For instance, Christ used the pungent aroma of the oil to signify "good fame which anyone in the works of a good life will have when he follows in the footsteps of Christ, as if anointing His feet with a most precious odor" (On Christian Doctrine, Book 2, 3; Book 3, 12). This

allegory makes it clear that Mary's work of anointing Christ was understood as imitable by Judas or others. Yet humankind's work is not the only type of work being performed; Christ forgives Mary's sins. When Christ charges his disciples with their mission in Matthew 10:8, he makes it clear that their future work includes casting out devils. The forgiveness of sins is clearly part of the apostolic mission and is therefore considered Judas's designated work. Because of his entrenched sin and reluctance to repent from that sin, Judas cannot imitate Mary, who engages in a good work honoring Christ, and he cannot imitate Christ, whose mystical work of forgiving sins has been charged to the disciples. By selling Christ's flesh for coins, he renders Christ marketable and, in a strange way, now accessible to him.

By agreeing to pay Christ's betrayer, Pilate validates the misappropriation of public funds for private gain (ll. 282-285). Not able to articulate the source of his grievance against Christ, Judas has couched his complaint in earthly terms: Christ has caused him to lose money. Unwilling to forego stealing from the disciples' purse, he cannot understand why Christ's work of forgiveness exceeds recompense for Mary's flagrant waste of oil. St. Ambrose expresses the principle of Christ's fluctuating worth: "Christ is not valued at the same price by all men....The faith of the buyer determines the increase in the

price....to a sinner a Redeemer is more valuable" ("Joseph," 3.14). This sense of Christ's apparent value and humankind's need for efficacious remedy becomes integral to the scenes involving Christ's disciples, which demonstrate that the only system of exchange whereby human redemption can be effected is Christ's blood shed upon the cross for the expiation of sin.

Within the play's central episodes where Christ predominates, the soteriological meaning of his Passion remains predominant even though the gesture of work, and Christ through it, becomes multisignifying and ambivalent. Biblical narrative establishes that Christ conducted the footwashing during an interrupted or finished supper. Although the Institution of the Eucharist during the Last Supper is omitted in Towneley, Christ reinforces the purposeful nature of the pedes discipulorum (l. 382-383). Because footwashing was a hospitable act performed before, not during or after, a meal, Christ makes it clear that his actions are to be viewed as highly deliberate (ll. 382-383).⁹ In a meditation dedicated to the Mystical Supper and the Washing of the Disciples' Feet, St. Cyril of Alexandria discusses the incongruity of one who is Creator

⁹ Biblical narrative states that Christ rises from supper, lays his garments aside and takes a towel, girding himself. He pours water into a basin and begins to wash his disciples' feet, wiping them with the same towel that has bound him (John 13:4-5). The Meditations, a known source of the plays, closely follows the biblical account (Ragusa 313-314).

performing such an act of servitude. He who was once clothed with light now girds himself with a towel. He who gathered the waters of the sea now fills a water basin. He who weighed the heavens and the earth with his hands now wipes the soles of his disciples' feet (158). Cyril's view of the footwashing as a denigrating act is expressed through the form of his contrast: God's omnipotence as a Creator being shown as incompatible with Christ's powerlessness as a servant. The Meditations confirm the condescension involved in the act: "The supreme Majesty and Master of humility bent to the feet of the fishermen" (Ragusa 313). Further, we may here view God's fullness conveyed as accessible through the converse dynamic of emptying-out, which will bring about redistribution.

Augustine interprets Christ's ritualistic act as an example of humility being demonstrated to his disciples. The footwashing becomes efficacious, however, only with the sacrifice of the cross (Homilies...St. John, Homily 55, 7).¹⁰ John Christopher Thomas confirms the sense that the footwashing is rendered efficacious only through Christ's Passion. Thomas states that the laying aside of Christ's garments and his ritualistic footwashing foreshadow "the humiliation and cleansing connected with Jesus laying down

¹⁰ Augustine views the footwashing as expressing the forgiveness of post-baptismal sin. See Thomas's list of sources for those who view the act as primarily a soteriological sign (16 n.2).

his life" (86-87).

As Augustine has stated, Christ must redeem humankind through blood as the medium of exchange. In Towneley the imminence of the redemptive sacrifice, foreshadowed during the footwashing, is reinforced at Gethsemane, where Christ sweats profuse drops of blood. During the footwashing Christ's gesture of manual labor is an external sign conveying the necessity of Christ's death. That the mystical import of the gesture cannot be comprehended before the Sacrifice is indicated in Christ's words to Peter: "You do not understand now what I am doing, but you will understand later" (John 13:7, Towneley ll. 388-389).

However, Judas's presence at the footwashing is a tacit reminder that two systems of exchange, one worldly and the other spiritual, are simultaneously operative. Whereas the purchase of Christ will be negotiated through money, the purchase of humankind's redemption will be effectuated through blood. However, the two systems stand in causal relationship to each other. Although an equitable return on transferred money can only be measured in finite terms, and salvific remedy from the Savior's blood is infinite and immeasurable, the unjust price (30 pence) is the catalyst effectuating the just price (Christ's blood). As Augustine declares, "[Christ] is our only Redeemer; no one except Him has redeemed us, and that, not with gold or silver, but with His blood" (Sermons...Liturgical, Sermo. 212, 2). These two

systems of exchange--one material, the other mystical--are reinforced throughout the Towneley Conspiracy. This two-pronged system is startlingly displayed as Judas is privy to both: the material signified by the coins he physically receives and the mystical signified by Christ's redemptive sacrifice, which he spiritually rejects. Although biblical narrative and Towneley establish Judas as a recipient of the footwashing, it is Peter who registers a sole response to the collective action.

Even though Peter's proclamation of steadfastness still rings in the air, playgoers know Peter will deny Christ even as they see him accepting obeisance as Christ kneels in front of him. As Theodore Lerud has shown, gestures of homage, such acts as bowing or kneeling, often demonstrate attitudes toward sovereignty in the Corpus Christi plays (139-140). For example, temporal sovereigns like Herod frequently expect others to kneel or bow to them in order to confirm their power (141). In a complete reversal of the earthly system, Christ not only kneels to his disciple but performs manual labor for his benefit. This scene parallels Mary Magdalene's anointing of Christ, an earlier episode narrated by Judas (ll. 250-281). Here Christ insists that Peter accept a gesture of servitude just as Christ himself had submitted to Magdalene.

Peter initially protests against having his feet washed by his master, stating his sensitivity to reversing the

lord-servant relationship (ll. 386-387). Peter protests on his own behalf, not on behalf of his fellow disciples. Clearly, it is he whose perceived position is most exalted and he who has the most to submit when the lord-servant relationship is reversed.

If Peter cannot submit, Christ proclaims, he cannot enter into heaven's bliss with his master (ll. 392-393). Participation in the footwashing is therefore compulsory. David Y. N. Wu points out that despite Peter's emphatic refusal, Christ makes it clear that Peter cannot turn him down (81). Peter's submission recalls Christ's immersion at the hands of Mary Magdalene: "Nay, lord, or I [heuens blys] forgo, / wesh heede, handys, and feytt also" (ll. 394-395). Christ had allowed precious ointment to be poured upon his head to cascade from his head to his feet and become intermixed with Mary's tears as she dried his feet with her hair (ll. 258-265). Because Peter has knowingly exalted himself, he seems most keenly aware of the moral superiority that must be cleansed. He must heed Christ's ensaumple by washing other believers' feet while remembering that no servant is better than his lord (ll. 408-415).

In exploring this scene for its social import, I wish to posit that the gesture of manual labor is ambivalent. While this signification does not arise from the theological meaning, it nonetheless intrudes upon it. If Christ's work is to be considered an ensaumple in every sense of the word,

that exemplarity necessarily extends into the social domain as mundanely construed by spectators. To illustrate, Jean-Claude Schmitt has demonstrated that medieval ideas about gestures included the concept of efficacy, which he describes as "its double meaning, the practical efficacy of technical gestures (sawing, moving, writing, etc.)" ("The rationale" 65). Within this axis, one of three he delineates, Christ's action becomes seen as consummately productive: end-stopped, successfully completed, achieving its goal.

Despite the act's efficacy, it becomes seen as ambivalent. Schmitt has discussed this signifying phenomenon as a dialectic. While gestures were understood to express the innermost movements of the soul, the body signaling this "invisible inside" was considered ambivalent ("The rationale" 60). Further, the question of what hands connote is unanswerable. The iconographical expression of God through his hand was everywhere apparent, but Jacques LeGoff questions whether that hand might not be conveying command rather than labor (75). That workers, arraigned at their basest level as manual laborers, were oppressed there is no question.¹¹ But within this episode, we may question whether Christ is ennobling manual labor by performing it; or, perhaps, indicting those who would scorn or render

¹¹ See Frantzen's "The Work of Work" for a discussion of these forms of oppression (Frantzen and Moffatt 1-15).

invisible (even by not writing about) those whom he epitomizes.¹²

The next episode that draws attention to Christ's work as a sign indicating redemptive necessity is the Agony in the Garden, during which Christ's humanity bends under the weight of his divinity. The work Christ must perform is arduous; his labor is an angst-ridden opus Dei, posing a sharp contrast to the painless yet instructive opus manuum conducted during the footwashing episode. Two striking similarities nevertheless link this scene to the previous episode: Christ's work as a servant and the aversion of Peter and Christ to servitude. At Gethsemane Christ's gesture of prostrating himself before his Father and his subsequent blood-like sweat reinforce the exemplum of the footwashing: submission is required for redemption.

If we consider the almost 90 lines of dialogue between the two scenes, a further connection becomes clear. Audiences viewing The Conspiracy would have heard Christ telling his disciples: "in this nyght ilkon / ye shall frome fle" (ll. 418-419), words which prefigure his own tendency to flee in the Garden. These lines are directed to all disciples present (Peter, James, and John), but the intimate connection between Christ and Peter established during the footwashing ritual (Peter having been the only

¹² On the marginalization of workers (craftsmen, peasants, and women), see George Ovitt, Jr., 164-198.

disciple to speak) foreshadows the one servant-one lord bond that is particularly prominent in the Garden. Although Peter's spirit and flesh recoiled from reversing the lord-servant relationship, he eventually accepted the reversal and became as lord. His obedience mirrors Christ's submission to his Father at Gethsemane, where the perceived distance between lord and servant increases as the consequences of not performing God's work become rife with cosmic significance. During the Agony in the Garden Christ fulfills his own earlier prophecy about desertion when he falters in serving his own master as the gravity of the work he must perform descends upon him.

Christ approaches Mt. Olivet, his soul heavy against anticipated death (ll. 498-499), and his flesh sick with fear (l. 511). Rosemary Woolf has pointed out that in *Towneley*, *York*, and *N-Town*, Christ's fear of death is stressed, emphasizing his human nature (236). This emphasis upon Christ's humanity is pervasive throughout the Meditations on the Life of Christ, where Pseudo-Bonaventure asks the reader to imagine Christ kneeling in prayer, beseeching God on his own behalf: "Although He is God and equal to His Father and co-eternal, He appears to have forgotten that He is God, and prays like a man" (Ragusa 321). The blood-like sweat mentioned in Pseudo-Bonaventure (323) is suggested in *Towneley* through the recurring mention of "payn" first by Christ and later by Trinitas (ll. 501,

514, 539, 552). Humankind's work is stigmatized through toil, perceptions of servitude, or "payn" because the flesh rises up against the spirit. When Christ falls upon the ground or kneels in prayer (stage directions in Towneley do not specify which), his prostrate gesture conveys the oppressive burden of his servitude.

Just like Peter, Christ recoils from voluntary submission. But unlike Peter, Christ wavers between unrelenting doubt and fatalistic resolve (ll. 500-503, 508-515, 520-527). Peter Travis contends that this episode is tinged with pathos; he faults the Towneley dramatist's use of the comforting angel, which derives from the Luke account, because Trinitas detracts from Christ's semblance of control (146-147). But it seems to me that the Towneley dramatist uses Trinitas to bridge man's work to God's work by representing God as prime mover in a system of exchange. God will overcompensate Christ's work, which culminates on the cross, by appropriating the benefits derived from that work throughout the ages.

The mystical work which God has commissioned, his redemption of humankind, is demonstrated through Christ's worldly enactment of that work. The significance of this work, externally presented through dialogue and gesture, is partially conveyed through staging. Martial Rose suggests that Christ kneels in prayer on the pageant wagon, his disciples remain at its foot; and Trinitas speaks from a

castle-like heaven built upon the pageant (418). While Christ prays, the disciples lapse into sleep, suggesting stupefaction. Christ's non-responsive Father and his non-responsive disciples draw him in two directions: upward toward his heavenly Father and downward toward fallen man.¹³ This three-level structural design calls attention to Christ at the mid-point, mediating man to God. Kolve has called the two adequate causes of the Passion "man's fallen nature" and "God's plan to redeem man" (231). Both are revealed as operative in Christ. God's work, having been instituted and destituted at Eden, awaits restitution through Christ's redemptive sacrifice.

Through the gesture of prayer, Christ demonstrates that aligning himself with the opus Dei is painful; indeed his flesh recoils from anticipated death. The extremity of his spiritual anguish is graphically depicted in the Meditations, where the author asks the reader to envision Christ's "most consecrated blood dripp[ing] copiously from all parts of His body in the manner of sweat abounding in this agony or battle" (LXXV 323).

Christ has instructed his disciples to pray earnestly (ll. 496-497), but their unremitting sleep appears to invalidate work. It was a medieval commonplace that prayer was humankind's work, and that death could be expressed as

¹³ Christ's being compelled upward, yet pulled downward, recalls the sliding-scale movements of the vertical plane, theorized in Chapter Two.

sleep (Augustine, Sermons...Liturgical, Sermo. 216, 6; Ambrose, "Death as a Good," 8.34). Without the redemptive sacrifice fallen man is, in Piers Plowman parlance, gummy-eyed and beslobbered; his work retrogresses and is inefficacious.¹⁴ In his Harmony of the Gospels, Augustine equates the disciples' lethargy with unabating sorrow, which Christ must sustain with his body, the cornerstone of the Church (Book 3, 14). Christ reinforces this sense that he must ameliorate this profound sorrow: "Ye slepe, brother, yit I see, / it is for sorow that ye do so; / Ye haue so long wepyd for me / that ye ar masyd and lappyd in wo" (ll. 516-519). For the disciples' sorrow to be lifted, sin must be remitted. This is the dictum of Trinitas, whose entrance is delayed until Christ's thrice-uttered prayer to his Father.

The purpose of Trinitas's speech, according to Woolf, is to reassert that Christ must die in order for humankind to be saved (236). Trinitas uses the visceral image of "payn," which Christ had used to describe his spiritual and physical anguish (l. 500, 514), to explain how Christ's pain, endured to the death, will cancel out humankind's pain, interminable in hell (ll. 528ff, esp. 539, 552). This sense of overcompensated exchange extrapolates into the future and, in sharp contrast to the conspirators' exchange

¹⁴ This is the image of Sloth in Passus V of the B-text (Langland 72).

of coinage, is not complete with transference of the commodity. The physiological or spiritual response of pain, expressed by Christ at Gethsemane and endured by others in hell, can only be ameliorated through Christ's lifesaving blood. Trinitas proclaims: "thou art man, and nedys must dee, / and go to hell as othere done, / when oone is borod, all shall owtt, / and borod be from teyn" (ll. 548-549, 554-555).

What becomes noticeable when we explore this episode for its social significance is the keen connection between Christ's "payn" and its expression through a blood-like sweat, evoking Adam's curse. That within the late Middle Ages labor was synonymous with suffering does not mitigate the disturbing reminder, that as Barbara Miliaras has said in a study of the cycle, "all still is not well so many centuries after the redemptive act has taken place" (442).¹⁵ While that configuration takes many forms, among them, servitude and other forms of oppression, it is the cultural stigma associated with manual labor that seems not only ever-present but insurmountable. That humankind could overcome their burdens through dying had not gone unobserved. The Dominican preacher John Bromyard, Owst points out, comforted parishioners by assuring them that on

¹⁵ While Miliaras's emphasis is upon heretical movements in England, reflected in Towneley, her comments on social and political movements informing the plays are worth consulting.

Doomsday, Christ would say to them, "Come unto me all ye that labour" (298).

Just as prominent a social connection seems to be humankind's proclivity toward unproduction as exemplified by the stupefied disciples, whose work, ultimately futile, turns back upon itself. Even among leaders, such sterility seems humankind's legacy when seeking gains through worldly work as exemplified by Pilate, for example. As Mark Bailey shows, records reflect what employers have deemed to be idleness. Referring to building workers, one such tract declares, "they waste much part of the day...in late coming to work, early departing therefrom, long sitting at their breakfast...and longtime of sleeping afternoon" (162).¹⁶ Such condemnation of workers cannot help but recall a similar incident, as mentioned in The Meditations, When Christ stood idly by during the years before his ministry, onlookers scoffed: "He is a useless man, an idiot, a good-for nothing, foolish, bad" (Ragusa 95).

When we return to observing how two systems of exchange converge during the play's final episode, Pilate and his forces are seen advancing during the Capture. Arnold Williams has commented that Pilate's predominance is most evident in this episode, which only in Towneley includes

¹⁶ However, Bailey emphasizes that "Legislative evidence and moral tracts are primarily a statement of seigneurial expectations of how workers should behave...the image they create is blurred by a web of social prejudices, jealousies and ignorance about labourers" (163).

Pilate (26). The juxtaposition of Pilate, asking Judas for an equitable exchange on his money (ll. 580-583) and Trinitas's proclamation that Christ's sacrifice is the just price of humankind's redemption (ll. 548-555), makes the clash of the two systems of exchange manifest. A final thaumaturgical act, Christ's healing of an enemy's severed ear, makes the irreconcilability of the worldly and mystical systems manifestly clear.

The imminence of and necessity for the redemptive sacrifice, which Christ enunciates in the biblical account, is demonstrated through Malcus's shed blood. After Peter has stricken off Malcus's ear in an effort to prevent his master's capture, Malcus cries: "My right ere I haue forlorne! / help, alas, I blede to dede!" (ll. 686-687). Inasmuch as Christ's external gesture of restoring Malcus's ear is the final manifestation of Christ's work within the play, that enacted work is quite important. Augustine has explained that Malcus's right ear represents the oldness of the letter, whereas Christ's healing act represents the newness of the spirit. The bondage of servitude is healed by the liberty enabled by Christ (Homilies...St. John 92, 5). Yet it seems quite fitting that Malcus, who is servant to Christ's worldly enemy, neither recognizes nor appreciates the significance of the restorative act. Just like Lazarus in the ministry sequence, Malcus seems perversely unappreciative, and responds the only way Cain's

kind can: in retaliation (ll. 692-695).

During the capture, final episode of The Conspiracy, Christ's adversaries seem to prevail, and the nebulous threat posed by Christ seems diffusable: Christ, materialized into minted coins, can be transferred hand to hand. Even Pilate's knights, who had insulted him in his own temple by bringing him news of Christ's spreading influence, now boast about what punishments they will let loose upon Christ (ll 613-638). The old charges are still leveled against Christ--he has resurrected Lazarus, healed the deaf and dumb, and threatens their law (ll. 716-719, 724, 731, 744)--but these past works are now extractable from Christ's purchased flesh. On another level, the sense that a price must be paid, that blood must be shed, is now imminently transactable through Christ's redemptive work culminating on the cross. This salvific remedy is the only system of exchange capable of restoring liberty, like Malcus's right ear, to those suffering under servitude. As Ambrose declares,

He redeemed with His own blood those that had been sold by their own sins. But Christ was sold because He took our condition upon Himself, not our fault; He is not held to the price of sin, because He Himself did not commit sin. And so He made a contract at a price for our debt, not for money for Himself....He alone paid what was owed by all.

("Joseph," 4.19)

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

God in a business suit wears a hard-hat, his clipboard in hand. He walks authoritatively across a noisy stage, giving orders to industrious workmen, who continue their nailing and hammering as children, wandering by on an outing, glance upward at a picture of Christ. This busy act of Creation, with God's work being likened to the launching of a new construction site, opens the York Theatre Royal's 1992 production of the city's mystery cycle, which has been staged quadrennially--this time amidst controversy--since 1951. No ex nihilo production this, God's work is already underway as spectators file into their uncomfortable five-hour seats, these very material necessities being one of the chief reasons why the highly-publicized production, traditionally staged in front of the ruins of St. Mary's Abbey, has been moved indoors. Among problems surrounding the production: the prominent guild of the Plastic Foldaway Seaterers has held firm on charging an exorbitant fee of £100,000 for outdoor seating; and the play's original artistic director, Australian Margaret Sheehy, has gotten herself fired in an unfortunate dispute over her unyielding

production costs, calculated at £300,000.¹

Warnings and controversy have surrounded production of the Corpus Christi plays ever since their inception. During the late Middle Ages potential disrupters were warned to leave their weapons at home. A Wycliffite preacher voiced indignation over the false tears spectators shed, not because they repented of their sins, but because they basked in their own emotions, aroused at the spectacle of seeing Christ crucified.² As recently as 1909, Nugent Monk, producer of the N-Town cycle in London, was arrested for showing God onstage in violation of the Blasphemy Law.³ While production of the plays has been steeped in controversy, Christ's role in medieval drama has failed to generate even a modicum of the dispute that surrounded the biblical Christ's life.

¹ For comments on the controversies surrounding the York production, see "Queue here for a rare chance to play God" (Davenport) and "No continuing city" (Lewis-Smith). My own observations are based upon my attendance at two performances of the plays on June 25 and July 2, 1992.

² See Clifford Davidson's "A Middle English, " 39. On the anti-theatrical prejudice and Lollardy, see Jonas Barish 66-79. Barish points out that the writer of the Treatise advances his antitheatrical views by taking negative examples from the life of Christ himself by saying that had Christ wanted us to play miracles, he would have done so himself or, at least, instructed believers to do so (71).

³ See Christine Richardson 234 n. 18. God's irrepresentability has been discussed by a number of medieval drama scholars, including Woolf, English Mystery, 99, and Kolve 30-31. Woolf explains that while Lollards deemed representing the Trinity as especially offensive, the Bible itself used anthropomorphic symbols to represent God (99).

Yet this avoidance of controversy, as it relates to Christ, is more critical construct than medieval phenomenon. I have demonstrated throughout this dissertation that Christ is not only central from a spiritual standpoint but dynamic from a dramatic one. Further, I have suggested that constrained positions which mythologize Christ or relegate him to one of two bifurcated perspectives succeed in removing him from the theatrum mundi in which he is key player. While The Crucifixion itself has not been analyzed, the meaning of the redemptive sacrifice has dominated this study. This Conclusion brings together several fundamental precepts which have driven this study and advanced this aim: the economic model established in Chapter Two and the superabundance thesis advanced in Chapter Three. Because of the known influence of Pseudo-Bonaventure's Meditations on the Life of Christ upon the plays, that text will provide a locus for my discussion as these ideas are related to Christ. Following this conceptual analysis, I will relate these comments to the Towneley cycle and propose new critical strategies for evaluating Christ in the plays. Whereas a substantial part of this chapter concentrates upon Christ, the concluding pages address the general topic of work, construed by the early Church as a punishment for sin, a view which at times seems supported by the Towneley dramatist. Further, my contention that the Ambrosian thesis offers a way to recontextualize work will be reasserted and

clarified. Finally, I will discuss the York production staged in England in 1992, particularly the polemical role of Christ as advanced in the performance, as well as several other episodes which have been analyzed in this study.

The economic model introduced in Chapter Two enables a way of viewing Christ as the Cross within the circle; that is, more dynamically than critics have acknowledged him to be. Christ, on behalf of humankind, is seen engaged in vertical exchange with the Father. As the axis mundi on the horizontal plane, he is also seen as reconciling (or questioning) polarized manifestations of work within the material world: whether they be the opus manuum and the opus Dei, a worker demographics of the damned and the saved, or working itself and its correlary, not-working.

Intersecting these two planes enables one to discern the Cross within the circle; that is, Christ as central to the plays. But the circle must be conceived as spherical as well; such a configuration enables one to comprehend the distributive dynamics associated with Christ's work. Considered together, the vertical, horizontal, and spherical dimensions explain how Christ's work functions in the plays.

Yet Christ does not function by himself in the plays but rather as he pertains to or is interpreted by humankind. From humankind's perspective, it is the superabundance-underacquisition dialectic which becomes paramount. For certainly God or Christ need not quantify what the Trinity

possesses, owes, or should give; that material rendering seems to be humankind's way of expressing what it needs or wants from Christ. In turn, superabundance (God's commodity) becomes perceived by humankind as a nebulous fullness, more palpable when transmuted into earthly form. Yet because this debased form of fullness fails to satisfy, a profound feeling of emptiness rises up, demanding the sacrifice of the Cross.⁴ While this escalating desire may be conceptualized in vertical terms, it is predominantly a spherical construct. Equilibrium can only be achieved when God's bounty is redistributed through Christ; humankind then becomes satiated in a spiritual sense.

Earlier chapters have demonstrated that the economic model is a medieval construct, which can be conceptualized vertically, horizontally, and spherically. Nowhere more conspicuously can we find this formulation communicated than in The Meditations. At Gethsemane the vertical paradigm becomes discernible when Christ, bathed in a blood-like sweat, prays to the Father that the Chalice be lifted from him, to which the Father replies:

My most beloved Son knows that the redemption of mankind, which we so desire, cannot be accomplished properly without the shedding of His blood; consequently, if He wishes the salvation of souls, He must die for them.

⁴ Middle English sermons establish this emptiness attribute by likening it to nothingness. One preacher, citing Augustine, proclaims: "dedely synne is ryght nowthe...itt bryngethe a man from owthe to nowthe" (Ross 165).

(Ragusa 320-325)

Furthermore, Christ can be seen engaging in horizontal exchange even as a small child, when he becomes a messenger for his mother, seeking payment from townsfolk for the spinning or sewing she has completed (69). Among his disciples, he transforms work as conceived within the material dimension: whether calling fishermen to become fishers of men (136), washing the feet of the damned (313), or being ostracized or misunderstood because he refuses to work at all (95, 163-164).

Moreover, the spherical construct, or distributive impulse, is conveyed through Christ. His death upon the Cross is "plentiful, for not a drop but a wide wave of blood flowed from the five parts of His body" (353). That humankind becomes implicated by having to acknowledge the Cross within the circle becomes manifestly clear: "He laid down His flesh and His soul for you to claim your body and spirit for Him, and for all He regained all" (356).

Not only is the economic model inherent in the Meditations but the superabundance thesis becomes evident in the narrative as well. In Ambrose's Hexameron God's bounty was discussed in material terms. That superabundance was seen as being distributable within a cosmos governed by equitable exchange. Because The Meditations depict this plenty as more a spiritual than a material phenomenon, here we may discern the satiation incentive, which has been

mentioned in Chapter Two. Considering humankind's mystical quest for God's bounty enables us to comprehend how the desire-compulsion (represented in Towneley) reaches toward fulfillment in the redemptive sacrifice.

In The Meditations superabundance is embodied within Christ himself.⁵ The narrator proclaims, "In Him are the remedies of our wounds, the aid to our needs, the reparation of our defects, the abundance of profit" (212). While the commodity of God's plenty is accessible to humankind, humankind's filling-up can only be accomplished through Christ's emptying-out: "The emptying of Christ was not simple or moderate: He emptied Himself as far as the flesh, as death, as the cross" (352).

Through distributive impulses humankind may itself fill-up by emptying-out; that is, by imitating the dispersal of God's bounty in some quantifiable way. The narrator exhorts readers to exercise charity: "one must either keep or give that which we have taken to hold for distributing" (249). He exhorts the reader to consider himself empty, even if he gives all his wealth away, if charity in the image of God does not occupy all of his essence: "Oh, how many things must first be instilled and gathered in so that

⁵ Aquinas establishes the same connection, linking that superabundance to Christ's sacrifice upon the cross: "Christ's Passion was a sufficient and a superabundant atonement for the sin and the debt of the human race, it was as a price at the cost of which we were free" (Summa, Part III, Q. 48.4).

we may then spread out liberally, giving not out of penalty but out of plentitude!" (252).

While in Towneley there is evidence of satisfaction gained from worldly work--for example, no one would dispute that Noah feels pride when his carpentry shows evidence of superior craftsmanship (ll. 255-256)--the emptiness of spiritual deprivation tends to loom larger than the benefits associated with physical or material gain. Accordingly, Lazarus fails to pay heed to Christ's work of resurrecting him from a four-day-old tomb and instead focuses upon the certainty of a second death unless Christ dies for his sins (Chapter Four). And Judas reconfigures Christ's work of mercy, bestowed upon a sinner, into coins he can mete out of Christ's flesh (ll. 248-261); yet recouping his perceived loss (Chapter Five) only drives him into despair (The Hanging of Judas).

Toward understanding how these ideas relate to Christ and his work, I wish to expand upon an idea brought up earlier in this study: Boethius's depiction of God as the Supreme Good. In Chapter Two I briefly alluded to Philosophy's comment in the Consolatio that nothing can be better than the source from which it has been derived (Book 3, 10, p. 101). Throughout Book Three of The Consolation, Philosophy leads the prisoner to recognize that all men seek happiness but can never achieve it through earthly means since God is the only one in whom happiness lies. Riches,

social position, fame, or power, never lead to happiness because these earthly acquisitions end up subtracting from this total quantity (happiness) in some way. Seekers of high office find themselves groveling; power-brokers find themselves running high risks (7, p. 91). All of the earthly means through which man pursues happiness prove unsatisfying because they are adulterated: "everything that is said to be imperfect is held to be so by the absence of perfection" (10, p. 99).

Even though this perfection which humankind seeks is God, there has been a breach between God and man resulting from the Fall. Therefore the essence of God's superabundance can no longer be accessed in the material realm, as it was in the prelapsarian Eden. Christ, by virtue of the hypostatic union, manifests this overbounteous quality on earth, often materially, as in the instance of the multiplied loaves.⁶ However, humankind is forever engaged in a reacquisition process that cannot achieve satisfaction in the physical realm; thus, Lazarus, having been raised from the dead, expresses only embitterment.

During this study of Christ's work in Towneley, I have been questioning how work should be construed or defined. Because work participates in the material world through external actions, it necessarily appears grounded in

⁶ Middle English sermons connect the miracle of the loaves to another form of superabundance: Christ's feeding thousands through the loaf of his body (Ross 128).

physical substance. In Towneley's Old Testament sequences, Noah expresses deep satisfaction at the sight of his unfolding carpentry (Chapter Three); Simeon bemoans the fact that his old bones impede his ability to perform his work in the world. These instances of saintly characters deriving satisfaction from labor lead us to believe that work is one form, however misdirected, through which humankind seeks reacquisition of that which has been lost (God's superabundance).

Christ becomes seen as the axis mundi, the conduit through which humankind reaccesses that supersaturated environment to which he was once entitled. Because his work partakes of two domains, which impinge upon and transform each other, contradiction is inevitable. In biblical narrative Christ refers the bread-seekers and water-seekers to the source in him alone, yet those who hear him remain baffled. Such a portrayal in biblical narrative can only be rendered more complicated when Christ comes to be represented in the drama. Even though Christ's work is perfectly synchronized within God's time continuum, in the temporal realm it often becomes quite inscrutable.

Christ's detractors must therefore translate his work into earthly terms. For example, in The Conspiracy Annas envisions Christ as having amassed great wealth in exchange for miracles performed (ll. 102-103). Although a theme of predestination is prominent within the cycle, entrapping

characters within fated actions, the redistribution of God's/Christ's superabundance becomes seen as inevitable. In the Old Testament sequences, even though Cain is unquestionably doomed, his "work" of slaying Abel enters a signifying realm unaffected by character-restriction (Chapter Three). Cain enables God's superabundance, lost to humankind after the Fall, to be seen as accessible through Christ. By enacting the Creation myth, recognizable to audiences through its analogy to the plow-play, Cain allows God's superabundance to be seen as reappropriatable (through Abel, who typifies Christ). Therefore fratricide in the material realm provides the catalyst for dispensing benefits in the spiritual dimension. Moreover, in the New Testament sequence the fated Judas negotiates his betrayal of Christ by using money as a medium of exchange, thereby expediting infinite satisfaction through (Christ's) blood as a more efficacious medium of exchange, to be transacted in the spiritual realm (Chapter Five).

The problem with the concepts of God's superabundance and humankind's undercompensation, as I have been using these terms, are that they are in the postlapsarian world uniquely spiritual principles. To illustrate, even though Christ paid the price of humankind's sin by making infinite satisfaction, that spiritual bounty (salvation) which is available to all souls after the Incarnation fails to benefit those who go to their death unsaved. Lazarus's

chilling warning from the grave in the guise of Dives, who although doomed tries unsuccessfully to renegotiate his fate, makes this point uncomfortably clear (Chapter Four). Even the saved are incapable of articulating the magnitude of the plenty which awaits them in the spiritual dimension; indeed, Peter recoils from Christ's washing of his feet (The Conspiracy, Chapter Five).

The collective human need for Christ's work to be performed, in Towneley, is both dramatic and soteriological. The spiritual need is expressed dramatically through a heightened tension that escalates, seeming to require the shedding of Christ's blood in expiation of human sin. However, the need is also a soteriological one. Humankind becomes aware that God's overplentitude, redistributed through Christ beyond the parameters of the age in which one is reading the dialogue or seeing the play, leaves man owing. Pseudo-Bonaventure cites Bernard on this unpayable debt: "You owe Jesus Christ your whole life, because He gave His life for yours and suffered bitter torments so that you should not suffer eternally" (Ragusa 351).

Spectators observing the Corpus Christi plays, I suggest, basked in the presence of contradiction, which has been theorized out of medieval drama scholarship. Leah Sinanoglou has demonstrated that the images of the child-

Christ and the crucified-Savior were often conflated.⁷ Such observations about known contradiction, as it pertains to Christ, can be used to explore the social ramifications of Christ's work in the mystery plays. For example, Clifford Davidson has called for a systematic cataloguing of iconographic gestures, which can assist our interpretation of the plays ("Stage Gesture" 470). Given the recurring stigma against manual labor which has been documented during the late Middle Ages, we might determine to what extent Christ's washing of his disciples' feet might have been recognized as cross-signifying.⁸ Certainly medieval wall paintings which depict Christ surrounded by workmen's tools (Chapter One) establish Christ as a worker, and therefore much like laboratores among the audience.

Within such a configuration, Christ's identification with those spectators one critic has deemed the "sweaty

⁷ Singanoglou has shown that communicants regularly reported seeing a vision of the Christ-child within the communion wafer (491-509). While this vision may have been suggested by medieval writings, which commonly conflated the Incarnation and the Passion, it seems to me that the conflation of images substantiates that Christ's contradictory nature was recognizable as such, when manifested in form itself.

⁸ Reconstructive approaches toward gesture are exemplified by Jean-Claude Bonne, who, in examining Christ's contradictory standing-sitting gesture as portrayed on a tympanum in Autun, asks: "What is it that requires us here to choose between these opposites?" (78). Bonne explains that medieval theological thinking was "attentive to Christ's postures and their dialectic" but cites one text that reconciles contradiction through dissociation (86). Ultimately, Bonne concludes that the image is ambivalent (90).

masses" establishes his social viability (Wellwarth 307). As Anthony Gash has established, dramatists were able to advance their own "unorthodox views" by "cultivating an ambiguity of tone within an orthodox framework" (76). Gash cites the Towneley cycle as one which exemplifies social protest. For example, he questions whether Noah's wife might not be serving some deep societal need, perhaps serving as a threshold figure, "symbolically restoring unity and joy to hierarchical societies threatened by rivalries and divisions" (79).

Furthermore, Clifford Flanigan has advocated situating the plays within their socio-historical contexts; using Victor Turner's structure/antistructure model, Flanigan demonstrates that Towneley's Annunciation play "simultaneously affirms and undercuts the inherited social and theological order" ("Liminality" 60-61). Gash and Flanigan, by challenging existing critical methodologies, alert us to the necessity of employing more polemical approaches toward the plays.⁹

Inasmuch as the late-medieval Christ was the center of the world to the medieval populace, Christ's role as a worker should be more rigorously analyzed to determine the

⁹ Although she proposes no definitive model for obviating contradictions she sees within the plays, Harriet Hawkins provides a foundation for a reconstructivist view: "this smooth blue sea is alive with sharks. The divine ordering of events, the overall unity, the cosmic concord, become a backdrop for class conflict, protest, cruelty, oppression, tyranny and torture" (191).

range of contradictory meanings which might have been generated through dramatic performance. John Coldewey, in studying the economic aspects of medieval drama, explains that all levels of workers--peasants, craftsmen, ecclesiastical and lay landlords, the newly formulating middle class--benefited during the fifteenth century (79-8).¹⁰ When considering Wakefield's increasing prosperity in the wool, and later the cloth, industry, we can posit that alongside clergymen and farmers would have stood weavers, fullers, and dyers: the bulk of whose work was done with their hands.¹¹ Christ's manual labor in the plays, I suggest, should no longer be viewed as detached from its theological agency. When Christ is considered for his social consequence as well as his soteriological efficacy, he becomes seen as more controversial: a liberator of the oppressed. That Christ played to the oppressed is indisputable. As George Wellwarth has shown, the plays were a popular art form, whose target audience remained the less illustrious among spectators:

The mystery cycles were enjoyed and patronized by
Wat Tyler and his kind, not by Sir William

¹⁰ Further information about Wakefield's dominant industry and/or the general characteristics of England's economy may be found in a variety of sources; among them Stevens, Four Middle, 116-117; Bolton 287-319, Cipolla 198-204, Boissonnade 279-336, Postan 355-428.

¹¹ The well-known example of English merchant guilds routinely excluding craftsmen involved in the wool trade (weavers, fullers, and dyers) has been mentioned in Chapter One. See Postan 382-383 and Hodgett 139-140.

Walworth and his kind; by peasants, apprentices, and journeymen, not by noblemen, professors, and clerks; onions and unwashed bodies rather than musk and floral essence contributed the chief aroma of the performance.

(Wellwarth 308)

That Christ should be viewed controversially seems mandated when viewing him as a worker: work itself is ambiguous. Jacques LeGoff, for instance, discusses the twin legacies of work as inculcated by the book of Genesis. God's work is active and tiring; prelapsarian man labors in the Garden without impediment. After Adam's sin, God curses humankind's work: "You will have to work hard and sweat to make the soil produce anything" (Genesis 3:19). LeGoff explains the penitential, punitive nature of work as comprehended by, reacted to, and practiced within the monastic tradition (73-86). Although after the twelfth century this penitential view came to be supplanted by a more positive view of work compatible with progress and technology, residue of the punitive tradition remained (107-121).

To some extent it is this negative, penitential view of work that seems reinforced in Towneley: Cain fails to derive rewards from his labor as a plowman; Noah's aging body impedes his efforts to master the materials of his trade. The drama necessarily subsumes and projects long-standing theological and social values by which it may have been influenced. George Ovitt, Jr., has established how work through the cursed tradition acquires negative

signifying potential. For example, he explains that peasants, craftsmen, and women, "silent workers," were deemed invisible during the Middle Ages for several reasons. Craftsmen and manual laborers were generally illiterate; texts were not written by or for this segment of the population until the sixteenth century. Further, work and craftsmanship were considered to confer and be invested with little value. Moreover, workers learned their crafts within the context of the oral tradition (166-167). Whereas the cursed status of work derives from the Genesis account and is theologically-based, the equation of the worker with his profession and the injustices proceeding therefrom are primarily social constructs.¹²

What the Ambrosian thesis contributes to the overall conception of work within the Towneley cycle is a dialectic for comprehending work that resembles the push-pull phenomenon inherent in the universe, in which all work-processes participate. The terms used to describe excess-as-ideal (God's superabundance) and deprivation-as-reality (humankind's undercompensation) illustrate that neither one nor the other prevails indefinitely. During The Creation, where Deus affirms his generativity, the Cherubim express an intuited sense of their own underacquisition, alerting spectators to the fact that even in a supersaturated

¹² On the social construction of work, see Allen J. Frantzen, "The Work of Work," 1-15 passim.

environment, something is amiss. Ambrose demonstrates that the universe is governed by equitable exchange, yet the unfallen Cherubim, as conveyed by the dramatist, seem to anticipate inequity. Ambrose himself does not introduce the idea of undercompensation but views lack in one dimension as gain in another: as necessary fluctuation within an equitable cosmos.

Work on earth, Ambrose's model suggests and the Towneley cycle demonstrates, can never achieve that which it strives to gain. Even Christ's most regenerative work, his resurrection of Lazarus, appears to fall short of the mark. The precursors of Christ (Abel, Noah, Isaac) necessarily underachieve at producing or acquiring God's superabundance because only Christ's death upon the Cross can reaccess and redistribute God's plenitude. Because of the pervasive strain of redemptive necessity which runs throughout the cycle, as suggested by Diller and discussed in Chapter One, Towneley is perhaps the most fitting cycle to submit to an analysis of work, particularly Christ's work, which is longed-for throughout the plays preceding the Crucifixion.

The York production, to which I now turn, succeeds in portraying work and workers within both provocative and traditional contexts. During the Creation, God speaks Latin while separating day from night, this creative act expressionistically rendered through his waving together and then separating several black and white handkerchieves.

While a prominent placard at the back of the stage advertises Shepherd, a local construction company responsible for the stage-set, the suggestive words "Restoration Phase 2 Shepherd," displayed throughout the five-hour performance, keep the redemptive work ever in mind.

No regular workday this, angels wearing halos and plasticized capes of multicolor design dance onstage, these choreographed movements representing, when silver and gold, the sun and the moon; when blue and purple, the firmament dividing the waters or the sea. As the workday whistle blows, workmen who have assembled the stage-set wave goodbye to God the employer, who because he is apparently exhausted or gratified, relieves himself of his coat and ascends to Heaven in a lift, proclaiming: "Ego sum Alpha et O / vita via Veritas primus et nouissimus."

One hallmark of the York production, as I see it, is the intermingling of expressionism, farce, and hypermodernism with the tragic and sublime. In that sense, the production is a splendid reconstruction of medieval drama contemporized for the twentieth century. In Towneley's Noah play, Uxor protests against submitting to her husband's decree to get aboard the ark. The York production updates the theme of protest by depicting animal rights' activists campaigning against the boxing of creatures, these seemingly abused animals upstaging Noah's

wife. As creatures comply with the boarding, placard-wielding activists implore: "Be fair to the bear"; "Don't box a fox"; "Say no to Noah," generating gails of laughter.

Isaac rides a bicycle onstage with sticks on his back; perhaps no modern audience would make the connection that he is conveying his own wood to the site of his sacrifice, prefiguring Christ carrying his cross to Calvary. When Abraham must slay Isaac, he raises a machete above Isaac's head, staying his hand as angels call his name. Tragedy, having been averted, turns into comic relief as a stuffed ram brought onstage causes Father and Son to dissolve into laughter. In mock-sacrifice, Abraham raises a soccer ball above Isaac's head as angels sing of Christ.

Part Two of the production, whose emphasis is Christ's ministry, Passion, and Resurrection, and which ends at the Last Judgment, establishes the polemical force of the production as it pertains to Christ. During the Temptation, Christ in blue jeans must climb a ladder to capture audience attention from a more powerful Lucifer, whose voice, electronically enhanced, resonates throughout the theater. Recruiting his disciples, Christ conveys all the authority of an entrepreneurial promoter. Raising Lazarus, Christ yanks the resurrected man, wearing a brown burial suit, out of his tomb. Clifford Davidson has suggested that during the Middle Ages, the actor playing Christ may have assisted Lazarus's entry from his tomb in such a manner, as depicted

in a Glasgow psalter (From Creation 87-88). Entering Jerusalem, Christ is hoisted over the crowd's heads, much in the guise of a sports victor. With the crowd singing "Hosannah!" and green flags waving, cymbals clash together, a drum roll is heard, and Christ, standing within their midst, laughs as he spits on his hands, healing a blind man. A hands-on miracle worker, he also delivers a lame woman from her infirmity.

Simultaneous with the episode during which Christ washes his disciples' feet, which is expeditiously dispatched in a celebratory atmosphere, is the plotting of Caiaphas and Annas. As these conspirators clink coins into a dish, they attempt to dismiss Christ by calling him "none but a journeyman joiner." The minor threat Christ poses is belied, however, by the special forces who assemble to guard Christ, now captured, at Herod's palace. His tormentors martial and discharge their ammunition, citing his miracles: the Wedding Feast of Cana, his feeding of 5,000 with two fishes, his resurrection of Lazarus. Herod's harlot puts lipstick upon Christ and kisses him, gracing him with a pink boa, one of many indignities audiences must witness. As the denigration escalates, Christ (God of humankind) is beheld holding a soccer ball, wearing one woman's shoe on his foot, a purple robe, red garter, pink boa, and crown of steel.

Despite the contemporary thrust of the performance, which conveys a strong sense of Christ as a controversial

character, some aspects of the performance remain rather traditional; for example, the workmen affixing Christ to a prostrate cross, deriving enjoyment from their work. Photojournalists at the Crucifixion scene, ice-cream vendors, and noisy picnickers, make the point that, today as then, onlookers pass on by, failing to recognize the implications of a God-man completing the work of redemption on their behalf. Inasmuch as this performance cannot adequately represent who Christ was to the medieval populace, it necessarily falls short, if representing the Middle Ages was one of its aims. In the Towneley Crucifixion Christ is sublime; dying, he compels: "Now is my passyon broght tyll ende! / ffader of heuen, in to thyn hende / I betake my saull!" (ll. 590-592). Joseph of Arimathea must remind Pilate that he has been a faithful servant in order to gain the favor of being allowed to bury Christ's body: "Graunte me the body--say me not nay--" (l. 638). Yet in the York production, the crucified Christ is transported away in a wheelbarrow and speedily run offstage. The redemptive work now completed, Christ nonetheless reassumes his identity as a worker at the site of the Resurrection, where he appears to Mary Magdalene, wielding his broom.

The York production captures all that can be portrayed (and perhaps should be) in the twentieth century: the magnitude of the redemptive work, the grace of God, the

scorn of humankind, and the depravity inherent in us all. Despite the need for medieval drama scholars to view Christ more polemically, I do not believe the myth that surrounds the sacred character should be dispensed with. For no producer will be hauled out on a Blasphemy Charge when a theatrical reviewer can dispassionately appraise an utterly demystified Christ, by saying:

Whatever else Mr. Green's Jesus may be trying to do, I sincerely hope he is not trying to found a charismatic sect; it was hard to believe that anyone would follow him from one side of the stage to the other, let alone across Israel.

(Lewis-Smith 13)

While there is no question that the Christ who appeared in the Corpus Christi plays is mythological, that myth has constrained and encumbered medieval drama scholars. Christ, standing within our midst, has failed to be recognized for the dynamic character that he is. We can no longer deem Christ central from a spiritual perspective while projecting him into a mystical dimension, where he remains inaccessible. This study has attempted to demonstrate that Christ, as dramatized within the Towneley cycle, is provocative and dynamic, controversial and ambivalent. Ambrose's dictum that it is through the work that we know the Worker provides a route of access for adopting reconstructivist approaches toward Christ. If Christ's work comes to be considered as contradictory, then he may be viewed as contradictory, without losing the myth, which

establishes his centrality.

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