

SIGN AND RELATED DIDACTIC TECHNIQUES IN
THE CHESTER CYCLE OF MYSTERY PLAYS

by

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NOTE ON THE TEXT

To preserve the appearance of the page I have refrained from underlining "Chester," though I have underlined the titles of the other cycles. For the same reason I have not underlined quotations in Latin. The editions which I have used for Chester; the Vulgate, and for a translation of the Bible will be found in my Bibliography. I have not cited them separately in footnotes.

Parts of chapters IV and V have already appeared in a slightly different form in a published article: "Sign and Transition: The Purification Play in Chester," Leeds Studies in English, New Series, XI (1980 for 1979), 90-104. They are included here by permission of my supervisor.

Neither the work for the thesis nor its composition was carried out in collaboration with anyone else.

ABSTRACT OF THESIS

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This is not a semiological study of the Chester cycle, though it contains material relevant to such a study. It notes (and classifies in an Appendix) Chester's frequent use of vocabulary relating to the provision and reception of signs, and it accordingly investigates the nature and extent of the cycle's interest in the signification of meaning. This leads the thesis into an analysis of signification both as a theme within the plays and a didactic technique employed by the playwrights.

With particular attention to sign, the thesis discusses Chester's relationship to biblical and theological tradition. (It does not discuss the concept of sign in medieval logic.) It closely investigates Chester's treatment of its main sources, the Bible and the Stanzaic Life of Christ and finds that, in both cases, the development of signification has been the principal concern of the dramatists when borrowing, omitting or adapting material. The thesis also asserts direct use of the Legenda Aurea. It compares Chester with the other mystery cycles and concludes that Chester is unique in making the signification process a central dramatic subject rather than simply employing signification as a means of instructing the audience. It explores the extent to which the cycle has thematic and aesthetic unity, and proposes that successive playwrights revised and created "normatively," that is, towards the established themes and style of the cycle. It discusses the cycle's characterization, and claims that a major achievement of the work is its consistent and highly developed presentation of evil as a perversion of signification. It finally attempts to clarify the kind of aesthetic and spiritual experience which the work offered to the onlooker and, in doing this, the thesis proposes that a study of signification sheds light upon the cycle's pictorialist style; its restricted emotional range; its use of allusion together with overt explanation, and the relative unimportance of typology compared with other, non-figurative parallels created in the work.

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CHAPTER I

SIGN IN THE THEOLOGICAL TRADITION

When men read, they read signs; when they preached, prayed or recited their articles of faith, they communicated by signs; when they looked at the world around them, and at each other, with the eyes of faith, they could see signs; when they worshipped, they used signs. The concept of 'sign' was all pervasive in western theological tradition. When one considers how simple and fundamental a concept 'sign' was, its variety of applications does not appear surprising. Augustine defined the meaning of 'sign' thus: "a sign is a thing which causes us to think of something beyond the impression the thing itself makes on the senses." (1) Viewed spiritually, a wide variety of earthly things could perform such a signficatory function, as the following quotation from G-H. Allard shows. He considers that, within the main tradition of signification, temporal things

n'ont d'autre valeur que d'être des médiations, des adjuvants, des échelons, des instruments, des chemins et des exemples de la remontée vers la Trinité. Entrent dans cette catégorie, les événements et personnages de l'Histoire, le monde, les arts libéraux, les langues et l'écriture, le langage, les signes sacramentals,

(1) Saint Augustine, On Christian Doctrine, trans. D. W. Robertson, The Library of Liberal Arts (New York: Bobbs - Merrill, 1958), p.34. The original will be found in Sancti Aurelii Augustini, De Doctrina Christiana, Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina XXXII, IV, 1 (Turnholti: Brepols, 1962), p.32.

les dons de l'Esprit, les préceptes
rhétoriques. (2)

In this chapter I will set out the different kinds of things which medieval churchmen considered to be important signs. (3) I have separated them for ease of discussion into signs of a linguistic kind, signs of a non-linguistic kind, and signs discernible in Creation, but it should not be thought that the theologians who discussed signs would have distinguished them thus. As Marcia Colish has pointed out, Augustine saw the signification of meaning in an essentially linguistic way even when it was carried out by means other than words. This was also characteristic of Christian epistemology until the later Middle Ages. (4) In the De Doctrina, for example, Augustine says of visible things such as hand gestures, banners, and movements of the body, "all of these things are like so many visible words." (5) Aquinas draws together linguistic signs and non-linguistic signs such as the actions and material

(2) G-H. Allard, "L'articulation du sens et du signe dans le De doctrina christiana de s. Augustin," in Studia Patristica, XIV, Papers presented to the Sixth International Conference on Patristic Studies, 1971; Pt III, ed. Elizabeth A. Livingstone (Berlin: Academie-Verlag, 1976), 377-88, p.384.

(3) I am excepting from this a discussion of sign in medieval logic. Though a key element in the formation of propositions, sign in this sense does not have any relevance to an analysis of the Chester cycle.

(4) Marcia L. Colish, The Mirror of Language: A Study in the Medieval Theory of Knowledge, Yale Historical Publications, Miscellany 88 (London: Yale Univ. Press, 1968). Colish makes these points on several occasions, but see her discussion of God's communication with men, and vice versa, pp.31 and 71, and her opening account of Christian epistemology, p.viii.

(5) Robertson, p.35; De Doc. Christ., p.34.

substances used in the sacrament: "Although it is true that words and other forms of reality perceptible to the senses belong to different categories as far as their real natures are concerned, still in their function as signs conveying meaning they do share a common ground." (6) An act of worship such as the Mass thus contains both linguistic signs and non-linguistic signs and the full meaning of the ceremonial depends on their joint use: "in order that the communication of meaning through the sacraments might achieve its full perfection it was necessary to give precision to the meaning that sensible materials have the power to convey as signs by adding certain words to them." (7) In addition, the theologian would see these many kinds of sign as having the same valuable function: they directed the mind towards God. Aquinas wrote, "Even though we are not able to attain God through the senses,

(6) Saint Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, ed. and trans. Thomas Gilby et al. (London: Blackfriars, 1963-), 3a, 60,6; p.23. References will be to Part, Question, Article, and then to the page of the volume in which that article appears. The Latin text always appears on the previous page.

(7) loc. cit.

through sensible signs our mind is urged to go to Him." (8) Words, images, sacraments, created things could all perform this function and were therefore valued by theologians. The distinctions I have implied by the following sections on sign are not, therefore, a reflection of the more unified medieval understanding of sign. (9)

Linguistic Signs

Although Origen had written on sign before Augustine, (10) it was from the Latin Father that western theology derived its concept of sign and, in particular, its understanding of language in relation to sign. Augustine was made heir to Aristotle's concept of sign probably through Cicero. (11) Scholars agree that Augustine then made a major original contribution to the theory of sign, but they do not always agree on what it was. Markus thinks it the use of sign to construct a theory of language. (12) Colish feels that Augustine had no design to construct a general epistemological or signficatory theory. Rather, his intentions were "to cope with the knowledge and expression of the word in and through human nature."

(8) Summa Theologiae, 2a 2ae, 84, 2; p.107.

(9) Theresa Coletti writing of apologies for the use of iconographic signs, i.e., images, says "inclusiveness...characterized the thinking on images during the course of its development over the centuries." Theresa M. Coletti, "Spirituality and Devotional Images: The Staging of the Hegge Cycle," Diss. Rochester 1975, p.71.

(10) R. A. Markus, "St. Augustine on Signs," Phronesis, 2 (1957), 60-83, pp.63-4.

(11) Colish, p.65.

(12) Markus, pp.64-5.

(13) Jackson feels that Augustine's originality lay "in the application of traditional sign-theory and sign-language to a new task, the interpretation of Scripture." (14) Whatever the extent of Augustine's debt and the nature of his originality, he established a theory of linguistic signification which lasted in theology into the fourteenth century (15) and which, as we shall see, still underlies the dramatists' use of the vocabulary of sign in the mystery cycles.

To Augustine, all words, whether found in texts or uttered in speech, are signs of a special kind: they are signa data. Such signs

...are those which living creatures show to one another for the purpose of conveying, in so far as they are able, the motion of their spirits or something which they have sensed or understood. Nor is there any other reason for signifying, or for giving signs, except for bringing forth and transferring to another mind the action of the mind in the person who makes the sign. (16)

These signs are to be distinguished from another group, of no interest to the exegete nor, one might add, to the present study of Chester. This group is composed of signa naturalia: "Those are natural [signs] which, without any desire or intention of signifying, make us aware of something beyond themselves, like smoke which signifies fire." (17) [My emphasis]. The essential

(13) Colish, pp.67-8.

(14) B. Darrell Jackson, "The Theory of Signs in St. Augustine's De Doctrina Christiana," in Augustine. A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. R. A. Markus (New York: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1972), 92-147, p.136.

(15) Colish, p.viii.

(16) Robertson, pp.34-5; De Doc. Christ. p.33.

(17) Robertson, p.34; De Doc. Christ. pp.32-3.

difference between the two groups is that the signs of the first group, the signa data, result from the intention to communicate, and the "natural" signs of the second group do not. (18) Robertson, however, in the passage quoted above, translates signa data as "conventional signs." In this, he was no doubt influenced by the point later in the De Doctrina Christiana where Augustine writes, "...Non constantalia signa inter homines, nisi consensus accedat." (19) This confusion over whether Augustine regarded signa data as characterized by their intentionality or their conventionality has been recently resolved, in favour of the former, by Jackson. (20)

The distinction between signa data and signa naturalia is clearly fundamental. Signification which exists as a result of the natural relationship of certain phenomena, and outwith the domain of willed communication, is the business of the natural scientist, not the Christian exegete or didactic dramatist. This is not to say that Chester contains no examples of what Augustine would call signa naturalia or does not assume the natural course of cause and effect upon which the perception of natural signs depends. It does contain such signs, and make such

(18) See J. Engels, "La doctrine du signe chez saint Augustin," in Studia Patristica, VI, Papers presented to the Third International Conference on Patristic Studies, 1959; Pt. IV, ed. F. L. Cross (Berlin: Academie-Verlag, 1962), 366-73, p.372.

(19) De Doc. Christ., p.60. Robertson translates: "signs are not valid among men except by common consent." (p.61).

(20) Jackson, p.98.

ordinary assumptions about reality but it is more interested in the meaning and communicated nature of signa data. For example, Christ's invitation to Thomas to observe how his "woundes are yett freshe and wett" (XIX,247) could have no meaning if it were not grounded on the assumption that such wounds are signa naturalia of death. But it is not as signa naturalia that Chester is presenting them. Christ is giving the sign of the wounds to Thomas. He is using them to communicate with the disciple, to prove something to him. The natural significance which the wounds have, and would have quite separate from this context, is subsumed under their greater importance as signs given by one person to another. They are signa naturalia in themselves, but signa data as used. As natural signs they would bear witness to the death of anyone in whom they appeared; as given signs they are being used by Christ to prove his resurrection.

It will have been noticed that the example of a given sign which I have just used is, in fact, non-linguistic. Augustine would, as with all other signa data, have seen this one as a kind of verbal communication and he would recognize that things other than words could function as signa data. It is important to recognize that while the theologian may have seen communication primarily in terms of signification, the Chester cycle is more interested in using signs than in classifying them. The cycle therefore has many examples of signa data which are not

words and which it would be irrelevant to see in verbal terms however much tradition permitted it. What I now wish to do is firstly, to look more closely at the theological understanding of words as signs and secondly, to determine whether Chester shares such a consciousness. No one would dispute that Chester uses words to convey meaning; what is at issue is whether Chester shows a self-conscious appreciation of words as signficatory, and what dramatic or didactic place it gives to this appreciation.

Communication of all external kinds takes place by virtue of sensible signs, (21) but within the realm of linguistic signification there are certain areas the significance of which it is particularly important for the Christian to understand. Of texts offering significance, the sacred scriptures are obviously the most fruitful, and Augustine's discussion of signa data, of the knowledge necessary to perceive their full significance, and of possible faults in one's understanding of them is directed, in the De Doctrina Christiana, by his need to elicit meaning from the scriptures. Equally, certain verbal activities are particularly important sources of significance for the fallen Christian who hopes to rise again. Book Four of the De Doctrina is therefore given over to teaching.

The signs encountered in the scriptures can be of two kinds: they can be literal signs, signa propria, or they can be figurative signs, signa translata. Words

(21) Summa Theologiae, 1a, 107, 1; p, 107.

always signify in a literal way in that they carry accepted conventional meanings. But the things which they linguistically signify can themselves be carrying an additional figurative meaning. In some parts of the Bible the meaning will be clear because the words are communicating literally; in others, it will be more obscure because the things the words literally signify are themselves intended to convey a figurative meaning. Thus, the word "ox" is signifying literally when it is directing our minds to the herbivorous quadruped which was its first designated reference and which is commonly brought to the minds of people who use the word. However, when the ox, literally signified by the word "ox", is itself intended to signify St. Luke, then figurative signification is taking place. (22) It is this distinction of literal and figurative signification in scripture that Aquinas elaborates and schematizes early in the Summa Theologiae.

In every branch of knowledge words have meaning, but what is special here is that the things meant by the words also themselves mean something. The first meaning whereby the words signify things belongs to the sense first mentioned, namely the historical or literal. (23)

Aquinas defines the "allegorical" senses in which the words can go on to signify as (a) allegorical "when the things of the Old Law signify the things of the New Law," (b) moral "when the things done in Christ and in those who prefigured Him are signs of what we should

(22) Robertson, p.43; De Doc. Christ., p.41.

(23) Summa Theologiae, 1a, 1, 10; p.37.

carry out" and (c) anagogical "when the things that lie ahead in eternal glory are signified." (24) The sacred text is, therefore, full of significance and it is the exegete's task to elicit this and in consequence to acquire such knowledge as will permit the more obscure matter to be clarified. Obscurity in the scriptures was, according to Augustine, "provided by God to conquer pride by work and to combat disdain in our minds, to which those things which are easily discovered seem frequently to be worthless." (25) On the other hand, the significance of the scriptures is never obscured to the disadvantage of the Christian seeking salvation for, "Hardly anything may be found in these obscure places which is not found plainly elsewhere." (26)

Although Chester is dramatizing and, at times, translating the Bible, it is clearly not the same kind of text as the Bible. It is not amenable to, and, indeed, does not solicit the intense and sustained interpretation of its verbal significance that could be used on the sacred writings. It is self-explanatory in the sense that potentially obscure matter is generally explained, (27) and in the further, more difficult, sense that because explanation is sometimes given, independent theological interpretation by the onlooker

(24) loc. cit.

(25) Robertson, p.37; De Doc. Christ., p.35.

(26) Robertson, p.38; De Doc. Christ., p.36.

(27) As will be clear later, Chester does offer scope for the biblically informed onlooker to supply additional meaning, but the extent to which this is done is more in doubt.

would seem correspondingly less justified. We will meet this problem of independent interpretation again in chapter VI but it is valuable to note it now as an indication that we cannot draw direct parallels between the way linguistic signs of the scriptures would have appeared to an exegete and the way Chester's linguistic signs offer meaning to the onlooker. To define the difference between the methods of carrying meaning which were seen in the Bible and those which we can see Chester adopting would take this study into the area of modern semiotics. Though this would be a valuable enterprise it is not the one which we have in hand. What we have to decide is whether and to what extent Chester is conscious that words are signficatory and how it uses this consciousness; we are not concerned to show whether Chester, as a text, is signficatory in the way that exegetes believed the biblical text to be linguistically signficatory.

The Chester authors are not interested philosophically in the condition and function of words as signs. They are not concerned with the fact that linguistic phenomena were thought to have an intrinsically signficatory nature. Nor, clearly, do they have a sustained exegetical interest. Except in a few cases, particularly with prophetic or typological material, Chester does not show the interpretative analysis exemplified in this quotation from Aquinas on the mission of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost: "To the Apostles, the mission took the form of a mighty wind,

as a sign of their power as ministers of the sacraments...it also took the form of tongues as of fire in evidence of their teaching office." (28) The major problems which exercised writers on signs (linguistic and non-linguistic) have been set out in Colish's important work, and I am relying upon that work for the following list of topics which do not seem to have engaged the Chester authors as they developed the cycle's interest in signs. Firstly, they are not concerned with whether the fallen language of men can bear truth and, if so, how it can do this. This problem was traditionally resolved by citing the incarnation of the Word. This event had given to human language the capacity to communicate about eternal truths with a degree of veracity. Colish writes,

Medieval thinkers...stressed verbal signs as the primary media of religious knowledge because they saw in Christ the Word the mediator between God and man, whose redemption enabled them to know God and to bear God to each other in human words. (29)

Nor is Chester concerned that the signs men can see and hear, both in words and in things round them, are only limited indications of ineffable truths. Colish writes that, for St. Thomas, "Signs are true, as far as they go, and the knower is capable of judging that they do not go the whole way." (30) It was also felt that the truth of a sign could only be judged, and the very identification of a sign as a sign could only be made,

(28) Summa Theologiae, 1a, 43, 8; p.235.

(29) Colish, p.X.

(30) *ibid.*, p.177.

if the hearer or viewer had a prior knowledge of that which it signified. Only a knowledge of God could permit one to judge words as truly significant of him or things in creation as genuinely exemplifying their Creator. Colish writes of Anselm,

...it is clear that the hearer can perceive the rectitude of a sign only if he knows both the sign and the object it signifies. The sign, thus, does not bring to the hearer any knowledge which he does not already have...This is completely consistent with Augustine's ideas on signification. The sign may be accurate, but it is not identical with its object...Its objective accuracy can be assessed only by a mind able to compare the sign with its object, which it already knows. (31)

Chester is not concerned either with the grace of God which dwells in the man and permits him to recognize the sign for what it is by illuminating him as to the sign's object. To Augustine, the recognition of signs depended on Christ spiritually teaching man. This Inner Teacher is the subject of the De Magistro. (32) Aquinas, however, saw the recognition of signs as dependent on God's grace in the different sense that God has graciously given man the natural capacity to make this recognition. (33)

These, then, were the questions which men who thought about signs considered theologically important. But they were less relevant to the Christian dramatist

(31) ibid., p.113, and compare p.130.

(32) Sancti Aurelii Augustini, Contra Academicos, De Beata Vita, De Ordine, De Magistro, De Libero Arbitrio, Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina, XXIX (Turnholti: Brepols, 1970).

(33) Summa Theologiae, 1a 2ae, 109, 1; p.73, and note g.

whose tasks were teaching, demonstration and exhortation. Chester is interested in texts and words (a) because of the meanings they bear, Christ's self-revelatory speeches being particularly important in this regard, and (b) because, bearing meaning, they can become the focus of belief or disbelief, understanding or incomprehension. Texts and words are didactic in content anyway, but can also be didactic in that lessons sometimes emerge from the way they are responded to. The moment in which a character recognizes the meaning of a sign is more important to the Chester authors than the particular form of divine grace which has permitted the recognition to be made. In fact Chester treats signs as if they could create belief in the perceiver. The revelation of Christ through his signs is more important to the Chester authors than an analysis of how far signs can convey truth, and how limited they are as evidence of a limitless God. In Chester the recognition of a sign as a sign is as often an achievement of belief by the character as it is evidence of his or her prior belief. Equally, within Chester's didactic scheme, a failure to recognize sign is more a rejection of belief than evidence of an inability to believe.

I believe that there will be final doubt as to how extensive Chester's conscious attention to linguistic signification is. It is represented by explicit sign terminology much less than is non-linguistic signification. When characters declare that they have

reached belief as a result of the signs offered them they are invariably referring to signs of a non-linguistic nature. Nevertheless, a consciousness of the text or word as signficatory is sometimes betrayed by the use of explicit sign terminology; also, there can be no doubt that there are some clear examples of Chester's using text or words as signs to which men must respond - in a similar way to its use of non-linguistic signs as a focus for response.

In Hm V, 31, Moses refers to the Ten Commandments as a 'token':

Fortye dayes now fasted have I,
that I might bee the more worthye
to lerne this tokenn trulye. (29-31)

It is a moot point whether Moses is referring to the commandments as newly heard by him, or to the text on the tablets which he is presumably holding. In either case, however, the author would appear to be using explicit sign terminology for linguistic matter. (34) In play VII, Joseph refers in a similarly explicit way to the message about Mary's innocence which he received from the Angel:

For hee sayde to mee sleepinge
that shee lackles was of sinne.
And when I hard that tokeninge,
from her durst I noe waye twynne.
(532-535)

On two other occasions use of explicit sign vocabulary shows that the author understands speech as a signficatory medium. Both occur in play XXIII. In the

(34) The use of "token" at line 39 could also bear this interpretation but, since there is room for an alternative reading, I will refer to it later.

first, Antichrist is urging the kings to communicate his claims to their subjects: "Therefore, kinges noble and gaye,/token your people what I saye" (225-6). In the second, Enock, like Joseph, is referring to information he has heard: "...tyll we hard tokeninge/of this theves comynge" (273-4). Finally, explicit sign vocabulary is sometimes used when the meaning of a biblical text (in every case a prophetic text) is being elicited. Chester shows itself here directly in the tradition of biblical exegesis which we discussed earlier. In the first example, from the H MS version of play V, an Expositor is interpreting the significance of an Old Testament signum translatum: the typologically significant period which Jonah spent in the whale's stomach: "Lordinges, what this may signifie/Christ expoundes apertlie" (353-4). (35) In the second, the Expositor is interpreting the meaning of Joel's prophecy of Pentecost: "This signes non other, in good faye/but of his deede on Whitsonday" (389-90). In play XXII, the author uses the words "signifie" and "betoken" on four occasions as the Expositor interprets the significance of the visions and prophecies of Antichrist's prophets (27, 85, 107,

(35) Typology was considered a special kind of figurative significance because of the chronological span over which its meaning referred. See Colish, p.70. Nearly everything in the Old Testament was figuratively significant beyond the immediate literal significance. Augustine writes "Therefore...all or almost all of the deeds which are contained in the Old Testament are to be taken figuratively as well as literally..." (Robertson, p.98: De Doc. Christ., p.96).

114). (36) Here is straightforward dramatization of biblical exegesis in the Augustinian tradition. Given this awareness of the signficatory power of scripture, one can see that the unique appearance of the Gospel writers to close the cycle is a suitable assertion that the drama's ultimate value resides in the textual significance of the scriptures which it brings to life.

(37)

There are also some places where it is clear that the Chester authors are using the signficatory nature of speech or text consciously for dramatic and didactic ends. These places are identified by the presence of a response to the meaning of a speech or text. Usually the response is unfavourable, but not necessarily so.

(38) In play XI, we find Simeon tampering with the biblical text which announces that a virgin will give birth. The text is wrong in his opinion, and he tries to alter the textual sign 'a virgin', and substitute his own: 'a good woman'. The significance of a text is at issue here and is put into dramatic and didactic focus by an inadequate response. Later, the Jews object to the inscription Pilate has nailed to the cross. The

(36) A range of words and phrases are used in this play so that the steady interpretation of the prophetic texts should not be too tedious, e.g., "understand I maye"; "may lickned bee"; "I shall expound"; "to moralyze aright."

(37) Since it is not known when these speeches entered the cycle, it is impossible to determine whether they represent a late reforming emphasis on the Bible as a more secure source of truth than the counterfeit dramatic images created by men.

(38) I have considered some of those episodes in greater detail elsewhere. False response to signs, and false use of them forms the substance of ch. V.

interpretation of this linguistic sign is made much of, accentuated by Pilate's direct question:

'Kynge of Jewes' - howe lykys thee? -
is wrytten thereon, for so sayd hee
withowten varyens. (XVIA, 222-4)

To the Jews, this "ys fowle wrytten" and the text should read that Christ lied when he claimed to be King of the Jews. The status of the linguistic sign is being emphasized in the action so that the onlooker may himself consider the significance of the text and mentally affirm its truth. There is an Old Testament analogue to these episodes in which textual sign has been focussed upon. It is rather muted, and appears in the narrative of a Doctor, perhaps accompanied by mimed action, rather than in full dramatic action. I refer to the breaking of the tablets with the Ten Commandments. These have already been explicitly referred to as a "token" which is to be learned. When the response to this token by the Israelites is unfavourable, Moses breaks the tablets. They are then recreated at the command of God. It is surely not far-fetched to see in this a dramatically restrained anticipation of the later episodes where textual sign is rejected and then re-asserted, whether that re-affirmation comes about by angelic means in the play of Simeon, or by Pilate's, perhaps unwittingly, appropriate obstinacy in the play of the Crucifixion. In these examples, the textual sign and the response it arouses have been in the foreground of the drama. There is also a particularly attractive example of verbal (as opposed to textual) signification

being concentrated on by the dramatist. The verbal signs at issue are the words sung by Gabriel to the shepherds, and it is the author's careful treatment of the shepherds' responses which reveals his conscious interest in verbal signification. I would like to examine this section of play VII in some depth.

In all four cycles some play is made of the shepherds' earthly response to Gabriel's heavenly song. In York and Towneley they sing in imitation of him. Ludus Coventriae and Chester are close to each other in that their shepherds do not apparently do this. (In Chester they are specifically given "troly, loly, loly, loo" to sing.) Also, in these two cycles, Gabriel's Latin is mangled before being properly interpreted. Yet Chester's account is much more unusual than might at first appear. At seventy-seven lines, it is much longer than the other cycles' accounts. Though closer in conception to Chester than those of York and Towneley, Ludus Coventriae's account is only ten lines long (16:78-88). Also Chester's version is more developed in that, while the shepherds in the Ludus Coventriae mangle only the word "glory," the Chester shepherds address themselves to the whole message. We can understand this special treatment in terms of Chester's interest in verbal signification. The whole section actually develops from the shepherds' bafflement at a non-linguistic sign, the Nativity star. Although they begin to sense the importance of the star (VII, 318-23), they do eventually have to seek heavenly help

for an understanding of the star's significance:

Lord, of this light
send us some sight
why that it is sent (VII, 346-8)

Gabriel gives the star's significance in his chant "Gloria in excelsis Deo et in terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis." The play thus modulates from a section directed by response to a non-linguistic sign into a section directed by a range of responses to linguistic signs.

William Munson has noted the improvement in the Chester shepherds' recognition of Gabriel's Latin words. (39) The subtlety of this process is not within the limits of this study. More important here is the last, most successful, part of the shepherds' discussion; this part essentially removes them from the world of burlesque. From line 400, they begin to get the words correct, and to declare the feelings aroused in them by those words. At first, this is sporadic. Primus Pastor recognizes that Gabriel was the singer; Secundus Pastor establishes gloria. All Tertius Pastor can do is to remove from the reckoning "sar," "cis," and "pax merye Mawd when shee had mett him." Garcius gets terra mixed up with "tarre," (40) but his response has a special appropriateness to the correct word

(39) William F. Munson, "Audience and Meaning in Two Medieval Dramatic Realisms," Comparative Drama, 9 (1975), 44-67, esp. p.51.

(40) This is the case in all MSS except AR which read "on terre" for "on tarre." This correct understanding by Garcius in AR does not affect the point that in this series of speeches the shepherds' recognition of Gabriel's words is still sporadic.

nevertheless. Then they correctly establish pax (416), hominibus (420), bonae voluntatis (426), and Garcius rounds off the success with the three words which express the essence of the Incarnation: Deo, terra and, again, pax (430-4).

As a result of this attention, the words of Gabriel's text are considerably emphasized for the audience. They are further put into the foreground as verbal signs because each receives an accompanying response from the shepherd quoting it. These responses are appropriate beyond the apparent comprehension of the shepherds, and each response acts as a kind of gloss on the significance of the word to which it is attached. It is suitable that Primus Pastor, recognizing that Gabriel "gloryd," should say that he could not be sorry when he heard this (402). It is appropriate that the singing of pax should later delight him as no other voice has done (418-9). It is wholly appropriate to the word hominibus that Secundus Pastor should quake with awe (421-3). God's intentions for men are truly awesome. One can also see that bonae voluntatis is a "cropp that passeth all other" (427) in the sense that a man's receiving the peace of God ultimately depends on his having good will.

By his presentation of the shepherds' responses to Gabriel's words the author of play VII is showing an interest in the dramatic and didactic potential of linguistic signs. The audience's attention is concentrated on the individual words of the Latin text

as it is elsewhere focussed, by visual means, on signs of a non-linguistic kind. The audience contemplates the significance of these verbal signs with the aid of the shepherds' responses, but not necessarily under their complete direction. The full significance is going to be understood by those who can translate the Latin, and therefore have their minds directed in a controlled way to the various aspects of the Incarnation: God, peace, Earth, men of good will. To this extent, the play offers an opportunity for informed spectators to enjoy a fuller appreciation of these textual signs, (41) but the less informed can still achieve an appropriate emotional response through the direction of the shepherds: their responses, mysteriously apt, constitute emotional renderings of the words' spiritual significance, if not of their literal meaning. I do not, therefore, agree with Eleanor Prosser when she criticizes the comedy of the shepherds on the grounds that the Angel's song would be "forgotten, the message lost, the moment never recaptured." (42) Indeed, I believe that the opposite happens.

We are thus asked to draw significance from things which other men's intuitive and laboured examination

(41) Leah Sinanoglou also considers the earlier speeches of the shepherds to have a depth of significance: they are "full of unwitting doubles-entendres." These earlier speeches do not, however, show an overt authorial consciousness of words as signs. Leah Sinanoglou, "The Christ Child as Sacrifice: A Medieval Tradition and the Corpus Christi Plays," Speculum, 48 (1973), 491-509, p.505.

(42) Eleanor Prosser, Drama and Religion in the English Mystery Plays. A Re-evaluation (1961; rpt. Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1966), p.82.

has rendered significant for us. This relationship between characters and audience, based here in their response to verbal signification, is surely part of that particularly "communal" quality which critics have sensed in play VII. Munson stresses communal celebration and audience participation through the characters: "The difference between the Chester shepherds' play and the Wakefield First Shepherds' Play is the difference between a traditional, holiday art and a more self-conscious art." (43) Peter Travis sees this celebration as characterizing the whole nativity sequence. (44) Our earlier feelings of superiority over the comic shepherds give way to a sense that we form a community with them based on the importance of Gabriel's verbal signs to us all, and upon our sharing in important respects the response which the shepherds make to them. (45)

Prophetic texts are, of course, inherently signifiatory as all language is but, as used in Chester, they share with the examples of speech and text already discussed, a special emphasis whereby they become important objects of response in men. They are linguistic phenomena the significance of which is shaping the play's action and meaning. It is important

(43) Munson, pp.53-4.

(44) Peter W. Travis, Dramatic Design in the Chester Cycle (forthcoming from Chicago Univ. Press).

(45) This subtly joyful progression may explain in part why play VII was popular enough to receive independent performances. See Lawrence M. Clopper, ed., Chester, Records of Early English Drama (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 1979), pp. 23-4 and 124.

that a character should believe these particular linguistic signs, because they are evidential in nature. A refusal to believe a prophecy is like a failure to accept Christ's miracles as miracles: both refusals are a rejection of belief in the God whom the signs reveal. Balaack, in the H MS play V, evidently accepts the significance of the prophetic speeches he hears. The formal manner of their organisation and delivery reminds one of their textual authority, and Balaack recognizes that these linguistic signs have proved the supremacy of God: "Now see I well no man on lyve/gaynes with him for to shryve" (437-8). (46) Herod has the prophecies of Christ's birth searched, in play VIII, because he accepts their evidential nature: "...search the trueth of Esaye..." but he then rejects their significance because it is contrary to what he wishes. I do not agree with Rosemary Woolf when she views these prophecies as essentially predictive, functioning in the same way as the prophetic utterances of an Old Testament prophets' play. (47) R. A. Brawer is closer to my understanding of their function when he states that Chester incorporates prophecy within action as part of

(46) "shryve" in line 438 is presumably an error for "stryve."

(47) Rosemary Woolf, The English Mystery Plays (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), p.204. As I have just shown, Chester's H manuscript's prophets are not used in a solely predictive way even although they are in the Old Testament section of the cycle.

a concentration upon the responses of the characters.
(48) These textual signs are at issue because Herod has requested their examination. They, like the miracles of the New Testament, have a probative function: they are signs of Christ's deity, as Herod's Doctor rather tactlessly points out (346-9). Herod, like so many men confronted by linguistic or non-linguistic signs, rejects their significance and his response is particularly violent. Moses broke the tables as an act of spiritual loyalty to God and he recreates them later; Simeon only tampers with the biblical text and ultimately accepts the original reading; the Jews are angry but helpless before Pilate's inscription; but Herod would have these textual signs destroyed: "Have donne! Those bookes were rent and torne" (351).

In all the preceding examples the Chester authors have evidently concentrated dramatic, and hence didactic, attention on the significance of words or texts, and the responses which men make to them. We can accept, therefore, that there is evidence in Chester of a conscious interest in the significatory nature of words whether spoken or written. The extent of that interest is at once important and difficult to define. It is important to define it because our primary aim is to understand the cycle critically as a whole. The mere proof that Chester's authors make conscious use of the kind of signification which theologians considered the

(48) R. A. Brawer, "The Form and Function of the Prophetic Procession in the Middle English Cycle Play," Annuaire Medievale, 13 (1972), 88-124, p.112-3.

most fundamental is only part of the critic's task.

There are several episodes in which it is difficult to determine whether the authors are specifically interested in linguistic signs or whether their real concern is with non-linguistic signification. Christ's speech, like all language, is intrinsically signficatory. Its meaning has a special salvific value, and we might therefore expect Christ's speeches to be always the focus of men's responses as the linguistic signs we have just been looking at were. But it is not always what Christ says that is at issue dramatically; sometimes it would appear to be the knowledge which permits him to say what he does say that men and women are responding to. In such cases it is difficult to see what place linguistic signs occupy in the drama, or rather, whether the author is really interested in linguistic signification. The episodes to which I refer are: Christ's debate with the Doctors; Christ's temptation by Satan; the woman taken in adultery. In each case, verbal or written material plays a central part in the action but would not appear to be the direct cause of belief or the direct object of disbelief. The Doctors, though appreciating that what Christ says is true in itself (XI, 257-8), would appear to be responding more to his miraculous knowledge of texts of which they already know the meaning: "Behould how hee hasse learned our lawes,/and he learned never on booke to reade" (XI, 255-6). Again, it is not what Christ's replies mean that Satan fails

to understand; rather, he cannot decide what the spiritual power of Christ's answers might imply about Christ's human or divine nature. It is that which he has set out to discover, and at the end he is still in ignorance of everything except his own downfall. When he does acknowledge defeat it is to Christ's knowledge that he bows: "Knewe I never man of such wytt/as him that I have [lafte]" (151-2). It would have been relatively easy for the author to concentrate on Satan's inability to understand the meaning of what is said to him. Christ speaks on one occasion very enigmatically to him:

for Goddes will omnyotent
is my meat withouten fayle,
and his word perfect sustenance
to mee alwayes without distance
(XII, 75-8)

The author might have concentrated here on imperfect understanding of a verbal sign, but instead he presents Satan's confusion as more general, and basically identical with the confusion he felt before the reply:

Owt, alas! What is this?
This matter fares all amyse;
hongree I see well hee is,
as man should kindlye.
But through no craft ne no coyntyse
I cannot torne his will, iwys; (81-6)

The defeat of Satan finally seems to turn, therefore, upon Christ's knowledge rather than Satan's inability to comprehend the verbal signs he receives. Likewise, when Christ has freed the woman taken in adultery she appears to be brought to belief not directly by the words Christ writes on the sand but by the miraculous knowledge he shows in being able to write them: "For

godhead full in thee I see/that knowes worke that doe wee" (277-8). The situation is not dissimilar to that in the Purification where, although it is in the biblical text that the miraculous changes occur to convince Simeon of the virgin birth, it is the miraculous change, and not the text, that he responds to and from which his belief is derived. One might, therefore, say that these episodes show the authors to be interested in non-linguistic signs of Christ's deity since it is to his miraculous knowledge that men and women are directly responding. And yet I cannot feel that such a precise distinction between the miraculous knowledge and the linguistic medium through which it is expressed is true to the theatrical effect of the scenes. The audience would see that the signs Christ was offering to the Doctors, Satan and the woman were being offered through speeches and writing whatever the precise cause of the characters' response might be. I do not believe these episodes, strictly considered, to be evidence of the authors' interest in linguistic signification as we discovered it in the earlier examples. But we must also recognize that the theatrical effect of the scenes might be very similar to that achieved in the scenes where linguistic signs are overtly important. The Doctors would appear to believe because of Christ's words; Satan would appear to be dumbfounded by Christ's words; the woman would appear to be brought to belief by Christ's writing on the sand. This is, perhaps, a valuable reminder that, while traditions in thought may

be capable of clarification, the corresponding ideas in an artistic context are inhabiting a world of appearances and of subtly shifting interrelationships.

So far we have been deciding on whether or not authors were consciously presenting linguistic signs, by examining the way in which they present certain texts and speeches. Are these linguistic features concentrated on? Do some characters reject them with disbelief, and others accept them as evidence of some truth such as God's supremacy or Christ's divinity? It is not only by such overt presentation that the authors show their conscious interest in linguistic signification. They give evidence of this interest by the way in which Christ's speeches during the ministry are deployed, and by the way in which Christ and others appear to regard them. The ministry in Chester is essentially a period of prolonged self-revelation by Christ, and this revelation of his divinity is achieved by his non-linguistic signs, the miracles, (49) and by his speeches which appear, by analogy with the miracles, to be linguistic signs of that divinity. Even although there is no overt response to Christ's great description of himself which opens play XIII, one still senses that the author considers this to be enlightening the audience in precisely the same way as the succeeding miraculous healing of Caecus enlightens

(49) I have reserved discussion of the miracles as signs until chapter II since Chester draws its interest in them directly from the Bible rather than from theological tradition.

the characters as to Christ's nature (Caecus literally as well as spiritually). Throughout the ministry, speeches and actions alternate, all displaying the glory of Christ: sometimes creating belief, sometimes evidently being rejected. When his ministry is nearing its end in the Garden of Gethsemane, Christ speaks to God thus:

Thy name have I made men to knowe
and spared not thy will to showe
to my disciples on a rowe
that thou hast given mee.
And nowe they knowe verelye
that from the Father sent am I.
(XV, 273-8)

Although in the immediately preceding lines (269-72) Christ has been speaking about his works, that is, the non-linguistic signs he has offered, this speech comes at the end of a considerable section of verbal instruction to the disciples (169-264). It seems clear that the words as well as the works are to be considered the means by which God's name and Christ's identity as God's Son have been made known. On another occasion, Christ explicitly links his words and works, asserting that they both bear witness to him, and are both the object of disbelief by the Jews:

That I spake to you openlye
and workes that I doe verelye
in my Fathers name almightie
beareth wytnes of mee. (XIII, 239-42)

Evidently both Christ's speeches and his miracles are signs which reveal him, and while the Jews do not believe what they see, Christ

says that his flock "here my voyce alwaye" (246). (50) Again the association of word and work is emphasized at XIII, 269-80. If anything, this passage begins with Chester accentuating the words of Christ more than does the part of the Bible which Chester has chosen to dramatize. The Jews, who are about to stone Christ, say that they do so not because of his works but because of his blasphemy: "De bono opere non lapidamus te, sed de blasphemia; et quia tu homo cum sis, facis teipsum Deum" (John X.33). Chester seems to make more explicit the Vulgate objection to Christ's speech:

For thy good deede that thou hast wrought
at this tyme stone we thee nought.
Both in word and thought
there thou lyes falselye.
(XIII, 269-72)

At this point MSS. B and H show that they see an association of words and works as signs by using for Christ's speeches a verb and adverb frequently used for the non-linguistic signs: "but for thie leasinge falsely wrought/thou shewest apartelie here" (my emphasis). Christ's reply to the Jews in the Bible is to urge them, since they do not believe him, i.e., his words, to believe the works instead: "...et si mihi non

(50) That this passage is close translation of the Vulgate in no way affects my claim that the authors are encouraging an association of Christ's linguistic and non-linguistic signs. I discuss Chester's careful use of the biblical text in chapter II. Christ's use of the word "openlye" when alluding to his speeches (line 239) has no Vulgate equivalent and I suspect that its use reflects the traditional, ultimately Augustinian, view that Christ's words were literal verbal signification of truths whereas his actions were figuratively verbal communication. See Colish, p.34.

vultis credere, operibus credite..." (John X.38). Chester however appears concerned to avoid such an alternative which would seem to lay stress on one kind of sign rather than the other. It wishes to stress the Jews' rejection of both kinds of sign, but the result is a reading, confusing at best, and possibly incoherent:

But sythen you will not leeve me,
nor my deedes that you may see,
to them beleevinge takes yee,
for nothings may be soother. (277-80)

Chester is emphatically presenting the words and the works of Christ as phenomena with the same basic function: revelation of Christ's divinity. Both kinds of sign also receive similar rejection from the Jews and, on occasion, arouse belief in good men and women. Mary Magdalene, for example, reaches belief as a result of Christ's miraculous, non-linguistic sign, the raising of Lazarus: "By verey signe nowe men may see/that thou arte Godes Sonne" (XIII, 476-7). Martha, on the other hand, shows her belief before this miracle, and in response to Christ's speech of self-revelation:

Martha, I tell thee withowt naye,
I am risynge and life verey;
which liffe shall last for aye
and never shall ended be.

Whosoever leeveth steedfastlye
in mee - I tell thee trulye -
though he dead bee and downe lye,
shall live and fare well.
Leeves thou, woman, that this maye?

MARTHA

Lord, I leeve and leeve mon
that thou arte Christ, Godes Sonne

Though explicit sign terminology is used only for the non-linguistic sign, it cannot be denied that the two episodes are closely paralleled, and that the author's deployment of speech and act as two species of sign can be inferred. One's sense of Christ's speeches as signs lasts into the Trial play where they are no longer being complemented by his non-linguistic signs. When Christ says to Cayphas: "I am Goddes Sonne almightye..." (XVI, 45-50), it sounds very like his earlier speeches of self-revelation; and when Cayphas responds "Wytnes of all this compenye/that falsely lyes hee!" (52-3), we are hearing the characteristic response which Christ has said the Jews make to his words. Here is verbal sign and unbelieving response again, even though there is no parallel non-linguistic sign to make us think in such terms. Similarly, the Chester author of the Hm text of XVI probably remains close to Pilate's lengthy questioning of Christ (John xviii .33-8 and, for lines 284-90, the Gospel of Nicodemus) because it shows Pilate attempting to grapple with Christ's verbal signs. Precise interpretation of this section is difficult, however, since the H MS omits a key response by Pilate together with the strong self-revelatory speech of Christ which follows it (XVI, 275-82). (51)

(51) It is also difficult to decide to what extent, if any, Pilate's response "Ergo, a kinge thou art, or was" is a change from the Vulgate "Ergo rex es tu" which could either be a question or a statement.

An unusual example of verbal signification appears in play XIII where Christ likens himself to the day and the disciples to the hours (337-56). It is unusual because it combines the self-revelation which we have seen as the essential feature of Christ's verbal signs with a kind of exegetical interpretation of verbal significance which is not found elsewhere in these New Testament plays. Christ first makes the statement that if a man walks in the twelve hours of the day he does not go wrong, but he soon does if he walks at night - he offends and there is no light in him. The Bible leaves the speech unexplained (John xi.9-10) but Chester chooses to present Christ as the expositor of this enigmatic verbal sign and he explains it in terms of his being the light of the world. Christ makes other enigmatic claims in his speeches of self-revelation in XIII. There are, for example, "Ego sum lux mundi" which opens the play, and "I am risynge and life verrey" (386), but in each case the explanation of the trope is achieved by the succeeding action: the giving of sight to Caecus; the raising of Lazarus. This is, therefore, an interesting and convincing indication that the author is interested in Christ's verbal signs. Christ's utterance is focussed upon by its enigmatic quality and because it receives the kind of exegesis which the textual signs of the Bible customarily receive from theologians. The signifiatory nature of words seems to be in the forefront of the author's mind since it is foregrounded in the drama.

To sum up, the western theological tradition regarded many kinds of things as signs but tended to see words as the most fundamental signs and to regard other kinds of signs figuratively, as verbal signification. The Chester cycle clearly reflects the tradition that words, spoken and written, are signficatory, by shaping its drama to draw attention to certain speeches and texts as sources of meaning to which men and women respond. It builds up a recognizable pattern of response to such material; it uses explicit sign terminology for linguistic phenomena; it chooses to follow a part of the Vulgate where Christ explicitly associates his words with the works which Chester, as we shall see, regards as non-linguistic signs; it parallels Christ's speeches of self-revelation with his miraculous actions of self-revelation, and indicates that both receive the same kind of response from the unbeliever. On the other hand, there are places where it is difficult to be sure whether the authors are interested in linguistic signification. The theatrical presentation in these episodes may make it appear that the authors are interested while the text of the plays suggests that they are not. One must also recognize that, however convincing a case can be made for the use of linguistic signs, this kind of signification is not represented nearly so much in the explicit sign terminology of the cycle as non-linguistic signification is. It follows, therefore, that the non-linguistic signs would be most

clearly in the minds of the audience. If someone were asked what he had seen at Chester he might well remark that he had watched all the glorious actions by which Christ showed himself. But, in fact, were he to stop with that report, he would be ignoring the subtle way in which the linguistic dimension of drama was harmonized with the cycle's action - all within the didactic framework of signification of meaning.

Non-linguistic signs

The non-linguistic signs with which theological tradition was most concerned were those used in worship. (52) The non-linguistic signs with which Chester is most overtly concerned are Christ's miracles, but these will be looked at more closely in chapter II. Chester is interested in non-linguistic signs other than the miracles, and much of its intensely visual style can be explained as a method of presenting visible phenomena as sources of significance, just as we have seen the cycle presenting words and texts in a formal and intense manner to accentuate their signifiatory function.

Worship was pervaded by signs appreciable by all the senses and, as Mirk points out in the Festial, it was valuable for the priest to know what the altar, veil, etc.,

(52) I except from this, of course, the signs of God which were considered evident in his Creation, and which I will discuss in the last section of this chapter.

betokened so that the disingenuous questioning of parishioners might be answered. (53) A good indication of the kinds of things which would be considered signficatory can be found in Pecock's The Reule of Crysten Religion. (54) In this passage he is setting out some of the things which he considers to be "tokenys, sacraments, and signes":

þe bodili hous of þe chirche wiþ alle þe ornamentis þerynne, wiþ ligtis, encensis, hali watir, gay and riche cloþis and garnementis, crossis, ymagis, peyntingis, bellis, organs, myrie songis, stipelis, gay corven roofis wiþ craftiose windowis, dyuersite of deedis to be doon after reule and ordre of þe ordinal, and manye oþere þingis and deedis. (p.244)

All these things have meanings and should, as signs, direct one's mind to the truth or person they signify. Indeed, the church year is made up of signs, for the establishment of a particular day for celebrating Christ's birth is a means of helping us to imagine the actual day of his birth. (55) One can add the sacraments to the list if Pecock is not in fact implying them at the end of the passage. They, like the images and the other external aids to worship, are the signs required to assist the fallen, limited man towards divine truths. Aquinas writes of this:

(53) John Mirk, Mirk's Festial, ed. T. Erbe, Early English Text Society, Extra Series, XCVI (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1905), p.126.

(54) Reginald Pecock, The Reule of Cristen Religion, ed. William Cabell Greet, Early English Text Society, Original Series, 171 for 1926 (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1927).

(55) Reginald Pecock, The Repressor of Over-Much Blaming of the Clergy, ed., Churchill Babington, Rolls Series (London: Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1860), I, 268-9.

Now it is characteristic of divine providence that it provides for each being in a manner corresponding to its own particular way of functioning. Hence it is appropriate that in bestowing certain aids to salvation upon man the divine wisdom should make use of certain physical and sensible signs called the sacraments. (56)

The worship of medieval men, whether expressed through images, music, sacraments or other things, was necessarily figurative because they lived under the New Law but before the Day of Judgment. It was no longer pre-figurative as were the signs used by men before Christ, but men were not yet in a position to behold God face to face. They still had to see him "through a glass darkly" (per speculum in aenigmate) - the key text in the tradition of writing about signs, linguistic and non-linguistic. (57) Of the time after Doomsday, Aquinas writes, "in this state of the blessed there will be nothing figurative in the mode of divine worship, but only thanksgiving and the voice of praise." (58)

Tradition saw the value of external things in worship, images in particular, as lying in three main areas. (59) Firstly, as a substitute for books, they had a didactic function, particularly for the illiterate, who could receive instruction by looking

(56) Summa Theologiae, 3a, 61, 1; p.39.

(57) Colish, *passim*.

(58) Summa Theologiae, 1a, 2ae, 103, 3; p.243.

(59) See Coletti, p.63 for a summary of the Church Fathers' attitudes. She discusses the function of images and the apologetic tradition associated with them in her early chapters. See also Charles Garside, Jr., Zwingli and the Arts (London: Yale Univ. Press, 1966), pp.90-2 for a discussion of the three main traditions noted here.

round at the walls of the church. Secondly, they had an affective function arousing people who were by nature fleshly, to a contemplation of spiritual things. Thirdly, they had a mnemonic function in reminding us of those truths which we are liable to forget or of the people whom they represented. They could fix these things in the mind. Pecoock, whose Repressor Coletti refers to as "a kind of compendium of the arguments supplied by a thousand years of image discussion," (60) evidently considers the mnemonic function of images to be their most important aspect. The Bible "weerneth not graued ymagis to be had and vsid, not for Goddis, but for rememoratiyf signes or myndyng signes of God and of Seintis." (61) Sacraments also have this mnemonic function, and the Eucharist is a 'myndyng signe' even although it is, by the doctrine of transubstantiation, a reality as well as a sign:

notwiþstondyng it is þin own body and blood,
 lord jhsu, gitt it is ordeyned and sette þere
 as a signe, tokene or sacrament, and as a
 signe, tokene or sacrament we shulden use it
 þere, þat is to seie for þat þere it schulde
 signifie to vs and bringe into oure mynde þin
 hooly lijf and passioun...(62)

Like images, sacraments have an arousing function in worship, as Aquinas points out when discussing them: "in divine worship the use of corporeal things is necessary so that by using signs, man's mind may be aroused (excitetur) to the spiritual acts which join

(60) Coletti, p.74.

(61) Pecoock, Repressor, I, 145. Compare also pp.164-5.

(62) Pecoock, Reule, p.248.

him to God." (63)

Pecock wrote of external signs that they are found particularly valuable "of hem whiche kunnen not rede or moun not here the word of God rede or prechid to hem."

(64) Aquinas says the same of the sacraments. For example, he notes that the baptismal rite contains various external details which are not strictly necessary for the ceremony to have its effect. They have their value in other ways, one being the instruction of the illiterate. Here we see a conventional justification of images applied to the sacraments:

Simple unlettered people need to be taught through sensible signs, pictures, for example, and other such things. In this way through the ceremonial ritual of the sacrament they are either instructed or persuasively moved to look for the meaning behind these sensible signs. Thus, since besides the principal effect of the sacrament it is necessary to know other things about baptism as well, it was fitting that these things were also represented by certain outward signs. (65)

It is as sign that a sacrament is discussed by Aquinas in the Summa:

Now for our present purposes when we speak of sacrament we have in mind one specific connection with the sacred, namely that of a sign. And it is on these grounds that we assign sacraments to the general category of signs. (66)

Augustine had defined a sacrament as a sacred sign in the De Civitate Dei, and this definition was regularly

(63) Summa Theologiae, 2a 2ae, 81, 7; p.29.

(64) Pecock, Repressor, I, 273.

(65) Summa Theologiae, 3a, 66, 10; p.45.

(66) ibid., 3a, 60, 1; p.5.

invoked. The two terms were regarded, broadly speaking, as synonymous: "...sacramentum, id est, sacrum signum" (67). Thus Aquinas recognizes that, in these general terms, any sign of something sacred can properly be called a sacrament. (68)

However, there were certain differences between sacraments and other external non-linguistic signs used in worship. Though a sacrament like an image or some other sign, might bring to mind a truth beyond itself, it was also important because it signified the spiritual condition of the user of the sacrament. Augustine, in the passage from which I have just quoted, wrote, "A visible sacrifice...is the sacrament, that is to say, the sacred sign of an invisible sacrifice." (69) Aquinas emphasized that the external acts of the sacraments were only of secondary importance - God valued the spiritual condition of the user, which they represented:

Therefore, the internal acts of religion are principal and essential, while the exterior acts are secondary and subordinate to the internal acts...These external signs are offered to God not because he is in need... Rather, they are signs of the internal and spiritual actions which are acceptable to God. (70)

As we shall see, Chester is interested in signs which

(67) Sancti Aurelii Augustini, De Civitate Dei, ed. B. Dombart and A. Kalb, Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina, XLVII (Turnholti: Brepols, 1955), X, 5, p.277.

(68) Summa Theologiae, 3a, 60, 2; p.9.

(69) This translation is that of W. A. Jurgens, The Faith of the Early Fathers (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1979), III, 99.

(70) Summa Theologiae, 2a 2ae, 81, 7; p.29.

have this sacramental quality, though they may not actually be sacraments.

A second important point about sacraments was that they caused the inner grace which they signified in the user. Aquinas would like to restrict the term 'sacrament', as he is using it in the Summa, for "that which is a sign of a sacred reality inasmuch as it has the property of sanctifying men." (71) The sacrament, then, signifies the user's spiritual condition of grace but is the instrumental means by which that grace enters. "And this is why the sacraments of the New Law are causes and signs at the same time. Hence too it is that, as the usual formula puts it, they effect what they figuratively express." (72)

The sacrifices and ceremonials of men of the Old Testament were external signs of their faith in God. They could therefore be properly called sacraments, and Chester reflects this basic understanding of them when its Expositor says of circumcision: "this was sometye an sacrament/in the ould lawe truely tane" (IV, 195-6). But they differed from New Testament sacraments in one key respect - they were only significatory. The grace of Christ was not in them and they therefore did not infuse in men the grace which the sacraments of the New Law did. Also, Old Testament ceremonials, to which Aquinas would prefer to deny the term 'sacrament,' were significatory of the truths beyond themselves only in

(71) ibid., 3a, 60, 2; p.9.

(72) ibid., 1a 2ae, 101, 4; p.127.

the sense that they prefigured things to be done under the New Law. Aquinas writes:

The sacrifice of the New Law, the Eucharist, contains Christ himself, the author of our sanctification...Hence this sacrifice is also a sacrament. The sacraments of the Old Law, however, did not contain Christ, but prefigured him, and so they are not called sacraments. (73)

Turning now to the cycle, we find that Chester does not present the New Testament sacrament of the Last Supper as a sign. It appears to present sacraments as signs only when they are of the Old Law, and are of typological significance. In play XV, Christ refers to the Last Supper as a memorial: "This give I you on me to mynd/aye after evermore" (95-6). The idea, which is, of course, biblical and liturgical, is hardly developed in any way that would suggest the author's particular interest in the signficatory nature of the Mass. There is also none of the intense eliciting of significance from sacrament that one finds in the corresponding episode in Ludus Coventriae. Neither is the Last Supper presented as the institution of an external sign by which men will be able to express their inner spiritual condition. Indeed, Chester wishes to distinguish this sacrament from the ceremonies of the Old Law on the grounds that it is a reality and they were signs. As the disciples are about to eat the Paschal Lamb, Christ tells them of an impending change:

For knowe you nowe, the tyme is come
that sygnes and shadowes be all donne.
Therefore, make haste, that we maye soon

(73) *ibid.*, 3a, 62, 1; p.55.

all figures cleane rejecte. (69-72)

To the Chester author, the Last Supper is the reality which replaces prefigurative signs. The H MS here avoids the possible confusion of the Group MSS. Instead of "sygnes" in line 70, it reads "figures." It thus stresses that the Old Testament sacraments are prefigurative, and avoids the apparent paradox of the Group MSS where Christ appears to be rejecting "sygnes" after having just spent his Ministry giving them in the form of miracles. The Group MSS are not, of course, inconsistent - the "signes" which Christ is rejecting are the Paschal Lamb and other Old Testament sacraments.

Those things done under the Old Law which Chester sees as prefigurative signs are Abraham's and Melchisedeck's offerings: circumcision; the 'sacrifice' of Isaac. The first sacramental actions of the Old Testament, Cain's and Abel's sacrifices, are not treated prefiguratively. The drama of play IV, however, is shaped around the eliciting of prefigurative significance by an Expositor from the sacramental actions. (74) Chester is not concerned with a neat parallellism of Old and New Testament sacraments. It lacks a Baptism for the circumcision to

(74) See IV, 113-28; 193-200; 460-7.

prefigure, although play IV does make the link. (75) Abraham's offering signifies the New Testament and his 'sacrifice' of Isaac the Passion. Tradition would permit one to see the New Testament as a sign used in worship and the play does rather emphasize its use throughout Christendom (118-20), but I cannot feel that the author is seeking to pair it with Abraham's offering as two sacraments. Similarly, though the Passion could be regarded as a sign, (76) the previous prefiguration of the Mass by Melchysedeck suggests that the author is not interested in Abraham's 'sacrifice' as a prefiguration of the Passion in a eucharistic sense.

When I suggest that the author of XV does not present the Last Supper as signficatory, I am not implying that he would have denied a signficatory character to the Mass. But, within the drama's unfolding of events, he insists that the Last Supper be seen as the reality, the thing "of greater effecte" (68), towards which the signs have pointed, just as the recognition of Christ as the Son of God follows appreciation of his miraculous signs, and just as the baby Jesus is the reality at the centre of the mass of nativity signs which have led men to him, or which men

(75) There is no evidence that Chester ever had a Baptism play. See Clopper, Records. Any explanation of this is at present, pure speculation. At the same time, the absence from Chester's Ministry section of an episode in which a man is seen administering a sign to Christ strikes me as in keeping both with Chester's emphasis on signs as God-given, and with its emphasis on a powerful Christ.

(76) Summa Theologiae, 3a, 48, 8; p.83.

use to express his nature. (77)

Even if the Last Supper is not presented as an external sign by which men can show their spiritual condition, the cycle does not ignore this kind of sign. Cain and Abel's sacrifices seem primarily to reveal their different spiritual states. When the circumcision is instituted it is understood to be a mark whereby a man can be distinguished from the unbeliever. Abraham says of it to God, "thereby knowe thou maye/thy folke from other mèn"(IV, 187-8). There are several references of this kind in Chester and, as the children of Israel are transmuted into the New Testament community of believers, the signs which distinguish them from the unchosen or unbelieving remain a matter of interest. The actions which function as these distinguishing signs seem to me to have a quasi-sacramental quality in that they are external and visible means by which men's spiritual state is signified. They are obviously not like sacraments in that they do not confer any grace on the men and women who use them. Nor are they always ceremonial in style. But they do have the quality of showing to God and men the "internal and spiritual actions which are acceptable to God" as Aquinas put it. I am also encouraged to regard these actions as quasi-sacramental marks of distinctness because the cycle does not

(77) In chapter IV, we will see an author rendering the Vulgate, perhaps even deliberately altering it, in a way favourable to this pattern of sign leading to reality.

provide an alternative moral framework in which to see them. Circumcision; carrying out the Ten Commandments; living according to Christ's word; loving each other; anointing Christ's feet, as Mary Magdalene does; performing miracles - all these are present in Chester because, as right actions, they signify right belief. The cycle is fideistic rather than moral; concerned more with what men should learn and believe than with the tropological area of what they should do.

We noted earlier that the Ten Commandments are referred to as a "token" at V, 31. The word is used again at line 39 where Moses delivers the tablets to the Israelites:

By this sight nowe yee may see
that hee is pearles of postee.
Therefore this token looke doe yee,
therof that yee ne blynne. (37-40)

If the word "token" refers to the two preceding lines, then the Commandments are being considered, like the miracles or the prophecies, as a sign of God's power, but this meaning is implicit anyway in lines 37 and 38. David Mills has pointed out to me that "token" could refer to lines 39 and 40. The paraphrased meaning would therefore be: "See that you provide this token, namely, that you do not cease to perform what the Commandments require." I am much attracted to this reading, not least because it has a parallel in advice given by Christ to his disciples:

Contynue in my word; from yt doe not departe.
Therby shall all men knowe most perfectlye
that you are my disciples and of my
familie. (XIII, 31-3)

A life lived by Christ's word, a life lived by the Ten Commandments, each is a sign of a man's spiritual allegiance and of his relationship to God. This is precisely what Abraham is saying of circumcision, as we have seen. In a similar way, the disciples will be able to recognize those who have truly believed in their preaching. Christ says:

By this thinge ye shall well knowe
whoso leeveth steadfastlye in you;
such signes, soothlye, the shall shewe
whersoever the tyde to goe.
(XX, 81-4) (78)

These converts will be able to subjugate devils and poisonous snakes; will survive poison; heal people, and so on.

Even when an action is instituted by Christ explicitly to exemplify charity, the scene develops towards a slightly different conclusion more in keeping with the pattern I have been suggesting. In play XV, Christ washes the disciples' feet "to shewe all charitie" (140). He makes them show their mutual love by their washing each other's feet, and commands them to love one another as he has loved them, but to this end:

Soe all men may knowe and see
my disciples that you bee,
falshood if you alwayes flee
and loven well in feere. (177-80)

Again the action is a distinguishing outer sign of

(78) The author makes a deliberate switch from Acts to Mark xvi, 15-18 in order to include this speech on something which the drama does not and, as far as one can judge the conventions of cycle drama, could not dramatize.

one's spiritual allegiance.

The most notable example of this kind of sign is the act of worship Mary performs in anointing Christ's feet. This episode was actually cited by Pecock as important New Testament authority for the use of visible signs in worship. (79) Its presence in Chester, however, owes less to its place in the defence of images in worship than to its being, as an act of worship, a visible sign of Mary's spiritual condition. By this action she reveals her belief, and Christ says that her belief has saved her. The presence of this penitential episode in a largely unpenitential cycle owes something to its showing an ordinary sinner capable of offering those external signs which reveal a proper spiritual condition. It is therefore an exhortation to the use of external worshipful actions betokening a true belief.

To sum up: only certain aspects of the traditional thinking on sacrament as sign are adopted and exploited dramatically by Chester. Though it seems likely that the author of XV would have shared the traditional attitudes to the Mass as signficatory, he wishes to present the Last Supper in a much more straightforwardly historical and biblical way, contrasting it with the prefigurative sacraments of the Old Testament, rather than using it to develop his own ideas of its intrinsic significance. At the same time, Chester is interested in developing a pattern of

(79) Pecock, Repressor, I, 162.

references to actions which believers can perform and which will function as external signs of their spiritual state. This was one aspect of traditional thinking on the sacrament and, although Chester's presentation of the Last Supper does not exploit it, it is part of the presentation of the circumcision. These actions appear, therefore, to have a quasi-sacramental quality in Chester.

As I made clear earlier, there were many non-linguistic phenomena, other than sacraments, which men regarded as signs. The most important of these were the images which men used in worship. Crucifixes, statues or paintings of the Holy Family and the Saints and other visible renderings of invisible truths were the objects of vigorous attacks and defences throughout the Middle Ages. Defended as signs, they were attacked as graven images. (80) Regarded by some as true, though limited, indications of truth beyond, and as valuable affective devices, they were regarded by others as earthly, man-made counterfeits, and therefore falsely affective. Phillips writes:

...for the Lollards, images were like all external signs, unreal; and that which is unreal is untrue...In observing a play or contemplating a holy image, all localisations, artifacts and analogies focus man's attention on the finite. (81)

Underlying the whole debate was the question of whether created things could direct one towards the highest

(80) *ibid.*, p.145. See also Coletti's thesis.

(81) J. Phillips, The Reformation of Images: Destruction of Art in England, 1535-1660 (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1973), p.32.



truths. To the defender of signs, the world buoyantly and justifiably promised a means of seeing God, albeit through a glass darkly; (82) to the iconoclast, images were characterized more by the darkness of created things than by the light which might be glimpsed through them. Coletti writes:

While Bonaventure and others in the tradition of image theology had made knowledge of creatures a matter of spiritual exigency, the Lollard argument posits the physical world as a wilderness of illusory meanings...(83)

Phillips agrees that in the reforming iconoclast there was "the profound inclination...to see a sharp dichotomy between nature and spirit, to reject earthly life as means to knowing the divine."(84) The importance to drama studies of the debate on images in the later Middle Ages lies in the condition of drama as an external sign. (85) It represents (or, as the reformer would say, 'counterfeits') invisible truths; it offers to the eyes representation of actions otherwise available to us only in the Scriptures. The distinction between a defender of images or drama and a Lollard is that they think differently about the relationship between the external manifestation and the truth it represents. The defender thinks about the sign leading to truth; the Lollard thinks of appearance and reality. To one, the external sign is a means to an

(82) I will discuss this more in the section on signs in creation.

(83) Coletti, p.87.

(84) Phillips, p.5.

(85) Coletti claims that the drama, the rise of which was contemporaneous with Lollardism, was "a tangible reaction to the spread of Lollard doctrine." (p.103).



end; to the other it has become an end in itself. This is why the Wycliffite preacher against miracle plays finds drama, if anything, more objectionable than the non-dramatic visual image: it has such a corporeal attraction that it cannot instruct the viewer in the truths beyond, which it claims to represent. (86)

And to þe laste reson we seyn þat peinture,
zif it be verry wiþoute mengyng of lesyngis,
and not to curious, to myche fedynge mennus
wittis, and not occasion of maumetrie to þe
puple, þei ben but as nakyd lettris to a
clerk to riden þe treuþe. But so ben not
myraclis pleyinge þat ben made more to
deliten men bodily þan to ben bokis to lewid
men. (87)

A painting can aspire to the purer condition of verbal signification; a drama never can. But if to the Lollard a drama fails to function as a sign of truths beyond itself, it also fails to convince as a sign of the spiritual truths within the viewer. Like the use of images and sacraments, drama was claimed as a mode of worship, "...þei seyen þat þei pleyen þese myraclis in þe worship of God..." (88) The preacher again rejects the idea that this outer activity is a manifestation of an inner worshipfulness. It is a substitute for true worship, he claims:

For Crist seiþ that folc of avoutrie sechen
siche syngnys as a lecchour sechiþ signes of
verrey loue but no dedis of verrey loue. So
siþen þise myraclis pleyinge ben onely
syngnis, loue wiþoute dedis, þei
ben...contrarious to þe worschipe of God,

(86) A. Hudson, ed., Selections from English Wycliffite Writings (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1978).

(87) *ibid.*, pp.103-4, lines 265-9.

(88) *ibid.*, p.99, lines 102-3.

bat is bope in signe and in dede...(89)

In addition to this, he claims that plays are "gynnyes of þe deuuel to cacchen men to byleue of anticrist." (90) It is not an idly polemic remark, for Antichrist, as the Chester cycle shows, was particularly known for convincing men of his false claims by the use of actions which he presented as signs but which were not signs in fact. It is ironic, but it may be more than that, that Chester should seek to dramatize the false signs of the Antichrist while the Lollards were seeing plays themselves as false signs - false in not directing the mind of the viewer beyond the sensible attractions of the plays to truths; false as signs of worship in that they substituted for true worship instead of signifying it in the onlooker; false, in summary, by being the groundless appearances which Antichrist and the devil offer to men, rather than the reality which is God.

It seems to me more than a coincidence that Chester is dramatizing the process of signification and the responses of men and women to signs at the very time when signs in worship were being attacked as unreal, and the drama itself was being attacked, with other signs, as a substitute for spiritual things, and one which aroused fleshly emotions rather than arousing the feelings to spiritual devotion. I would not claim that Chester is a polemic work, or even that it is

(89) *ibid.*, p.100, lines 142-6.

(90) *ibid.*, p.100, lines 146-7.

consciously apologetic. Rather, it is the product of a time when the process of signification is felt to be under attack and signification is therefore in the foreground of the authors' minds. Worries that the drama was too open to attacks on its emotional power might well have led Chester to emphasize the formally expository and the pictorial rather than the emotional. (91) It might have led to the rather curtailed characterization which we will see in the cycle.

Knowledge of the stages of Chester's composition seems unlikely to progress beyond the history of accretion, deletion and revision proposed by Clopper. (92) The nature of the records means that such a history may chart the appearance or disappearance of plays, and may suggest that revision of certain plays took place. But it cannot guide us as to what thematic ideas entered the cycle at what time; the period at which certain sources were used; the precise nature of the revisions that took place - for example, whether they were metrical or substantial. Without this information, a less impressionistic link of Chester's interest in signs with the reforming context of late medieval England seems impossible.

Chester, like the North-West generally, is known

(91) Peter Travis shows how the author of the Passion in Chester carefully controls and directs emotions during the most potentially agonizing scenes.

Peter W. Travis, "The Dramatic Strategies of Chester's Passion Pagina," Comparative Drama, 8 (1974), 275-89.

(92) Lawrence M. Clopper, "The History and Development of the Chester Cycle," Modern Philology, 75 (1978), 219-46.

to have been conservative in religion. Christopher Haigh notes that Bishop Bird of Chester complained in 1541, "that the people of his diocese were dangerously sympathetic towards 'popish idolatry'." (93) The existence of a Bishop of Chester at all has been explained as a response to the difficulty of controlling the religious sympathies of the archdiaconate of Chester in the times of reform:

The need for such a measure which had been pointed in the lawless conditions of the 1450s was made urgent by the religious exigencies of the 1530s. Largely exempt from episcopal control and undaunted by a remote and otherwise preoccupied archdeacon, the men of Cheshire were unlikely to be cowed by an archdeacon's official who had to live and make his way in Cheshire society... (94)

Evidence of recusancy in the Elizabethan period is difficult to interpret as the lists of recusants can bear witness as much to reforming zeal as to religious reaction. (95) But it seems likely that in the 1540s and 1550s the small number of Chester men seeking to be ordained resulted from the area's religious conservatism. (96) All this seems to support the suggestion that Chester's intense and, as I will claim in chapter III, uniquely intense, interest in signs reflects the conservatism of an area feeling reformist objections to the drama and to imagery in general. But

(93) Christopher Haigh, Reformation and Resistance in Tudor Lancashire (London: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1975), p.102.

(94) P. Heath, "The Medieval Archdeaconry and Tudor Bishopric of Chester," Journal of Ecclesiastical History, XX (1969), 243-52, p.250.

(95) K. R. Wark, "Elizabethan Recusancy in Cheshire," Diss. Manchester 1966, pp.32-3.

(96) Haigh, p.156.

this does not take us further into specific interpretation of the text, and, indeed, it does not tell us quite what the authors felt the cycle was doing in religious terms, or whether the citizens of Chester considered it valuable in the same way as the authors did. Even if an author's interest in non-linguistic signification was consciously apologetic, it does not follow that the citizens recognized it to be so or would have cared if they had. Phillips notes that "the real reaction of the public towards images is difficult to determine." (97) The same was probably true of their reactions to the drama as image. The motive in writing might well have been different from that prompting preservation or occasional performance of the cycle. If the middle years of the sixteenth century saw Bishop Bird complaining of Cestrian idolatry, they may also have seen a cycle performed to bolster Cestrian civic pride rather than devotion. Clopper writes "...in post-Reformation Chester, we can conclude that the plays were set forth, in some years, because it was felt that the preservation of tradition was of great importance to the welfare of the city." (98)

To conclude: it seems likely that the authors of the cycle were interested in signification because they lived in times when the use of sign was under attack. One might claim that the repeated presence of signs in

(97) Phillips, p.89.

(98) Lawrence M. Clopper, "The Chester Plays: Frequency of Performance," Theatre Survey, 14 (1973), 46-58. See also Ruth M. Keane, "The Theme of Kingship in The Chester Cycle," Diss. Liverpool 1977, p.224.

Chester was an attempt to assert the value of the dramatic medium. Drama was a significatory medium and was undergoing the same kind of attacks as non-dramatic signs. An attention within the plays to the value of signs might, therefore, confirm the worthwhile nature of the drama itself. On the other hand, it is not possible to know whether this was a consciously apologetic development of the authors, or whether it was an unconscious response. In the same way, it is difficult to prove Coletti's general impression that the cycle drama genre was a reaction to reformist iconoclasm, and just as difficult to prove that Chester developed its interest in sign because it was in a part of the country conservative in religion and hard for the bureaucracy to control. The absence of records which would permit a close analysis of the cycle text's composition thereby prevents us from assigning any part of it to a particular historical context. We are therefore left with no more than a strong impression of a link between Chester's interest in sign and contemporary interest in the function and status of non-linguistic signs.

An interest in the traditional and reforming attitudes to non-linguistic sign has led us to a consideration of the drama as sign, and of the possible link between the nature of the dramatic medium and the content of the cycle. But it could also lead us to a consideration of whether the cycle draws attention to certain non-linguistic phenomena as sources of

significance. This was the approach adopted in the section on linguistic signs. I would like to take this process only half way, pointing out that the cycle does show an awareness of non-linguistic signification, but postponing until chapter VI, a closer analysis of the dramatic techniques the cycle adopts to focus the onlooker's attention on the significance of what he can see.

The first explicit references to signs or tokens in the cycle occur in play III; although there are things evidently functioning as signs earlier in the cycle but which are not explicitly referred to as such. MS. H has Noah say of the olive branch "This betokeneth God has done us some grace,/and is a signe of peace" (Appendix 1A, 22-3). The Group MSS lack the Raven and Dove episode, but share with H two references to the rainbow as a token that God's vengeance will never be exacted in such a dire way again (III, 311 and 319).

Play IV, as we have seen, is highly significatory, and Melchysedeck says of his present "much good it may signifie/in tyme that is commyng" (91-2). The Expositor tells us that Abraham's laden horse "signifieth the newe testamente" (118). In the nativity section, the Expositor tells the audience of a contemporary "verey signe" which it can see as evidence that the vision vouchsafed to Octavianus actually occurred: the Church of the Ara Caeli. The Magi seeking a sign of Christ's birth know from Balaam's prophecy that a "starre should ryse tokninge of blys" (VIII, 11). When the star does

appear, the Second King knows that their prayer has been heard by God: "for in the starre a chyld I see/and verye tokeninge" (VIII, 80). The Magi's gifts are also signs. The significance of the revealed child emerges from these visually striking symbols which surround him. (99) The vocabulary of signification is present throughout the Magi's interpretation of their gold, incense and myrrh (IX, 96, 100, 115, 164). After the Nativity, we have to move to the Harrowing of Hell for other explicit references to visible phenomena, other than miracles, as signs. Adam rejoices when he sees light enter the darkness of Hell: "This ys a signe thou wilt succour/thy folkes that lyven in great langour" (XVII, 5-6). Later, it is probable that John the Baptist would be carrying a lamb while he says "And with my finger/shewed express... a lambe in tokeninge of thy lycknesse" (65...7) (100). Finally the Good Thief, who is encountered as the redeemed leave Hell, says that he prayed to Christ when he saw "synnys full verey/that hee was Goddes Sonne" (261-2) (101). He also refers to the cross he is carrying as a "tokeninge" (269).

(99) See Rosemary Woolf, The English Mystery Plays (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), p.194 for a discussion of the significance of the gifts.

(100) H differs in the significance which the lamb is said to have, but it also uses the explicit sign vocabulary.

(101) The readings signes ARH and sines B make clear his meaning. Though "synnys" is quite unique in MS. Hm, where 'sign' is always spelt with <gn>, it seems hard to credit that the scribe thought he was rendering "sins" rather than "signs". The reference is to the earthquakes, darkness and other prodigies which accompanied the Passion.

As well as objects or events such as the earthquake at the Passion, actions can be referred to as signficatory. Melchysedeck is said to have given the bread and wine "in signification" of New Testament sacramental action (IV, 131). (102) After Abraham's 'sacrifice' of Isaac, the Expositor says:

Lordinges, this signification
of this deede of devotyon -
and yee will, yee wytt mon -
may torne you to myche good. (IV, 460-3)

The nativity section of the cycle also has examples. Mary sees groups of people weeping and rejoicing and asks "A, lord, what may this signifye?" (VI, 429). The Angel responds "Marye, Godes mother dere, /the tokeninge I shall thee lere" (437-8). When the star, which the Magi are following, comes to a halt, Second King says "That is a signe wee be neare" (IX, 17). If we set aside, for the moment, Christ's miraculous actions both before and after the Passion, and Antichrist's false miracles, all of which are explicitly referred to as signs, we still have Judas's description of his kiss as a "verey signe" whereby Christ will be revealed to the Jews (XIV, 411).

This account of explicit sign references is based upon the words "sign" and "token(yng)" in their nominal

(102) The exact meaning of IV, 129-32 is difficult to determine since "for" could mean "so that" or "because", and "in signification" could, possibly, relate to line 129, thus yielding the meaning that Melchysedeck used the bread and wine because, later, we were to use them in signification. The weight of the context, however, suggests that it is Melchysedeck's action which is being considered signficatory.

or verbal forms. If we were to extend our discussion to include those occasions when characters seemed to be eliciting meaning from visual sources of significance, but without explicit sign terminology, the amount of evidence for authorial interest in visual signification would be too great for one chapter. We were able to estimate the authors' interest in linguistic signification because the number of instances where it was evident was not large. With non-linguistic signification we are dealing with a much larger body of material and it is necessary to discriminate strictly. Characters are continually explaining what they can see and what they have deduced from what they see. Adam, for example, looks at Eve and says "I see well, lord, through thy grace/bonne of my bones thou hir mase" (II, 145-6). A few lines later he declares "...now I see/thou hast her given through thy postee" (154-5). Reference to sight becomes almost the standard "line-filler". For example, God says, "One sleepe thou arte, well I see" (133). One could open the cycle at random and find characters making such references to what they see. Such general emphasis upon sight says more about the authors' consciousness that they were providing visual images, than it does about their interest in signification. Theresa Coletti noted exactly the same emphasis on sight in the Ludus Coventriae. (103) Such an emphasis does operate incrementally to demand that the onlooker concentrate

(103) Coletti, p.21.

on what is seen and behold it with spiritual alertness. Even if it is not a unique feature of Chester, it is still particularly appropriate in a cycle in which the eliciting of significance from a range of sources is of constant interest. But one has to distinguish between these incidental allusions to sight and cases where the author is accentuating the visual object or the scene presented as a source of significance but not actually using explicit sign terminology.

As with instances of linguistic signification, responses to visual things by characters indicate authorial interest in shaping the drama around visual signs. In play II we find Abel and Cain drawing conclusions from what they see. As yet, the cycle is not concerned to distinguish between these responses as believing or disbelieving ones, but this juxtaposition of an evil man and a good man drawing significance is a prototype for later contrastive responses to visual signs. Abel says:

nowe sothly knowe I well by this
my sacrafice accepted is
before the lorde todaye.
A flame of fyer thou sende hase
(II,652-5)

Cain, also reading the sign correctly, says:

To see this sight I am neare wood.
A flame of fyer from heaven stood
one my brothers offeringe.
His sacrafice I see God takes,
and my refuses and forsakes. (570-4)

When the midwife Tebell sees that the birth of Christ is painless she recognizes this as a miraculous sign and interprets it properly. It is evidence that Mary is

a virgin:

...this is a marvelous thinge!
Withouten teene or travaylinge,
a fayre sonne shee hasse one.
I dare well saye, forsooth iwys,
that cleane mayden this woman ys,
for shee hath borne a chyld with blys;
soe wiste I never none. (VI, 526-32)

Salome, on the other hand, sees only with the eyes of earthly experience: she does not recognize the sign as a sign: "Was never woman cleane maye/and chyld without man." She is brought to spiritual insight by another miraculous sign which punishes her and reveals God's power (VI, 552-3), and then by a salvific miracle which cures her withered hand and completes her enlightenment: "Nowe leeve I well and sickerlye/that God is commen, man to forbye" (561-2).

In the examples quoted, the visual has provided significance for two pairs of characters. In the first, though both characters could read the sign offered, the sign revealed their different spiritual condition; in the second, the characters divided over the very issue of whether what they could see was indeed a sign. The good midwife recognized it as such; the midwife of more earthly vision could not. But recognition of something as a sign was only part of the author's concern. He developed from Salome's unbelief a further two signs the significance of which vastly enlarged the scope of the action, implying punishment for unbelief, and then revealing the salvific purpose of the Incarnation. Such juxtaposition of responses, and rich use of visual signs can be found most markedly in the New Testament

parts of the cycle and will be referred to in later chapters where more can be said about their contribution to the cycle.

It is not always the case that an author has his characters respond to something which he is using as a visual sign. In play II the dead beasts' skins with which God clothes Adam and Eve are neither referred to as signs nor responded to as such by the characters. Nevertheless, God's exposition of the significance of the skins, and the formality of the investiture ensures that we are conscious of a dramatically focussed visual sign:

Dead beaste skynes, as thinketh mee,
ys best you one you beare.
For deadly nowe both bine yee
and death noe way may you flee.
Such clothes are best for your degree
and such shall yee weare.

Then God, puttynge garmentes of skynnes upon them...
(II, 363-8)

It is not even necessary for the author to give an explanation of a visual sign for the audience to recognize that it is one and appreciate its meaning. When Mary, Joseph and the child flee into Egypt, the idols which they pass fall down (si fueri poterit) as the Angel sings a passage from Isaiah. The Angel does not develop the significance of the event; it is presented simply as something which will be to Mary's "likinge" (X, 284); Mary does not respond to it. But the significance of what we see is clear: the coming of the true God means the destruction of false ones. Chester does not make it clear that it regards the

idols as inadequate signs but this is certainly how theological tradition regarded them. Augustine describes pagan idolatry as a slavery to useless signs. (104) Pecock asserts that the pagans worshipped before images regarding them as signs, but were deceived because sometimes devils entered into the image and at other times the image was left as a bare material object with, of course, nothing to signify. (105) Chester is not concerned with such precision but its interest in idolatry, and its focus upon this particular event probably owes something to the traditional understanding of idols as visual signs, inutile in themselves, and wrongly used if worshipped. On our main point, however, the theatrical presentation which the fall of images requires determines that we will understand the event, as a whole, to be a sign without exposition or response to guide us.

When we discuss in chapter VI the techniques used by the authors to accentuate visual things as significant, we will see how intensely pictorial Chester is. But just as we have had to discriminate between characters' allusions to sight and actual cases where they respond to signification, so a distinction has to be drawn between the Chester authors' use of iconography and their deliberate dramatizing of the process of visual signification. It is at this point that Theresa Coletti's and my approaches to the visual

(104) De Doc. Christ., p.85.

(105) Pecock, Repressor, I, 244-5.

dimension of the drama diverge. I am quite ready to accept that all the cycle plays were richly visual, their authors conscious of the value of the visual image, their theatrical appearance similar to the imagery of non-dramatic art. Coletti has also conducted well her investigation "to discover similarities between medieval drama and the visual arts in terms of their respective origins and intentions..." (106). This study, however, is concerned with the fact that Chester authors continually dramatized situations in which visual things offered significance and characters responded to them. It is not concerned with the dramatists' use of visual imagery as one of the many theatrical and literary tools by which they could communicate with their audiences.

Signs in Creation

Even the eternal power of God and his eternal Deity can be understood by looking at the things which he has made. The invisible can be appreciated by means of the visible:

Invisibilia enim ipsius, a creatura mundi,
per ea quae facta sunt, intellecta
conspiciuntur: sempiterna quoque ejus virtus
et divinitas...

This verse from Paul's Epistle to the Romans (i.20) is the source of a whole tradition of looking at creation for signs of the Godhead. Augustine often quoted it and develops it particularly beautifully in Sermon 141:

"For His invisible attributes are clearly

(106) Coletti, p.6.

perceived, being understood through the things that have been made." Ask the world, the beauty of the heavens, the splendor and arrangement of the stars; the sun that suffices for the day; the moon, the comfort of the night; ask the earth, fruitful in herbs and trees, full of animals, adorned with men; ask the sea, filled with so many swimming creatures of every kind; ask the air, replete with so many flying creatures. Ask them all, and see if they do not, as if in a language of their own, answer you: "God made us." (107)

Aquinas sees all creation as relevant to Faith because signficatory of God: "Matters about Christ's humanity, the Church's sacraments or anything else created come under faith in that through them we are led towards God." (108) The tradition that created things bore a degree of likeness to their Creator and could therefore direct the man contemplating them towards God is known as "exemplarism". God is the exemplar of his creation. The relationship of likeness was really part of a whole theory of being in that when men asserted the formal likeness between creation and Creator they were asserting God as the cause and also as the goal towards which creation was tending. A recent study of Erigena has noted that he saw the whole world as sacramental because signficatory, but that this was not a pantheistic view because it depended on viewing the world as in the process of returning to God after the

(107) Patrologia Latina, XXXVIII, 776; Sermo CXLI, 2. The translation is that of William A. Jurgens, The Faith of the Early Fathers, (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1979) III, 28. Compare Augustine's De Trinitate, XV, ch. 2, 3. Sancti Aurelii Augustini, De Trinitate, ed. W. J. Mountain and Fr. Glorie, Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina, LA (Turnholti: Brepols, 1968), p.462.

(108) Summa Theologiae, 2a 2ae, 1, 1; p.9.

separation of the Fall. (109) Bonaventure expresses the three-fold relationship thus: "The creatures of the sense world signify the invisible attributes of God, partly because God is the origin, exemplar and end of every creature and every effect is the sign of its cause, the exemplification of its exemplar and the path to the end, to which it leads." (110) Colish writes that the relationship of likeness was not seen as accidental but part of the divine salvific plan:

God has expressly constructed the world to be more or less like Him, and to provide a set of signa Dei for man. Such signs are aids in the restoration of a correct relationship between man and God, a relationship which is obstructed by man's sin and lack of faith. (111)

Of created things, Man himself is the best such sign. Created in the image and likeness of God (Genesis i. 26-7), he offers a variety of possible analogues for the Creator. Augustine devoted Books IX to XIV of the De Trinitate to the images of the Trinity which can be seen in man's nature. (112) The human trinitities of mind, knowledge and love; memory, understanding and

(109) G. S. M. Walker, "Erigena's Conception of the Sacraments," in Studies in Church History, III, ed., G. J. Cuming (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1966), 150-8, p.154.

(110) Bonaventure, The Soul's Journey into God. The Tree of Life. The Life of St. Francis, trans. Ewert Cousins, Classics of Western Spirituality (London: SPCK, 1978), p.76. I have not rendered Cousins' division of this passage into lines of verse. The original may be found in S. Bonaventure, Itinéraire de l'Esprit Vers Dieu, Texte de Quaracchi, Introduction, traduction et notes par H. Duméry, Bibliothèque des Textes Philosophiques (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1960), p.58.

(111) Colish, p.182.

(112) Compare De Civitate Dei, XI, 26.

will reveal the Trinity that created them. Augustine also finds a three-fold condition in man's senses. Taking the sense of sight as typical, he discerns the object of sight, the image created in the eye, and the will linking the two. These make up a further trinitarian analogue.

As Colish has pointed out, all these signs are limited with respect to that which they signify - images, sacraments, creation, man himself - possess the capacity to direct us towards God but, though like him, are essentially unlike him. Augustine takes chapters 22 and 23 of De Trinitate Book XV to show how the analogy which he has created between God and man is an imperfect one because of the divine Trinity's combination of three Persons in one, and because of its immutability and eternal existence. Bonaventure, having noted the three powers of the human soul, draws its analogy to God in terms of the Pauline phrase per speculum in aenigmate: "Consider, therefore, the operations and relationships of these three powers, and you will be able to see God through yourself as through an image, which is to see through a mirror in an obscure manner." (113)

This tradition in sign theology is not evident in Chester and it is hard to see how a work given over, in the main, to representation of historical events could find a place for inferences thus derived from the

(113) Cousins, p.80; Itinerarium mentis ad Deum, in Duméry, p.60.

contemporary world. The operation of God, and his character as revealed in that operation are discernible, for the cycle authors, in his past and future interventions rather than in the shape of present things. When Chester refers to a sign available to the contemplation of the audience, the sign is not functioning in an exemplarist way. The church of the Ara Caeli is historical evidence of a historical occurrence, and no more. If one were looking for exemplarist suggestions, the Creation play would be the most likely source, but there is not much hard evidence that this is how the author wishes the Creation to be understood. The opening to play II is simply the act of Creation: the emphasis is on the things created but there is no suggestion that we can rediscover God in them. The play's action precedes the point at which men need to discover God through signs; the author and audience are accepting the fiction that they can see God face to face. This does not mean, of course, that the audience only watches the play within its fictive boundaries. It is quite possible that an onlooker watching the dramatized act of creation and sensing its results all around him in reality, would feel that the drama was presenting him with signs of God's nature; that God's description of the work as "good" or his statement that there was "nothings amisse" (II, 54) reflected back on the beautiful harmony of the Creator. He would surely see the power of God proved in the action. But I do not consider this to be evidence of a

particular interest in exemplarist sign theology. All the cycles show Creation and if an onlooker is led to consider God's nature by watching his creation he is doing no more than he was constantly being invited to do in sermons. The MS. R text seems to offer a clearer link between creation and Creator in play I. When God calls himself "Prince pricipall, proved in my perpetuall provydence" (22-3), we appear to be invited to see signs of God in his unfolding plan as the cycle will discover it. But MS.H and one of the Group MSS, B, read "prudence" instead of "provydence." In literary terms neither is an obviously preferable reading. Chester does not seem to be exemplarist in spirit. Instead, it offers a covenantal relationship between an omnipotent God and his creation. The theological background to this idea is provided by the school of thought which scholars (increasingly reluctantly) call nominalism.

A recent gathering of papers from a conference on late medieval thought shows how scholarly attitudes to nominalism have altered. (114) William Courtenay sets out a range of new considerations which present a much gentler transition from older theological attitudes to the nominalism of the later middle ages. (115) The

(114) Charles Trinkaus with Heiko Oberman, ed., The Pursuit of Holiness in Late Medieval and Renaissance Religion, Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought, X, Papers from the University of Michigan Conference (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974).

(115) William J. Courtenay, "Nominalism and Late Medieval Religion," in The Pursuit of Holiness, pp.26-59.

nominalist attitudes to the eucharist were more conservative than has been thought; (116) extreme nominalism was shortlived and, indeed, opposed by the more moderate Ockhamism; (117) English Ockhamists increasingly appear to have been moderate in their theology; (118) Ockham, himself, is perhaps to be associated with Aquinas rather than Duns Scotus. (119) The reluctance of some scholars to refer to the theology of the later middle ages as "nominalism" derives partly from an anxiety to escape the older view which saw this theology as unattractive, (120) and partly from a sense that the term should be restricted to writings in the fields of logic and language. (121)

The view that Chester might reflect "nominalist" trends in thought was first presented by Kathleen Ashley in an important article on the power of God in the cycle. (122) It was later objected to on the grounds that all the emphases and ideas characterized as nominalist by Ashley were available in the Bible. (123) Ashley's reply affirmed that she did not seek to present Chester as a "nominalist text," and she significantly widened the sphere of influences which

(116) Courtenay, p.48.

(117) *ibid.*, p.50.

(118) *ibid.*, pp.54-5.

(119) *ibid.*, p.49.

(120) *ibid.*, p.31.

(121) *ibid.*, pp.52-3.

(122) Kathleen M. Ashley, "Divine Power in Chester Cycle and Late Medieval Thought," Journal of the History of Ideas, XXXIX (1978), 387-404.

(123) James R. Royce, "Nominalism and Divine Power in The Chester Cycle," Journal of the History of Ideas, XL (1979), 475-6.

could be thought to bear upon Chester:

I suspect...that further research into fifteenth-century spirituality will reveal that the cluster of themes and the Christology we have heretofore associated strictly with 'nominalist' theologians will prove to be characteristic of a wider range of late medieval religious literature, and that this body of literature provides the immediate context out of which Chester cycle was written. (124)

Ashley's reply seem generous. That emphases and ideas are available in the Bible in no way explains an author's selection of them from the mass of material available. Ashley could even demonstrate Chester's intense concern with God's power by counting the use of the words "potesty" and "postie." The more clearly defined the emphasis, the more the choice of that particular emphasis needs to be explained. The current state of knowledge of the Chester cycle demands attention to just such theological trends as Ashley examined. One needs to be aware of the distance between "high" theological writing and popular didacticism, but the difficulty of characterizing this distance and of explaining how far rarefied ideas can be transmitted to popular works should not prevent us from looking at the ideas for a guide to the works. I consider it quite likely that Chester does reflect, though not exclusively, certain theological attitudes which had their origin in nominalism, were found acceptable partly because of the gradual transition which a more moderate English Ockhamism permitted, and which had

(124) Kathleen M. Ashley, "Chester Cycle and Nominalist Thought," *ibid.*, p.477.

become sufficiently popular and widespread for the Chester authors' use of them not to constitute a theological polemic. How far their use of these ideas, like their attention to sign, was theologically 'pointed' is difficult to discover.

Scholars of nominalism emphasize that the nominalists saw the relationship between God and man in contractual rather than ontological terms. Man's hope for salvation lay in God's adhering to promises he had made. Man's knowledge of reality depended on God's fixing and maintaining certain relationships between words and reality. God's will to ordain and remain faithful to what he has ordained was the ground of man's being and his hope of redemption. Oberman writes of the nominalist God: "a covenant God, his pactum or foedus is his self-commitment to become the contractual partner in creation and salvation." (125) Steven Ozment, in distinguishing between nominalism and mysticism, shows how the kind of relationship between God and man which we saw in exemplarist thought is rejected by the nominalist. Mysticism depends on the belief "that God and man share a common nature and are really connected." (126) Salvation depends on there being such a "likeness" between God and man. (127) A nominalist, however, differs in that

(125) Heiko Oberman, "The Shape of Late Medieval Thought: The Birthpangs of the Modern Era," in The Pursuit of Holiness, 3-25, p.15.

(126) Steven Ozment, "Mysticism, Nominalism and Dissent," in The Pursuit of Holiness, 67-92, p.77.

(127) loc. cit.

...a saving relationship with God is never finally dependent upon real connections between God, grace and the soul...Man's salvation rather depends upon God's fidelity to his promises, on the trustworthiness of the word behind the 'system'. (128)

The presentation of Christ by the Chester authors must have stressed the distance between him and ordinary people. Even in his ministry his face was gilded, and the continual performing of miracles from his birth on must have ensured an awesome effect to balance the love which he obviously shows for his, "litle children" (XV, 169). (129) In addition to this, Chester's Old Testament plays reveal a considerable interest in 'contracts' between God and man. Lawrence Clopper sees the Old Testament sequence as held together, not by typology, but by a consistent dramatization "of those moments in pre-Christian history when God intervened to make covenants with men, who through their righteousness, kept open the channel of grace." (130) Here, surely, is evidence of the nominalism which Ozment describes as "...a study of historical covenants, of God's will as expressed in Scripture and tradition...of order instituted and maintained." (131) Noah, Abraham and Moses are all involved in covenants

(128) Ozment, p.80.

(129) Clopper, Records. There are regular entries for the gilding of God's face. See Index under "faces."

(130) Lawrence M. Clopper, "The Principle of Selection of the Chester Old Testament Plays," Chaucer Review, 13 (1979), 272-83, p.281. Though published after Ashley's article, Clopper actually wrote this some considerable time before Ashley introduced the question of nominalism. He does not make the connection between covenants and nominalism.

(131) Ozment, p.80.

with God. All these covenants look forward, as Clopper notes, to the "New Covenant, Christ." (132) This is what Chester stresses instead of exemplarist relations of God and man. This may also, in part, explain Chester's interest in Christ's speeches as signficatory: they are the scripturally transmitted New Covenant. Man's response to them is his response to the ultimate contract which God offers to his creation. His miraculous signs are expressions of his will, evidence of his power, and intrinsically salvific promises of our redemption. His words, which the cycle pairs with the actions, have the same three-fold nature and also, because they constitute a covenant of final salvation, they are the linguistic signs to which we should especially attend:

Contynue in my word; from yt do not departe.
Therby shall all men knowe most perfectlye
that you are my disciples and of my familie.
Goe not before me, but let my word be your
guide;
then in your doinges you shall alwayse well
speede.

(XIII,

31-5)

Because Christ is the New Covenant, those linguistic signs which are revealing him are also the terms of the covenant.

(132) ibid., p.274.

CHAPTER II
SIGN AND CHESTER'S SOURCES

In this chapter I wish to study the ways in which Chester is indebted to its main sources for its use of sign. The point of this examination is not to prove that Chester is thus indebted - that will be quickly evident - but to reveal the careful way in which the Chester authors have used their sources with one eye upon the integrity of the work to which they are contributing. The sense one gets of a closeness to the creative processes of medieval artists is not chimerical if firmly based upon such an analysis.

The medieval dramatist reading his Vulgate Gospels would have encountered a major difference between the use of the word signum in the synoptic Gospels, on the one hand, and John, on the other. In the former, he would have found it used in a variety of ways. Firstly, it is used for the signs which the Pharisees request of Christ.

Tunc responderunt ei quidam de Scribis et
Pharisaeis, dicentes: Magister, volumus a te
signum videre. (Matthew xii.38)

It is made clear that such requests are made to tempt Christ: "Et exierunt Pharisaei, et coeperunt conquirere cum eo, quaerentes ab illo signum de coelo, tentantes eum" (Mark viii.11, cf. Matthew xvi.1; Luke xi.16). Christ refuses to give such a sign and in his replies he rebukes those who ask for signs and thereby show

their evil and lack of faith: "Generatio mala et adultera signum quaerit" (Matthew xii.39, cf. Luke xi.29). The only sign which will be given to the Jews is that prophetically prefigurative one which they already possess, but will evidently ignore: the sign of Jonah's three days in the whale.

Sicut enim fuit Jonas in ventre ceti tribus diebus et tribus noctibus; sic erit Filius hominis in corde terrae tribus diebus et tribus noctibus (Matthew xii.40, cf. Luke xi.30).

Secondly, the word signum appears at a point where the disciples ask for a sign. Their request is not reprehensible, as that of the Jews is, because they are not seeking a sign to justify belief. Already believing, they seek a sign to recognize the Second Coming: "Interrogaverunt autem illum, dicentes: Praeceptor, quando haec erunt, et quod signum cum fieri incipient?" (Luke xxi.7, cf. Matthew xxiv.3 and Mark xiii.4). In his reply Christ warns them of the signs which will be shown by false Christs and false prophets, and this constitutes the third group of references to sign in the synoptics:

Surgent enim pseudochristi, et pseudoprophetae: et dabunt signa magna, et prodigia, ita ut in errorem inducantur (si fieri potest) etiam electi. (Matthew xxiv.24, cf. Mark xiii.22).(1)

Related to this group are the other eschatological signs which will mark the Second Coming. These take the form of natural catastrophes: "Et terraemotus magni

(1) Luke does not use the word signa in the corresponding passage, xxi.8. Compare also II Thess.ii.9; Rev. xiii.13 and 14; xix.20.

erunt per loca, et pestilentiae, et fames, terroresque de coelo, et signa magna erunt" (Luke xxi.11, cf. Luke xxi.25).(2) Also the sign of the Son of Man will appear at the Last Judgment: "Et tunc parebit signum Filii hominis in coelo" (Matthew xxiv.30). This sign was traditionally understood to be the cross. (3) Fourthly, two of the synoptic gospels report that Judas gave a sign to the Jews in order that they might identify Christ: "Dederat autem traditor ejus signum eis, dicens: Quemcumque osculatus fuero, ipse est..." (Mark xiv.44, cf. Matthew xxvi.48). Lastly, there are singular uses of signum - more frequently in Luke than Mark, and not at all in Matthew. Those converts who believe the disciples will show that belief in their capacity to perform signs: "Signa autem eas, qui crediderint, haec sequentur: In nomine meo daemonia ejicient; linguis loquentur novis..." (Mark xvi.17-18). The swaddling clothes and the fact that Christ is lying in a manger will be signs for the shepherds in Luke ii.12: "Et hoc vobis signum: Invenietis infantem pannis involutum, et positum in praesepio." In Luke also, Christ is himself referred to as a sign by Simeon: "Ecce positus est hic in ruinam, et in resurrectionem multorum in Israel: et in signum, cui contradicetur." Finally, Herod is glad when Pilate hands Christ over to his jurisdiction: "... sperabat signum aliquod videre ab eo fieri" (Luke xxiii.8).

(2) Mark does not use the word signa in the corresponding passage, xiii.24-7.

(3) Summa Theologiae, 3a, 25, 4; p.198.

From the above account of sign we can see that there are only two occasions in MS. Hm when a use of signum in the synoptic Gospels has authorized an exactly corresponding reference in the cycle. These are Judas's kiss (XIV, 411), and the miracles to be performed by believers (XX, 83). (4)

Of the seventy-seven examples of signum in the New Testament, the largest number in any single book is the seventeen in John. (5) But these seventeen uses cover a much narrower range of phenomena than do those of the synoptic Gospels. In nine instances it is very clear from the immediate context that 'sign' refers to a miracle performed by Christ. After Christ has turned the water into wine at the Marriage at Cana, John writes, "Hoc fecit initium signorum Jesus in Cana Galilaeae" (John ii.11). When Christ has raised the nobleman's son, John writes, "Hoc iterum secundum signum fecit Jesus, cum venisset a Judaea in Galilaeam" (iv. 54). Other clear uses of this kind may be found in iv. 48; vi. 2, 14, 26; ix. 16; xi. 47; xii.18. Another six uses of signum seem likely from the context, and from John's other uses to be referring to Christ's miracles. For example, we find the statement that many believed because of Christ's signs: "Cum autem esset Ierosolymis in pascha in die festo, multi crediderunt

(4) MS. H has Herod hope for a "signe" instead of Hm's "vertue" at XVI, 172. This will be discussed in ch. IV.

(5) B. Fischer, O.S.B., et al, comps., Novae Concordantiae Bibliorum Sacrorum (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1977), V, 4838-9.

in nomine ejus, videntes signa ejus, quae faciebat" (ii.23). We also find Jesus distinguished from John the Baptist on the basis that Christ performs signs and John did not: "Et multi venerunt ad eum, et dicebant: Quia Joannes quidem signum fecit nullum" (x.41). Other instances where one can deduce that the text is referring to Christ's miracles when it speaks of signs can be found at iii. 2; vi. 30; vii. 31; xii. 37 and xx. 30. There is a further occasion when Christ is asked for a sign which will prove his authority. It is probable that it is a miraculous action that is being requested because Christ responds in a way which seems to meet the Jew's request as if it were for a miraculous action, although the sign he offers to their blind eyes is actually of deeper significance:

Responderunt ergo Judaei, et dixerunt ei:
Quod signum ostendis nobis quia haec facis?
Respondit Jesus, et dixit eis: Solvite
templum hoc, et in tribus diebus excitabo
illud. (ii. 18-19).

As John points out in verse 21, Christ is here referring to his own body and the three days between Passion and Resurrection.

The emphasis upon sign in chapters ii to xii of John where all but one of the references occur, and the consistent use of the term for miracles performed by Christ or performable by him have led scholars to suggest that the Gospel is partly composed of a 'Book of Signs' onto which the compiler has added the material of the later

chapters. (6) Discussion of this is outwith my competence and the scope of this study but I mention the opinion to highlight the profound difference there is between the synoptic Gospels and John in their use of the term signum.

If the references to examples of signum in the foregoing account of John are followed up, it becomes evident that Chester is even less indebted to John than it was to the synoptics for particular, explicit uses of the term 'sign'. Only the request for a sign by the Jews after Christ has driven the moneylenders from the temple has been repeated explicitly in Chester (XIV, 246 and 249). To a certain extent this lack of parallel explicit usage derives from Chester's refusal to give to the Pharisees or to the citizens of Jerusalem explicit sign vocabulary even when it is dramatizing those episodes in John where such usage is authorized. Thus Chester does not have the sign usage of ix. 16; xi. 47; xii. 18. But a larger difference from John also contributes to the dissimilar pattern of explicit references to sign. Chester does not actually dramatize some of the major signs offered by Christ in John: the turning of water into wine; the healing of the nobleman's son; the feeding of the five thousand.

(6) The name "The Book of Signs" is C. H. Dodd's though the argument that there was a previous gospel based on these signs is much earlier. For a discussion of the debate and its origin see the bibliographical entry under Martyn; for a close interpretation of the Book of Signs see the entry under Dodd, pages 289-389; for a recent approach reconstructing a proposed narrative source for John see under Fortna.

Thus far, Chester's indebtedness to the Gospels does not seem great, but to understand the relationship of the plays to the Bible we have to move beyond the matter of explicit references to more fundamental questions on how the Gospels and Chester understand sign and miracles: how people respond to them; what their functions are. If anything, Chester's distinctness in explicit references argues the authors' creative selection of signs and their consideration of the cycle's integrity as a separate work. A close marrying of such references with those of the Bible would be part of a poorer work, the shape and direction of which were being controlled by the source.

John's use of the word signum consistently for Christ's miracles suggests that he understands these miracles in their signficatory rather than prodigious or powerful aspects. The synoptics do not use the word for Christ's miracles, (7) and we could accordingly expect to see a different understanding of the miraculous from them. Lucien Cerfaux distinguishes thus:

Jean n'a pas choisi sans dessein le terme sèmeion pour désigner les miracles. Dans les synoptiques, les miracles sont des dunamis qui manifestent la puissance, l'autorité du Christ; le mot sèmeion nous demande de creuser leur valeur d'événements significatifs et

(7) See also W. Nicol, The Sēmeia in the Fourth Gospel (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1972), p.62.

représentatifs de cette autorité. (8)

The New Testament, as a whole, avoids the frequent Old Testament presentation of miraculous phenomena as "marvels." Moule writes:

In the Septuagint, a 'marvel' thaumasion ...frequently occurs; but from the New Testament such words have almost vanished in description of what we (despite this!) still persist in calling 'miracles'... Dunamis and semeion - 'power' and 'sign' are the usual terms. (9)

But within the Vulgate New Testament, as we have seen, there are marked differences in choice of word and in the attitudes taken to miracles. The Johannine view of what the miraculous sign shows, and of the response which it should receive is evident if we look again at the opening use of the term. This time, I will quote the verse in full: "Hoc fecit initium signorum Jesus in Cana Galilaeae: et manifestavit gloriam suam, et crediderunt in eum discipuli ejus" (John ii.11). The last reference to Christ's signs in John is even more specific, showing that the glory which is manifested is a specifically divine glory and identifies the deity. This is a particularly Johannine function for sign and the above quotation from Cerfaux perhaps does not fully bring that out:

Multa quidem, et alia signa fecit Jesus in

(8) L. Cerfaux, "Les miracles, signes messianiques de Jésus et oeuvres de Dieu, selon l'Évangile de saint Jean," Recueil Lucien Cerfaux, II, 41-50, rpt. in J. Coppens, ed., L'Attente du Messie (Bruges, 1954), 131-8.

(9) C. F. D. Moule, "The Vocabulary of Miracle," in C. F. D. Moule, ed., Miracles, Cambridge Studies in their Philosophy and History (London: Mowbray, 1965), p.237.

conspectu discipulorum suorum quae non sunt scripta in libro hoc. Haec autem scripta sunt ut credatis, quia Jesus est Christus Filius Dei: et ut credentes vitam habeatis in nomine ejus. (John xx. 30-1)

These signs reveal Christ's identity in his glory and they demand a response of belief. (10) The perceiver should pass from observation of the sign to recognition of Christ as Son of God. It is this recognition which is being implied when John says that people having seen his signs believed in him (ii. 11; ii. 23; iv. 53; x. 42). This recognition is not always made, of course, and John investigates a range of inadequate responses (as our later studies will show Chester also doing). (11) However, even when a response is not fully enlightened, it is noticeable that it is present nonetheless, and in this John is different from the synoptics. After the feeding of the five thousand, John reads:

Illi ergo homines cum videssent quod Jesus fecerat signum, dicebant: Quia hic est vere propheta, qui venturus est in mundum. (vi. 14)

It is not a recognition of Christ as Son of God, but of Christ as the awaited prophet, but in the synoptic Gospels there is no apparent interest in the recognition or belief which might have arisen from this act (Matthew xiv. 21-2; Mark vi. 44-5; Luke ix. 17-18).

(10) See also J-P Charlier's influential article, "La notion de Signe (ΣΗΜΕΙΟΝ) dans le IVe Evangile," Revue des Sciences Philosophiques et Theologiques, 43 (1959), 434-48, p.440.

(11) Cerfaux classifies these responses, op. cit., pp.44-5. For analysis of Chester's range of response see chs. V and VI.

Similarly, John can show an episode containing sign developing into a full-scale analysis of the sign itself, and of what it shows of Christ. This is the case in the story of the man born blind:

Dicebant ergo ex Pharisaeis quidam: Non est hic homo a Deo, qui sabbatum non custodit. Alii autem dicebant: Quomodo potest homo peccator haec signa facere? Et schisma erat inter eos. (ix. 16).

John is concerned to note that some people do not believe despite the signs they have seen (xii. 37). Not to believe in him, even although one has seen his signs, is not to believe in the light and not to walk in the light (xii. 35-6).

If we pass to the synoptic Gospels we find that miracle occupies a quite different place in the scheme of faith. Response to a miracle tends to be more wonder and amazement (despite the change from the Old Testament word for "marvel"); it is more rarely an occasion for belief. (12) Only once does a miracle (not, of course, referred to as a 'sign') seem to engender such a belief or, perhaps more accurately, confirm a belief already held. After Jesus has walked upon the water, his disciples worship him "dicentes: Vere filius Dei es" (Matthew xiv. 33). Sometimes the synoptic response may be to glorify God but this does not mean that the people see Christ for who he is. They do not honour him as Son of God. After the healing of the palsied man "mirarentur omnes, et honorificarent

(12) See also Nicol, The Sēmeia in the Fourth Gospel, p.66.

Deum, dicentes: Quia nunquam sic videmus" (Mark ii. 12, cf., Matthew ix. 8). The observers in these Gospels may see Christ as a prophet (Luke vii. 16), as a man of authority (Luke iv. 36), even as the Son of David (Matthew ix. 26-7 and xii. 23), but for them miracles are not the theophanies which they are in John. The following quotation of Luke v. 26 represents the spirit of the synoptic treatment well:

Et stupor apprehendit omnes, et magnificabant Deum. Et repleti sunt timore, dicentes: Quia vidimus mirabilia hodie.

A further major difference between the Gospels is that, whereas John stresses the growth of faith out of the performing of signs, the synoptic Gospels stress the link between the performing of a miracle and prior faith on the part of the performer or beneficiary. For example, we read at Matthew xv, 28 that the faith of the Canaanite mother brings from Christ the miracle which saves the daughter:

Tunc respondens Jesus, ait illi: O mulier, magna est fides tua: fiat tibi sicut vis. Et sanata est filia ejus ex illa hora.

One could compare with this the faith of the friends who let the palsied man down to Christ (Mark ii. v), of the woman with the issue of blood (Mark v. 34), of the blind beggar whose faith leads Christ to return his sight (Luke xviii. 42). In Matthew xvii. 19-20 the disciples discover that they were unable to perform the miracle of casting out a devil because of their weak faith. Even the miracles which Christ says will be performed by believers, though they are called "signa"

in Mark xvi. 17, fall within the synoptic pattern in that they display a prior belief rather than operate to create belief as the signs do in John. John is interested in adequate and inadequate responses to signs which are, for him, miracles. (13) The synoptic Gospels are interested in faithless requests for signs which, for them, are not miracles; they are also interested in faith which precedes and elicits salvific miracles from Christ. (14)

Considering Chester's presentation of signs and of miracles in the light of the above account permits us the following conclusions. Chester does share with the synoptic Gospels the idea that evil can show itself in a faithless, tempting and challenging request for signs. It also shares the idea that evil will show itself in the offering of false signs at the time of Antichrist. Chester generalizes this aspect of evil throughout the evil characters of the cycle. Also, though Chester clearly does not use the Bible for its fifteen signs before Doomsday, the idea that the Second

(13) See also Donald Guthrie, "The Importance of Signs in the Fourth Gospel," Vox Evangelica, 6 (1967), 72-84. Two of Christ's miracles in John are not referred to as signs and in the first there is no subsequent discussion of his nature: the healing at Bethesda, v. 2-16; Christ walking on the water, vi. 21.

(14) A further synoptic interest in miracle as fulfilment of prophecy is suggested by Matthew viii. 17 but Matthew is interested in a range of things that fulfil prophecy, and this is the only example of a miracle's performing this function. Mark and Luke do not consider miracles in such terms. John does not consider signs as fulfilments of prophecy, but at xii. 37-41 he sees the Jews' inability to discern the meaning of sign as such a fulfilment.

Coming is preceded and accompanied by signs is present in the synoptic Gospels. (15) Of course, there would be little point in noting such general similarities, important though they may be to Chester's shape, if the cycle did not show itself aware of the Bible in a more minute and judiciously selective way. These larger attitudes to sign would be derivable from many traditional sources developing the Bible. I feel, however, that an account of what could have been available directly from the Bible is valuable because the cycle so clearly reveals an attention to the biblical text. I have not been able to discover any specific non-biblical source other than the Stanzaic Life of Christ for Chester's general attitudes to sign, and even there the Life offers more in the way of sign material than a particular conception of sign. However, I can see definite biblical sources for the conception, the detail and the deployment of sign in the cycle.

While sharing these aspects with the synoptic Gospels, Chester also treats the specific references to sign in the synoptics with care. (16) It is attracted to the Marcan idea that believers will perform signs because, unlike the usual synoptic approach, Mark here

(15) L. U. Lucken considers Mirk's Festial as the probable source of Chester's fifteen signs. I do not feel there are sufficient verbal parallels, and there are also differences of detail in the twelfth and fifteenth days. L. U. Lucken, Antichrist and The Prophets of Antichrist in the Chester Cycle, Diss. Catholic Univ. of America, 1940 (Washington: Catholic Univ. of America Press, 1940), pp.125-6 and p.134.

(16) Simeon's description of Christ as a sign will be discussed in ch. IV.

identifies miracles as signs and this fits in well with the cycle's general treatment of miracles, and with its interest in the signs by which men can demonstrate their true belief. It is presumably reasoning like this which lies behind MS. H's adoption of the reading "signe" for that which Herod hopes to see performed by Christ. H finds the Lucan signum (xxiii. 8) wholly acceptable within Chester's New Testament pattern of sign because it maintains the cycle's understanding of miracle as sign.

When the author of play XIV takes over the synoptic description of Judas's kiss as a 'sign' he does so to create a sense of deep irony. When Judas says that he will give the Jews a "verey signe" to distinguish Christ from his disciples (XIV, 411) the phrase appears parodic not only because the Jews have just given a long résumé of Christ's true signs but because of Chester's intensely Johannine emphasis upon Christ's miracles as signs which reveal his identity. When the kiss is actually given it has, as Kolve has pointed out, "no real meaning" because the author deliberately places it after Christ has declared his identity to the Jews. It thus becomes an even deeper parody of the signification we have seen. (17) A synoptic reading has therefore been adopted to give irony of a Johannine kind and the author ensures that the irony will be recognized by adding the word

(17) V. A. Kolve, The Play Called Corpus Christi (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1966), pp.201-2.

"verey." Judas will give them a 'true sign' - the phrase has been used already of Christ's signs at XIII, 476, will be used again for the signs accompanying his Passion, at XVII, 261, and for the signs by which his disciples will recognize his deity at XX, 173.

On the other hand, Chester obviously seeks to avoid the synoptic identification of the swaddling clothes and manger as signs, for it omits them from the speech of the Angel which it is dramatizing (VI, 464-71). The reason for this is that the Chester nativity section prefers the miracle of the Virgin Birth as the central sign attesting Christ's divine identity. Such signs as confirm the Virgin Birth therefore also prove that the child is the revealed Christ. These signs derive primarily from Joseph. Joseph's aged appearance, which proves that he could not be the child's father, is emphasized at VII, 496-503, and he further gives an account of his own previous conversion from doubt at 543-9. The author of play VII wishes to confirm the truth of the theophany enjoyed by the shepherds, by a sign of a miraculous nature. The Virgin Birth, attested by Joseph, will testify to the divinity of the child more adequately than the synoptic Gospel's signs of swaddling clothes and manger. These signs would simply permit recognition while the Virgin Birth reveals the salvific power of God and the deity of the child, and in doing so is more in keeping with the later revelations offered by Christ's miraculous signs.

Although I have been concentrating on Chester's use of the synoptic Gospels, my discussion has necessarily indicated that Chester's main debt, in its New Testament development of sign, is to the Gospel of John. It has not slavishly followed John's pattern of explicit references to sign; it does not include the first three signs in John, and one can only speculate on the reasons for this. But its understanding of Christ's miracles as signs which reveal his Godhead is fundamentally Johannine; its use of them as the focus of belief and disbelief in the people Jesus encounters is likewise Johannine.

The sequence of episodes from Christ's temptation in the wilderness to his cleansing of the Temple reveals the care with which the Chester authors have approached the Bible and these episodes deserve some closer examination here.

Since the episodes of "Christ in the Wilderness" and the "Woman taken in Adultery" come from the synoptic Gospels and John, respectively, their association in one play bespeaks a didactic plan. Indeed, these episodes achieve their greatest degree of dramatic interrelationship in Chester. They are both absent from Towneley; they are separated by the carriers' play of the Transfiguration in York; they form successive but separate plays in the Ludus Coventriae. An association seems reasonable, for both episodes show temptation offered to Christ, and both have the law as a theme. First, Christ repels Satan

with the law and then, when tempted by the Jews, refuses to oppose the New Law to the Mosaic. But Chester's special interest in uniting the two episodes was that each offered the possibility of presenting characters in relation to sign. It is an attention to sign which explains the form of the play. Success and failure in recognizing Christ from signs is first shown in the action of both episodes; then, a larger understanding of Christ's nature is achieved by the audience, which sees the significance of the two episodes with the aid of the Expositor. Characters respond to signs within the action; the action itself is signficatory for the audience. Since I will be looking more closely later at Satan's attempt to elicit signs of Christ's nature, I will note here only that the author of play XII has carefully combined material from both synoptics and John because it offered a didactically rich and formally balanced play.

It is difficult to know whether the author was initially attracted to the episode of the "Woman Taken in Adultery" because of its intrinsic relevance to the theme of temptation, or because he could see its possible contribution to the cycle's development of sign. Having decided upon it, however, he set about altering the biblical account to emphasize two aspects of sign: its revelation of Christ by his miraculous power, and the opposite responses which are made to sign by people of different spiritual capacities. In John, this episode (viii.1-11) is not an

example of sign, and John puts the weight of Christ's reply to the Pharisees into the moral challenge which he eventually offers to their consciences:

Cum ergo perseverarent interrogantes eum,
erexit se, et dixit eis: Qui sine peccato est
vestrum, primus in illam lapidem mittat. (v.
7)

In Chester, this challenge, though retained (XII, 241-4) is divested of its force since it is promptly ignored by the Pharisees who reply as if nothing Christ has said carries any weight at all:

Speake on, maister, and somewhat saye:
shall shee be stoned or elles naye;
or do her mercye as thou maye,
to forgive her this synne? (245-8)

Christ's writing on the sand becomes the focal point of the scene and it reveals his divine nature because it shows that he has miraculous knowledge of the Pharisees' sins. The emphasis in the episode has thus passed to sign.

The speech in which the woman responds to the sign has no biblical equivalent. She declares:

A, lord, blessed most thou be,
that of mischeiffe hasse holpen mee.
Hethenforth filth I will flee
and serve thee in good faye.
For godhead full in thee I see
that knowes worke that doe wee. (273-8)

To the redemptive aspect of the story Chester has added fideistic recognition. The Pharisees, on the other hand, do not possess spiritual insight. Their earthly vision permits them only to see their own sins on the sand; they cannot recognize beyond that the power which has revealed itself in exposing them. The Chester author has out-done Saint John in his development of

sign.

In play XIII, the Chester author has gone to John for the material of the whole play. (18) The healing of Caecus (John ix. 1-38) is referred to as a sign (ix. 16); the raising of Lazarus (John xi. 1-45) is evidently regarded as one at v.47. The Pharisees say "Quid facimus, quia hic homo multa signa facit?" For the middle episode, in which Christ is threatened with stoning, the author has gone to John x. 24-39. He has again, however, made a sign where none is present in John. In the Bible Christ simply escapes from the Pharisees before he is stoned: "Quaerebant ergo eum apprehendere: et exivit de manibus eorum" (x.39). The Chester author has used this event to present another manifestation of Christ's divine power, and hence a sign of his identity, for Christ does not simply escape: the stage direction reads, "Tunc colligunt lapides et statim evanescit Jesus." The author may have been developing the hint contained in an earlier attempted stoning (John viii. 59) where the Vulgate reads: "Tulerunt ergo lapides, ut jacerent in eum: Jesus autem abscondit se, et exivit de templo" (my emphasis). Using the idea that Christ hid himself, the author has increased the significatory power of the event by presenting it as a miraculous hiding.

(18) Since I developed my ideas on sign and illumination in play XIII, I have discovered a similar analysis of the play in John Paul Pival, Jr., "Staging as Projection of Imitated Action in the Chester Cycle," Diss. Wisconsin 1973. The context of argument in which we discuss the play is quite different.

He is concerned to retain the significatory nature of the other miracles. The blindness of Caecus has for Chester, as for John, a fundamental role as sign - it has its origin not in the sins of the man or his parents, but in its final cause, which Christ explains:

...for this cause spetiallye:
to sett forth Goddes great glorye,
his power to shewe manifestlye,
this mans sight to reforme (55-8)

Lazarus's resurrection is similarly revelatory. Firstly, it shows "Godes grace" (Chester XIII, 440; John xi. 40 "gloriam Dei,"). Secondly, the manner in which it is worked is intended to reveal Christ's identity as the Son of God. When Christ prays aloud, he does so to ensure belief:

But for this people that stande hereby
speake I the more openlye,
that they may leeve steedfastly
from thee that I was sent. (446-9, cf. John
xi. 42)

These miracles also fit the pattern of the cycle in that, in John, they are the foci of contrasting responses. In the first, there is even an investigation of the sign and the response of Caecus is contrasted with the disbelief of the Jews. Chester adopts this in full. Evidently the Chester author feels the additional attraction of John's note that the Jews could not themselves agree (John ix. 16) and we therefore have the characteristically juxtaposed favourable and unfavourable reactions to the sign. The first Pharisee judges Christ to be mad for violating the sabbath (131-4), the second says:

I cannot enter into my thought

that hee which hath thys marveyle wrought
should be a synner - I leeve yt
nought; (135-7)

The author was presumably well aware that the didactically necessary polarizing of Jews and believers would lead him to present the second Pharisee as recidivist and evil. He therefore has the Pharisee speak here of a "marveyle" rather than 'sign' which the Bible has (v. 16). Nothing is implied about a deeper belief by this word; the use of the word 'sign' would imply a sense of what the sign was significant of.

In the Lazarus episode the contrast of response to the performed sign is implied rather than shown. Only Martha's reactions are given, and Mary's response seems to function as a summary of the whole play's action. "By verey signe nowe men maye see/that thou arte Godes Sonne" (476-7). This is even clearer in MSS. ARBH where she refers to his "signes" (plural) and seems, therefore, to be more of a commentator on the several episodes of XIII. The Jews are emphasized as the enemy far more in Chester than in John. In John xi. 45, many of the Jews present are brought to belief whereas in Chester the belief of acknowledged friends only is concentrated on. In John xi. 36-7 the Jews first notice that Christ's tears show that he loved Lazarus and secondly, wonder that he has died despite Christ's power already shown so signally in the healing of Caecus. In Chester, these attitudes become derisive insult (426-433).

So far, then, we see that Chester has been

attracted to the significatory nature of the miracles and to their role in creating belief and indicating disbelief. But in John they have an additional symbolic value which has also been taken over by Chester, and has been given to the central miracle of Christ's disappearance by an author possessed of as much theological acumen as dramatic insight. The healing of Caecus and the raising of Lazarus are the most obviously symbolic signs in John and have encouraged modern theologians to see symbolism as pervasive in the Gospel. (19) The Chester author has further taken the central episode and made it into a symbolic sign which links the two outside miracles and does so in terms of their Johannine symbolism.

W. Nicol has pointed out that miracles are called signs in John not because of any parabolic or symbolic significance which they might have: "The miracles are not *sēmeia* in the sense that they are signs which point to some meaning behind them; the miracle itself is significant, demonstrating the power of Jesus and causing many to believe." (20) While this is an accurate account of the meaning of the word '*sēmeion*,' it is not the case, of course, that the signs never contain an additional meaning.

In John, the healing of Caecus is immediately preceded by a statement which shows that the form which the miracle will take reflects symbolically a claim

(19) See Cerfaux, p.46.

(20) Nicol, p.62. Compare Guthrie, p.74.

which Christ is making for himself: "Quamdiu sum in mundo, lux sum mundi" (John ix. 5). The illumination which Christ offers is of a total salvific and spiritual nature but the healing of Caecus expresses it first in a physically salvific way and then leads to a fideistic illumination when Christ announces that the newly opened eyes are beholding the Son of God. (21) Chester retains all of this, accentuating the theme by opening the play with "Ego sum lux mundi." It does not take over from John the carefully defined stages of Caecus's belief. Guthrie writes

It is important to notice the progression in the man's conception of Jesus. At first he was 'The man called Jesus' (ix. 11); later he says 'He is a prophet' (ix. 17)...still later he comes to believe in Jesus as the Son of Man (ix. 35). His final confession is striking for its simplicity, 'Lord, I believe' (ix. 38). (22)

Chester mixes these up. When Caecus has just received his sight and is declaring his feelings for the first time there is no doubt that he considers the instructions he received were from God: "When I had donne as God me badde..." (77). But when Caecus is talking to the Pharisees the author uses the biblical text more and thus Caecus refers to "The man which we call Jesus" (101) and then says "A prophet hee ys, withowt fayle" (140). The impression given is that these terms are suitable to the blindness of those to whom he is speaking, and the author wishes to show

(21) The symbolic significance of the Caecus and Lazarus miracles is noted by Cerfaux, pp.46-7 and Guthrie, pp.76-7.

(22) Guthrie, p.76.

Caecus's own progression as a simpler, and, with regard to his audience, a didactically more appropriate change from belief in God (73-8) to recognition of Christ as God's son (233-4).

The symbolic significance of the raising of Lazarus is so obvious as almost to require no comment. Christ makes it clear in his discussion with Martha about the dead Lazarus.

Ego sum resurrectio, et vita: qui credit in me, etiam si mortuus fuerit, vivet: Et omnis, qui vivit, et credit in me, non morietur in aeternum (xi. 25-6).

The raising of Lazarus symbolically represents Christ's claim to be the Resurrection and the Life, at the same time as it proves, because it is a miraculous sign, that he is God's Son. The salvation offered to all who believe is represented in this act.

These two signs are linked. To those who receive Christ as the Light of the World, he will also prove the Life. Those illumined by his signs and brought to belief thereby become heirs to his resurrection. At the same time, those who do not believe the signs remain in darkness as a result and, not believing in him, are separated from him and the life he offers. It is this unpleasant corollary which the author chooses to dramatize in the central episode. Concerned as, indeed, John is, to distinguish between the believer and disbeliever in terms of sign and sight, (23) the

(23) Charlier notes that the idea of being blind to signs is in John xii. 40 where John quotes Isaiah vi. 9-10 "Excaecavit oculos eorum, etc." (p.438).

Chester author nevertheless recognizes that the dramatic medium requires the condition of the unbeliever to be represented in action rather than developed in the lengthy polemic and apologetic debates which John uses in these chapters. He therefore takes the escape of Christ from the stoning, and not only turns it into a sign, but into a symbolic sign. The fact that Christ is not, in the spiritual sense, the Light of the World to the Jews is represented by his disappearance from their earthly sight. Restored to physical sight, Caecus had his spiritual sight illumined and became one of those who, believing, will have eternal life. The Jews, rejecting the signs which would have illumined their spiritual sight, have their earthly sight baffled (285-300); they are, in an inverted way, blinded by Christ's absence. One can hear in their reaction "Owt, owt, alas where is our fonne?" (285) the chaotic overtones of the eternal diabolism to which they have consigned themselves, and the author cleverly includes in the colloquial speech of one of them a suggestion that they have chosen death: "Nowe by the death I shall one dye...to syr Cayphas I shall him wrye" (293 and 295).

Play XIII requires us to appreciate a creativity of a different order from that of post-Romantic originality. The author has taken his material from John, his theological concepts from John, the sequence of events, from the woman taken in adultery through to Lazarus, from John. But he has also shown the power of

his own theological and artistic insight in his selection of material, his care to dramatize an event rather than follow an argumentative mode, and his profoundly sympathetic altering of John's material.

Play XIV does not have the formally balanced structure of XIII, and both Eleanor Prosser and Rosemary Woolf have criticized it for this reason. Prosser writes: "The Chester playwright...was still writing chronicle; he did not have a clear purpose in mind." (24) Woolf writes, particularly with respect to the "Cleansing of the Temple," "At this stretch of the gospel narrative there is an obvious danger that fidelity to biblical completeness will lead to the disintegration of the cycle into tiny scenes, and this is the effect of the Chester author's unwillingness to select or re-arrange." (25) It is true that the authors of the play have been partly imbued with the spirit of Gospel harmonizing, but it is not true that their selection of material is wholly directed by this, or that they do not have a clear purpose.

The opening scene of the play evidently went through some revision before it appeared in the extant form. (26) I will be discussing the nature of this revision, and its contribution to the cycle's ministry of signs in chapter IV, but even if we attend to the

(24) Eleanor Prosser, Drama and Religion in the English Mystery Plays: A Re-evaluation (1961; rpt. Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1966), p.118.

(25) Rosemary Woolf, The English Mystery Plays, p.233.

(26) Clopper, "History and Development," p.232.

probably unrevised part - the anointing of Christ - we can see that an interest in sign has contributed to the inclusion of the episode. In chapter I we noted that Mary's action had a quasi-sacramental quality, that it was an external sign whereby she revealed her spiritual state. Christ's passive acceptance of the anointing is also regarded as a source of significance by the author, for Simon questions "A, Judas, why doth Jesus soe?" (57) Both Simon and Judas observing the action respond to it, one questioning its meaning, the other openly hostile to it and careless of any meaning it might have: "Naye, Simon, brother, sooth to saye,/hit is nothings to my paye" (65-6). These responses draw forth from Christ an explanation, in the form of parable, of the significance which the act has.

One thing is clear - we are not seeing here the Johannine sign which we have encountered in the previous play, and indeed play XIV does not emphasize the performing of signs by Christ though it does include several examples of his omniscience miraculously expressed. He knows that the ass and foal will be found and the author has gone to Luke xx. 30-4 for this material. The scene was clearly traditional in the drama, being found in the other extant cycles, so the movement to Luke here does not bear any particular importance. But in the play Christ also predicts the man with the water pot, Judas's betrayal and Peter's denial, in addition to his general foreknowledge of his suffering and Resurrection. The effect of this is to

imbue the audience with a sense of his omniscience, and although there is no internal recognition of these fulfilled prophecies as signs, the presence of references to sign in the play and the influence of the two preceding plays urges the onlooker to see each successive event as a sign of that omniscience. The play's more overt emphasis is, however, not on Christ's performing of signs but upon the varied responses of those who have either seen his signs or would wish to see them.

For the sequence of events from "Lazarus" to "Mary Magdalene" and from "Mary Magdelene" to the "Entry" the play is, like the previous play, being guided by John. Although the material of the present "Mary Magdalene" is from Mark's Gospel, the episode originally followed the account in John (xii. 1-8). The "Entry" evidences a careful harmonizing of material.

Though the episode of the foal and ass is from Luke, the author proceeds to include a detail of his own suggested by the Johannine treatment of sign. The Janitor delivers up the ass and foal because he has recognized Christ's power from his raising of Lazarus:

Take asse and foale and goe your waye
for eyche man of him marvayle may.
Lazarre, that fowre daye dead laye,
hee rayсед at his callinge. (165-8)

In John, the citizens of Jerusalem meet Christ either because they were present at the raising of Lazarus or had heard of it:

Testimonium ergo perhibebat turba, quae erat cum eo quando Lazarum vocavit de monumento, et suscitavit eum a mortuis. Propterea et

obviam venit ei turba: quia audierunt eum
fecisse hoc signum. (John xii. 17-18).

The Chester author takes the opportunity of retaining this idea, with dramatic economy, by letting the synoptic Janitor, quite unbiblically, remind the citizens of Christ's miracles: "For his marvayles leeve aye upon/that hee is verey Goddes Sonne" (173-4). He then blends the synoptic and Johannine accounts of the Entry itself. He takes from the former the terms of the welcome which Christ got (following 208), but has three of the citizens express John's emphasis by citing Christ's miracles as the principal reason for honouring his Entry (183-8; 197-200). The Janitor and citizens never actually refer to the miracles as signs but that is clearly how they are being regarded. The Sixth Citizen declares:

These miracles preeven appertlye
that from the Father almightie
hee is comen, mankynd to bye;
yt may not other bee. (XIV, 197-200)

It is possible that the author does not feel it appropriate to give sign vocabulary to such statements by anonymous citizens reporting what has been seen. Sign vocabulary tends to be used rather by named characters whose responses are to signs immediately performed and recognized. In other words, important statements about belief having come from "signs" tend to appear when important dramatizations of sign are taking place.

Here, then, we see the spirit of Gospel harmony operating, but in conjunction with a conscious desire

to extend the Johannine concept of sign which is so characteristic of the Chester Ministry. The same harmonizing, with the specific interest in developing sign can be seen in the "Cleansing of the Temple."

The practice in previous scenes has been to take the sequence of events from John and, where appropriate, to include material from the synoptic Gospels. In following the "Entry" with the "Cleansing" the author adopts the synoptic sequence, for John places the latter event very much earlier in Christ's ministry (ii. 13ff). The substance of the story however is provided by the Johannine account. The Cursor Mundi also adopts this practice, and the Chester author may have been influenced by tradition in choosing the fuller Johannine account of the event. (27) If we consider the care with which he has used the Bible, however, we may well feel that conscious deliberation rather than the harmonizing tradition has prompted his use of John. John differs from the synoptic account in that he develops the episode in terms of sign and the synoptics do not - surprisingly, perhaps, because John's development is very much in the synoptic style as we discussed it earlier.

In John's version, the Jews ask Christ, who has

(27) R. Morris, ed., Cursor Mundi, Early English Text Society, Original Series, 59 and 62 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co., 1876), pp.844-5. The Pepysian Gospel Harmony contains both accounts at their separate positions. Margery Goates, ed. The Pepysian Gospel Harmony, Early English Text Society, Original Series, 157 for 1919 (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1922).

just thrown down the tables, "Quod signum ostendis vobis quia haec facis?" (ii. 18). Both Chester merchants ask for those signs or tokenings which would authorize the action by proving his identity:

PRIMUS MERCATOR

Saye, Jesus with thy jangling,
What evidence or tokeninge
shewest thow of thy rayninge,
that thou darest doe this?

SECUNDUS MERCATOR

What signes nowe shewest thou here
that preeves such power (245-50)

In fact, to the alert onlooker, the destruction of the money tables is itself a sign of Christ's spiritual authority. Although the above request for sign is synoptic in style, the author includes a quite unbiblical suggestion that the Jews, like the alert onlooker, have suspected Christ's authority in this deed. This addition is much more Johannine in spirit since it resembles the recognition of sign but without, of course, any of the spiritual implications of such a recognition. The second Merchant says,

Nowe yt seemes well that hee
would attayne royaltee;
elles this bould durst hee not bee
to make such araye. (237-40)

The partial vision which amounts to spiritual blindness is characteristic of the Jews in these ministry plays and this is again represented in their vocabulary during their conspiracy with Judas. John permits them to use sign vocabulary. The Chester author, however, does not, even although he wishes to make it clear that they reject Christ from a position

of knowledge. They summarize the signs Christ has given (XIV, 329-376): his disappearance, the raising of Lazarus, the healing of the blind, his casting down of the tables, and his verbal signs of preaching and calling the Temple his Father's house. They can even use the word "miracle" (341), but their unbelief means that they cannot use the words 'sign' or 'tokening'. On the other hand, Chester follows John in having Christ refer to his actions as 'works', not 'signs'. 'Sign' thus remains the term used by people who are interpreting what they see.

The authors of these Ministry plays know their own didactic intentions as well as they know their Bible; they know what to take from source, and where their simpler scheme of teaching demands adaptation of source. Their creativity shows as much in their restraint as in what they select to dramatize. The decision to follow John in not presenting the Transfiguration was part of this restraint. We can see why Chester chose thus from the following account by a modern theologian, Peter Riga-

St John does not change the theme of the transfiguration, but simply applies it through the earthly Christophanies and manifestations of Christ's divinity (glory) by his signs. Thus Christ manifested his glory to his disciples...throughout the whole of his earthly existence and not simply in one anticipatory manifestation as in the synoptic tradition. (28)

The York cycle does have a Transfiguration play but

(28) Peter Riga, "Signs of Glory: The Use of Sēmeion in St. John's Gospel, Interpretation, 17 (1963), 402-24, p.415.

this would be supererogatory at least, and possibly even inconsistent in Chester because it would imply a particular moment of revelation while the cycle has stressed many such moments, including nativity episodes unrecounted in John. A cycle which by its internal action stresses the need for the onlooker to behold the signs of Christ and to believe is going to choose the Johannine presentation of many theophanies and a range of possible responses. It is not going to choose the 'closed' revelation of Christ to his disciples if it is going to assert that a clear choice between belief and unbelief exists for the common man; that both responses are possible; that the choice is real.

One last point needs to be made before we pass to a much briefer account of Chester's use of the Old Testament. It has been an increasing scholarly tendency to enlarge the orbit of 'sign' in John until it circumscribes most of Christ's works and his words. The following aspects of John have been seen in this way: all his symbolic acts; (29) anything which offers the possibility of belief or disbelief; (30) a whole chapter of the Gospel; (31) Christ's life (32) and, most importantly, his enigmatic speeches. (33) John himself only gives explicit justification for seeing

(29) F. M. Braun, "Quatre 'Signes' Johanniques de l'Unité Chrétienne," New Testament Studies, 9 (1962-3), 147-55, p.147.

(30) Vernon Ruland, "Sign and Sacrament: John's Bread of Life Discourse (Chapter 6)," Interpretation, XVIII (1964), 450-62, p.458.

(31) *ibid.*, p.459.

(32) Nicol, p.3.

(33) Charlier, p.436.

Christ's words as signs when he replies to the Jews' request for a sign by saying "Solvite templum hoc, et in tribus diebus excitabo illud" (John ii. 19). John points out that although the Jews took this literally, Christ was actually referring to his body, and thus the theologian can see in this reply a linguistic counterpart to miraculous signs. In neither case can the Jews see the full significance of what has been offered them. There is much theologically to recommend this reading, (34) but the Chester cycle is simpler in its approach. We have already seen in chapter I that it closely parallels Christ's words with his deeds, and that this, in the context of the long theological tradition of regarding words as an important kind of sign, directs us to the conclusion that Christ's words are being presented as signs by the authors of the ministry. But Chester has to be careful about its use of enigma. The main thrust of its teaching must be clear although certain room can be left for private meditation of meaning. If it pairs Christ's words and work as signs, it is nevertheless restrained in suggesting that they have a deeper meaning. We have discussed two symbolic miraculous signs - in each case, the symbolic significance was completely clear and in neither case was it that particular significance which the Jews failed to understand. They simply rejected the action as a whole. Similarly, Christ's words are

(34) See, for example, the similar use of parables in the synoptic Gospels, as discussed by Riga, *passim*.

straightforwardly rejected by them. As a popular didactic work it would not be suitable for Chester to suggest that belief depended upon comprehension of enigmatic significance, or wise to suggest that disbelief could be attributed simply to incapacity to understand. Accordingly, when it dramatizes Christ's reply to the moneylenders it avoids the double meaning of the Bible and, on the face of it, we have a straightforward claim by Christ:

This temple here I maye destroye,
and through my might and my maistrye
in dayes three hit edifie
and buyld yt up agayne. (XIV, 253-6)

Not inability to understand, but refusal to believe is Chester's simpler, less subtly Johannine, but still Johannine approach to words as signs.

As a closer analysis of signification in the Old Testament plays is to be given in later chapters I wish to restrict discussion here to a few important points.

Chester does not always take the opportunity to use sign vocabulary where its choice of biblical material would have permitted it. It lacks, at II, 41-56, a description of the sun and moon, the lights of heaven, as signs. Genesis i. 14 says that they were created "in signa et tempora." Similarly, the mark which God put upon Cain (Genesis iv. 15) is not alluded to in Chester's version of the encounter even although a concern with signification is evident in the episode as a whole. Eve says when she hears of Abel's death "Well I wott and knowe iwysse/that verye vengeance it is" (II, 693-4).

Chester's two references to the rainbow as a "tokening" are biblically authorized by Genesis ix. 12-13 and 17, but MS. H's use of sign vocabulary also in the raven and dove episode is not (Appendix 1A, 6, 22 and 23). These uses heavily accentuate the salvific significance of the Noah play in H, but even in Hm sign has a climactic role in marking the salvific covenant between God and man. (35) The use of this vocabulary to describe that other covenant - the code of law contained in the Ten Commandments - is not biblical (MS. Hm, V, 31).

On the whole, Chester's Old Testament sign vocabulary relates to the giving or taking of significance rather than to the naming of things as signs. It is the process of signification rather than the identification of something as a 'sign', so called, that seems to draw explicit sign vocabulary from the authors. It seems possible that the authors wished to refrain from naming too many things in the Old Testament as signs in order to avoid confusion with the large number of identified, named 'signs' in the New Testament. These New Testament signs formed a particular group: they were miracles revealing Godhead; their special character and function could be highlighted because 'sign' as a name was largely reserved for them. This does not mean that

(35) For the importance of covenants in the Old Testament plays see Lawrence M. Clopper, "The Principle of Selection of the Chester Old Testament Plays," Chaucer Review, 13 (1979), 272-83.

signification as a process, and the taking of significance or even the naming of some things as 'signs' were not considered legitimate aspects of a dramatization of the Old Testament. Typological signification is obviously important in play IV, and the taking of significance by characters throughout the Old Testament is propaedeutic in introducing the audience to the demand that it observe with insight, a demand which is made with increasing urgency as the New Testament succeeds the Old.

One final point deserves to be made because it both relates to Chester's fondness for the Gospel of John, and shows up a rather surprising lack in Chester's pattern of sign as compared with other cycles. Scholars have frequently noted that John's understanding of sign is derived from, or is even a conscious development of the treatment of sign in the Old Testament. (36) His vocabulary is seen to be largely that of the Old Testament; his association of sign with sight is present in the Old Testament; he makes allusions to the signs of the Old Testament. But although Chester is Johannine in its New Testament plays it does not take the opportunities which John himself offers to adopt this presentation of sign in the Old Testament. It includes neither the feeding of the five thousand nor its typological prefiguration,

(36) See, for example, Cerfaux, p.47, Riga, pp.403 and 411, and David W. Wead, The Literary Devices in John's Gospel, Diss. Basel 1970, Band IV der Theologischen Dissertationen (Basel: Friedrich Reinhardt Kommissionsverlag, 1970), pp.12-16.

the supplying of manna in the desert, which John refers to vi. 30-2. Despite the popularity of the brazen serpent and its being explicitly mentioned by John iii. 14, Chester does not choose this particular typological sign. Most strikingly, however, Chester omits the miracles which are performed upon Pharaoh by God at the time of the Exodus. Riga states that these works were among those to which Christ was referring when he said "Pater meus usque modo operatur, et ego operor" (John v. 17). (37) Christ's salvific signs are the continuation of these Old Testament signs and wonders through which the children of Israel were saved and by which God manifested himself (Exodus x. 2). Given the cycle's interest in sign and in the Gospel of John, Chester's clear understanding of the Old Testament children of Israel as "proto-Christians," (38) and the generic acceptability of the events as proved by their appearance in the shared York/Towneley play, it seems very strange indeed that Chester should have chosen the Moses play it did. I can only adduce one explanation for this, though I think it is a strong one. In the episode of the disasters which fall upon Pharaoh (Exodus vii-xii. 36) Pharaoh's belief in God is not an issue. His heart is certainly hardened, as the hearts of the Jews contemplating Christ's signs are hardened, but it is hardened against letting the Israelites go, not against belief in God. Indeed, it appears that God

(37) Riga, pp.416-7.

(38) Clopper, "The Principle of Selection of the Chester Old Testament Plays," p.276.

has expressly hardened Pharaoh's heart against the exodus in order to give God the opportunity to display his whole range of signs:

Et dixit Dominus ad Moysen: Ingredere ad Pharaonem: ego enim induravi cor ejus, et servorum illius: ut faciam signa mea haec in eo (Exodus x. 1)

The following verse clarifies this: God is hardening Pharaoh's heart so that, at some point in the future, the signs thus permitted by his intransigence will convince the children of Israel of who God is:

Et narres in auribus filii tui, et nepotum tuorum, quoties contriverim Aegyptios, et signa mea fecerim in eis: et sciatis quia ego Dominus. (Exodus x. 2)

The Chester dramatists recognized that these signs were the scourges of God not signs offered for Pharaoh's belief. They probably also felt the difficulty of using them as signs in the way the second verse of Exodus x suggested. Left with 'signs' which were only salvific, and were unconnected with believing or disbelieving responses, they could not see a proper theological parallel between these events and the more fully significatory miracles of the New Testament. They refrained, therefore, from dramatizing them. If this explanation is correct, we have more evidence of the creative care exercised by the Chester playwrights in their use of their main source. The skill which we have already seen in their New Testament plays should make it easier for us to accept such an explanation.

Over the years, Chester has been thought to show evidence of French influence. Rosemary Woolf is the

latest critic to have claimed this. She writes, "it seems clear that the Old Testament sequence (and perhaps more) was rewritten towards the end of the fifteenth century by an author who modelled his plays upon those in the Mystère du viel testament." (39) Although she cites Albert Baugh's, excellently impartial, article on French influence, I do not believe that his findings can support her claim. (40) Baugh himself writes, "I do not think French influence has been "proved"; I merely consider it probable." (41) The influence which he suspects is not evident in verbal echo but in "the general management of certain scenes and episodes, the structure of individual plays." (42) It is difficult to see how much further the study can be taken. One interesting concomitant of Baugh's argument is that many of Chester's episodes which he cites as unique in English tradition, but popular in the French, contribute markedly to the cycle's development of sign. (43) But they are not the only episodes that do this and the Antichrist play, so important for Chester's sign pattern, is unique to the extant

(39) Woolf, p.306.

(40) Albert C. Baugh, "The Chester Plays and French Influence," Schelling Anniversary Papers (New York: Russell and Russell, 1967), 35-63.

(41) *ibid*, pp.62-3.

(42) *ibid.*, p.62.

(43) Baugh notes such parallels for Abraham and Melchisedeck; Balaam; the signs before Doomsday; Octavianus and the Sibyl; the healing of Caecus; the cleansing of the Temple.

English drama but is not in the French cycles. (44) Although the healing of Caecus and the subsequent attempted stoning are unique to Chester and found also in French, we surely do not need to cite French influence for their inclusion or management, in view of the foregoing account of Chester's use of the Bible. Lack of evidence about Chester's history, and the general nature of the parallels with French drama which have been adduced seem to make such influence of little value to the critic.

Woolf, I believe, over-read the evidence in claiming that the plays were "modelled" on the French, but she did so in developing an idea which was substantially correct: Chester's indebtedness is "to a few easily identifiable works." (45) These works are the Bible, the Stanzaic Life of Christ, and the Legenda Aurea upon which the Life is partly based. When Woolf described Chester's relationship to its sources as "simple" (46) she was contrasting it with the other cycles' more complex reflection of traditional ideas from a variety of sources. If we approach Chester's narrower range of borrowing with the aid of a specific topic, signification, we can see that the particular judgements made by the Chester authors were far from simple, but show an independent, selective and creative vision.

(44) Cividale's lost cycle did include an Antichrist. See Woolf, p.291.

(45) Woolf, p.306.

(46) loc. cit.

A proper account is still required of the extent to which Chester uses the Legenda Aurea directly rather than through the medium of its English derivative, the Stanzaic Life of Christ. Frances Foster was concerned to show that the Life was a more likely source than the Latin work. (47) The other main article on Chester's sources also concentrates on the Life. (48) There is no doubt that Chester does often use the Life directly, but I think we must beware of simplifying the methods Chester used in drawing upon source material, particularly in view of the lengthy period over which the cycle was composed. There are places where it seems likely that the author was either using the Legenda Aurea without the Life, or in addition to it - places where the Latin version was the only one available or, as seems more likely, where the author was concerned to give his own version of the Latin, although he knew that offered by the Life. Equally, there are places where Chester, though probably aware of both Latin and English versions of an event, diverges from both or alters both.

I would like to begin with some cases where I consider that the Legenda Aurea was immediately available to the Chester author, who used it in conjunction with the Life. In the following extract

(47) Frances A. Foster, ed., A Stanzaic Life of Christ, Early English Text Society, Original Series, 116 (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1926), pp.xxviii-xliii.

(48) Robert H. Wilson, "The Stanzaic Life of Christ and the Chester Plays," Studies in Philology, XXVIII (1931), 413-42.

from the Legenda Aurea, the significance is being given for the people whom Mary sees weeping and rejoicing as she enters Bethlehem: (49)

pars populi gaudens est populus gentilis, qui
in semine Abrahae aeternam benedictionem
accipiet. Pars autem gemens est plebs
Iudaica, a Deo suis meritis reprobata.

There are two prima facie similarities between the Legenda Aurea and Chester as against the Life. The Life adds an explanation of how the people could rejoice without knowing that Christ had come (373-6). It also refers to the fact that the sceptre is now passing from the Jews, as foretold in Genesis xl. 10. Neither of these details is present in Chester which thus appears closer to the Latin. But such similarities in omission are fairly regular between Chester and both works. An independent sense of what is dramatically economical and powerful can lead to such similarities without any influence being implied. What does suggest use of the Legenda Aurea here is Chester's inclusion of the detail that it was the "commen" people who rejoiced. The Life does not make this point. It seems to me likely that the word, in keeping with Chester's nativity exaltation of the humble and humbling of the mighty, was suggested by the use of the word "plebs" for the Jewish people in the Legenda Aurea. The Chester author has simply reversed the application of "populus" and "plebs" in order to show the rejection of the whole nation of

(49) Jacobi a Voragine, Legenda Aurea, ed. Th. Graesse (Dresden and Leipzig: Librariae Arnoldianae, 1846), p.41. The episode is at lines 357-92 of the Life and in Chester play VI, 429-52.

Jews, but the salvation of the ordinary believer.

More persuasive parallels appear in the section where the significance of the Magi's gifts is being expounded. (50) I would like to go through the significances section by section because these parallels exist in a complex context of borrowing and independence.

The Life and Chester agree in abbreviating the Legenda Aurea's first reason for giving the gold. This becomes Life, 2037-40 and Chester IX, 37-47. Since it is largely historical background and authoritative material which is being omitted one might feel that both English works could be abbreviating the section independently.

The next reasons for the gifts' appropriateness are not so much meanings which the gifts have, as functions they can perform. These are the Bernardine explanations that the gold is suitable for Mary's poverty; the incense counteracts the smell of the stable; the myrrh is good for strengthening limbs. (51) Chester, the Life and the Legenda Aurea all agree on the Bernardine interpretation of the gold and incense, (52) but a difference appears in the discussion of myrrh and it is one which separates Chester from the other two works. The Latin reads, "myrrham propter membrorum pueri consolidationem et malorum vermium

(50) Stanzaic Life of Christ, 2037-2120; Legenda Aurea, p.93; Chester IX, 37-119.

(51) See Woolf, p.194.

(52) Stanzaic Life of Christ, 2041-54; Legenda Aurea, p.93; Chester IX, 48-55.

expulsionem." The Life (2057-64) includes the idea of strengthening, and of repelling worms and notes that myrrh prevents corruption. For some reason, Chester omits these ideas and notes only that myrrh is good for anointing limbs (56-9). Given the evident use of the other works elsewhere, it does not seem likely that this omission implies Chester's ignorance of the fuller interpretation. I would suggest that Chester does not wholly wish to present its child Christ as a child who needs his limbs strengthened. There is too much of the omnipotent God about him. He has already miraculously cured Salome, and even the Shepherds have praised him in terms which reflect his grandeur rather than humanity. (53) Here, then, the Chester author has quite altered the significance of the source in order to accord with the cycle's general treatment. Strangely, a verbal echo of the Life's words at this point appears later in Chester at a point where it is Christ's lack of bodily corruption that is being stressed. The fifth explanation of the gifts in the Legenda Aurea is in terms of those aspects of Christ signified by them. The myrrh signifies his "caro integra et incorrupta." The Life refers to his "clene flesche" (2117) and Chester also reads "cleane flesh" (111) but here, where there is no suggestion of weakness in Christ, Chester feels

(53) They refer to him as "kinge of heuon" (552); "emperour of hell" (563); "the maker of the stare" (567); "prince withowten any pere" (576) and Hm is probably influenced by these grandiose terms when it reads "the blessedesfull baronne" (569) instead of "barne" in MSS. ARBH.

able to pick up again that part of the Life it omitted earlier. Chester's idea that myrrh "waves corruptyon" (110) seems to recall the Life's "wormus wayues" (2061) and "al corrupcioun puttis hym fro" (2063).

In the third group of significances, both the Life and Chester remain true to the essential points of the Latin, though the glosses given by the two English works are independent. (54) However, there then follows a brief summary of what the gifts signify in Christ, and here some variation appears. The summary is introduced thus by the Legenda Aurea: "Per haec tria ergo in Christo intimatur..." Chester's introduction seems closer to the Latin than to the Life, for it reads "By these giftes three of good araye/three thinges understand I maye" (88-9), whereas the Life simply reads, "Lo her ze moun se wel in sigt" (2077). The interpretation of the gifts furthers this sense that Chester is directly translating the Latin. In the Legenda Aurea, gold and incense respectively signify "regia potestas" and "divina majestas." The Life, however gets these phrases mixed up, and therefore has the gold signify "Kynges realte" (2078) and incense "Goddes myzt" (2079); where a more accurate translation would have been "Kynges myzt" and "Goddes realte." Chester does contain that more accurate translation, giving us "Kinges powere" and "godhead" for gold and

(54) Stanzaic Life of Christ, 2065-76; Legenda Aurea, p.93; Chester IX, 65-87. Chester changes the Life's "bishop" (2069) to "godhead" (72) to avoid demeaning Christ.

incense (90, 92). For the myrrh, Chester again seems independent of the Life, for, while the Life properly interprets the significance "humana mortalitas" in terms of Christ's death, the Chester author simply translates the Latin phrase before him. Thus the Life reads that myrrh intimates the "deth that tholet he" (2080) and Chester reads the more general "bodely death" (94).

In the fourth group of significances there seems clear evidence that Chester is independently translating the Latin. The Legenda Aurea has, for the third gift, "myrrha carnis mortificationem." The Life understands this as the mortification of the flesh which we voluntarily engage in when overcoming lust:

And myrre may signifie also
ouercomyng of our fleschlie wille,
quen we fezten agayn þat fo
our talent noȝt forto fulfille. (2089-92).

Chester, however, takes the other meaning which this ambiguous phrase could carry. It understands it as the natural mortification of the flesh to which we are heir by mortality. Thus, it reads, "myrre death that man hath bodelye" (102). This separation in the understanding of an ambiguous phrase suggests either that the Chester author did not have the Life before him when he looked at the Latin, or that he was sufficiently alert to the Latin and to the less moralistic tone of the Chester cycle to resist the moral interpretation which the Life gave to the phrase "carnis mortificationem." In either case, there is no doubt that he had the Legenda Aurea before him.

In the fifth group of significances Chester again has a reading closer to the Latin, for it reads "pretiouse godhead" (107) for "divinitas pretiosissima" in interpretation of the gold. (55) The Life does not seem to translate the phrase at all, but discusses instead how Christ showed his love by disparaging his deity in becoming human. This would be quite at odds with Chester's presentation of a Christ powerful and Godlike even on Earth, and so the author keeps close to the Legenda Aurea.

The end of this section sees Chester and the Life agreeing in the point at which they stop following the Legenda Aurea, though here, as with their opening the section at the same point, such a decision could be arrived at independently by the two authors. The conclusion we can now come to is that in the episode of the Magi's gifts, and possibly that of the weeping and rejoicing people, the author or authors had the Legenda Aurea before them, probably in addition to the Stanzaic Life of Christ. When the Chester author of the section on the King's gifts was considering his version he was not held to the Latin text simply because of its authority: he could ignore a reading if he felt it best. He was guided in the use of both texts by his sense of what was appropriate to the cycle. This led him several times closer to the Latin than to the Life. He appears to have resisted a Life reading consciously

(55) This similarity between Chester and the Latin is noted by Foster, p.xli, n.2.

and adopted the alternative possible translation of the Legenda Aurea text because it did not lead him to a moralistic consideration which he knew was inappropriate to the cycle. We cannot accept Wilson's explanation that differences between Chester and the Life were "very likely...a result of the playwright relying in part upon his memory of the passage." (56)

It is certainly not my intention to claim that this was always the way in which Chester authors used the Stanzaic Life of Christ. There are occasionally other prima facie similarities between Chester and the Legenda Aurea as against the Life but they are cases in which this similarity could be explained by Chester's independent abbreviating of the Life with no influence from the Latin. (57) I have found no other close verbal evidence of Chester's use of the Latin rather than the English. What I am concerned to point out is that in the use of the same sources Chester authors would not always be following the same methods, though they might arrive at results consonant with one another. Though this may seem an obvious enough conclusion it is not one that I have found in the studies of Chester so far carried out. Critics have uneasily moved between accepting, as Wilson did, the presence of revision, and trying to retain the idea of a single shaping mind whether it was Salter's cross-rhyme

(56) Wilson, p.423.

(57) For example, Chester and Legenda Aurea both simplify the disagreement of the midwives to a straightforward response and counter-response. The Life tries to imply a longer argument (461-4).

reviser; (58) Kolve's "last," and therefore artistically responsible, reviser; (59) or revisers such as the one whom Woolf thought to have modelled the Old Testament material upon the French Mystère. I will be examining this topic again in chapter IV but think it necessary to note here before we look at Chester's relationship to the Stanzaic Life of Christ that whatever coherent pattern of use emerges it has not been proved that one man was responsible for it. Equally, it cannot be proved that one man did not adopt a range of methods when using his sources. It seems to me quite likely that the man who eschewed the Life at various points in the Magi's gifts section also used it more closely at others and ignored the Legenda Aurea.

Our analysis of Chester's particular borrowings from the Life will concentrate upon signification. It will do so because it was for material relating to sign and signification that the Chester authors had recourse to the work. With this in mind, it is helpful to note some general differences between the texts in their signifiatory interests and styles.

The most striking dissimilarity is the emphasis which Christ's ministry gets in Chester compared with the meagre account given of it in the Life (5333-88).

(58) F. M. Salter, "The Banns of the Chester Plays," Review of English Studies, 15 (1939), 432-57, p.452. This article continued in the same journal, volume 16 (1940), 1-17 and 137-48. It has been largely superseded by Clopper's work on the Chester Records.
(59) V. A. Kolve, The Play Called Corpus Christi (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1966), p.277, n.14. Pival quotes and follows this approach to artistic responsibility.

After the Temptation by Satan, Christ's ministry does not fit easily into the pattern of the liturgical year which the Life is using as the framework for discussing the meaning of aspects of Christ's life. An account of the ministry would disrupt the pattern since it does not have church festivals associated with it. Chester, on the other hand, is particularly interested in these signs. The fundamental difference is that the Life's interest in signification is exegetical, Chester's dramatic. The Life looks at the church year and at the biblical text as fields of significance. It, like Mirk's Festial, is engaged in the popular didactic version of the eliciting of significance which Augustine discussed in the De Doctrina Christiana. Chester is not generally interested in this exegesis but is dramatizing the historical signs given by God to men. Characters and details are readily found to be significant by the Life. Thus, the disciples on the road to Emmaus "moun signifie/Suche as willeful pouert han" (7617-8). Chester does not moralize its historical characters thus. Neither is it interested in the significance of details like the tongues of fire at Pentecost. This is a standard exegetical interest present in the Life's "Pentecost" section. (60) The use of this kind of interpretation for the Magi's gifts, and the candle at the "Purification" stands out as unusual in the cycle. Nor is Chester concerned with the numerological significances which the exegete can, and

(60) Compare Summa Theologiae, Ia, 43, 8; p.235.

according to Augustine must (61) bring out, nor with the etymological significance of names given to Christ. (62) In addition, Chester's didacticism is geared towards faith rather than morals and, as a result, it tends to avoid the moral significance which many of the biblical characters' actions are seen to have by popular didactic works such as the Life, the Festial and, indeed, the other cycles. Mirk, for example, writes of Mary's receiving an unnecessary purification:

The fourth skylle was to ensampull to all cristen woymen þat þay schuld come to þe chyrche aftyr hor burth, and þonke God heghly þat had saued hom hole and sonde yn hor trauayle. (63)

Similarly, the Life says that Christ obeyed the law of purification to show "ensaumpul of mekenysse" (2272) and received baptism "for-to shewe all rightwysnes" (2312). Chester rarely presents this moral signification though it does, occasionally, use it. (64). It is much more frequent in the didactic treatises, and the other cycles.

Because Chester is a dramatic text and not a treatise, its method of organizing material which it shares with a treatise such as the Life is quite different. For example, the Life gives five signs which proved Mary's virginity: per prophetam, that is, by the Old Testament prophecies of her; per figuram, by the typological prefigurations of her; per custodiam, by

(61) De Doc. Christ., p.50.

(62) See, for example, the Stanzaic Life of Christ, 1325-8.

(63) Mirk, Festial, p.52, 16-18.

(64) For example, IX, 21-4 and XV, 139-40.

the marriage to Joseph who could bear witness to her and was incapable of sullyng her; "by expresse experiment," that is, by Salome's investigation; and by the nativity miracles (Life, 725-88). If one includes the H MS version of play V, which contains both the prophecy and the type which prove Mary's virginity, (65) then Chester contains all five different kinds of sign, but it is not interested in classifying them as such. It lets them work dramatically, cumulatively, as the history unfolds. With those larger differences of approach in mind, we can appreciate more acutely the reasons for Chester's particular borrowings from the Life.

I would agree with Wilson in rejecting the suggestion that Chester's Abraham and Melchysedeck, and Balaam stories were influenced by the Life. (66) In the former episode, too much material is present in Chester and absent from the Life; in the latter, too much detail in the Life is absent from Chester, which could have easily used the biblical account in Numbers xx-xxiv. There are no verbal parallels in either episode. At the same time, however, both episodes are unique to Chester among the mystery cycles and both appear in a work which Chester did use as a source at points. In addition, the typological function of Melchysedeck is brought out in both works, though with greater elaboration in Chester. It strikes me as quite

(65) MS. H V, 297-328.

(66) Wilson, p.413. Foster suggested this as a possibility, p.xlii.

possible that the decision to include these episodes was influenced by their presence in a local and influential text. Foster writes that the Life "is a compilation made at Chester." (67) It seems likely that those responsible for deciding what action should be dramatized would pay attention to the structure of biblical history as set out already in material which was readily available and had the additional attraction of contributing to the local cultural identity. This would not necessarily demand the direct or close use of that material in the dramatic writing itself.

The Death of Herod and of his son, and the fall of the Idols when the Holy Family escape to Egypt may also owe their inclusion to the influence of the Life. In every case, however, Chester's account differs from that of the Life. There is no verbal echo or similarity of detail in the death of Herod's son (Life, 3449-68). The Life focuses upon the stench of Herod's illness and the story of how other people reacted to his likely death (Life, 3525-88), whereas Chester emphasizes decomposition and Herod's own reaction. The fall of the Idols appears in Chester without the overt significance which the Life gives it: "In tokenyng pat he was heuen king" (3324). (68) But these episodes are all in the Life and, with the exception of Herod's own death, are unique to Chester. And although the Ludus Coventriae

(67) Foster, p.ix.

(68) This differs from the usual pattern of Chester's borrowing where, if anything, the vocabulary of signification is added to the Life.

also dramatizes the death of Herod, its conception of the event, and the morality treatment of its significance is in quite a different tradition from Chester's.

In each case, the episode makes a contribution to Chester's development of sign. (69) We can be confident that the authors were influenced by the episodes' presence in the Life to include them in the cycle, but that they treated them independently, working them towards the cycle's main interests. The man who included the fall of the Idols may have omitted to give the significance explicitly, as the Life did, but he hardly needed to give it. The fall is preceded by the scene in which Herod, with various references to his false God Mahound, complains that his rule is threatened, and plans the Massacre of the Innocents. The fall of the Idols cannot but signify the omnipotence of the true God, and portend the downfall of those who place trust in false gods. This downfall occurs in the next episode with Herod's, and his son's, death. The fall of the Idols functions in a similar way to Christ's disappearance in play XIII. It is a central action the significance of which seems to bind together the flanking episodes by symbolizing the condition of those who oppose God.

We have, then, a series of episodes the inclusion of which was probably suggested by their presence in a

(69) The contribution of the Herod episodes will be examined in ch. V.

text considered important in Chester. In some cases, such as the Melchysedeck and Idols stories, the episodes already had a significatory quality in the source; in others, such as the death of Herod and of Herod's son, this aspect was the creation of the author without guidance from the source. In all cases the material contributes to the cycle's development of sign. (70)

Whether Chester took the nativity episode of the weeping and rejoicing people from the Stanzaic Life of Christ or from the Legenda Aurea direct, it was a choice of material which added to the cycle's significatory content. Mary asks "what may this signifeye?" (VI, 429) and the Angel replies "the tokeninge I shall thee lere" (438). The significant quality of the action is also represented in the Life's vocabulary: "signifiet" (361) and "expovnet" (362). If the Chester author was aware of the Life's account, then we have evidence of his normalizing the vocabulary of signification to the cycle's customary usage where 'sign' and 'token' are the preferred terms.

Chester's dramatization of the two midwives (VI, 469-563) is probably based on the Life's narration (445-80), but Chester has made several changes. Firstly, Chester makes it clear what it was that brought Tebell to believe in Mary's virginity. The Legenda Aurea reads "Zebel igitur considerans et

(70) The contribution of the Balaam story will be examined in chapter IV.

inquirens et ipsam inveniens exclamavit virginem peperisse." The Life introduces the idea of sign into the episode: "Tebel by signe sothlie con se/that Mary was a clene may" (457-8). Chester follows up the hint and interprets the "signe" to be the miraculous sign of the painless birth. The author thereby follows the cycle's characteristic understanding of sign as miraculous action:

I dare well saye, forsooth iwys,
that cleane mayden this woman ys,
for shee hath borne a chyld with blys;
soe wiste I never none. (529-32)

Secondly, Chester simplifies the disagreement of the midwives into juxtaposed single speeches (525-39). This is in keeping with the usual pairing of contrastive responses to sign in the cycle. Thirdly, and most importantly, Chester powerfully dramatizes the two subsequent signs, the withering and curing of Salome's hand, and also concentrates on Salome's being brought to belief by them. The Life is simply interested in the fact that miracles took place (469-80); Chester sees them in relation to belief. It thus extends the nexus of sign and belief which is so frequent in the drama. The Chester author also stresses that these signs have shown God's power (545, 553) - another recurrent interest in the cycle, and presents them as salvific intimations of the redemption (552-5 and 560-3). The author has gone to the Life for an exciting example of a nativity sign, and he has proceeded to clarify its signficatory nature and to extend it. He has always kept the cycle's general thematic interests and

dramatic style in mind.

The story of Octavianus and the Sibyl, culminating in the vision of the Ara Caeli, is an area in which influence from the Life has been suspected but differences between the texts noted. (71) Ruth Keane, having set out the differences between the two versions, writes: "They seem in fact to be independent presentations of a shared legend." (72) I do not intend to enumerate once more the differences of detail that there are, except to say that, in the case of the vision itself, it seems hard to believe that the author would have changed the vision if he had known the description of it in the Life, but it seems harder to believe that he could not have been aware of the Life since it is fully used elsewhere in the play, and there is actually a verbal echo linking the description of the vision by Octavianus in Chester to the corresponding description in the Life. (73) It is my opinion that the author did change the Life's description of Octavianus's vision in order to provide a comprehensive sign which included the mother and child, the promise of future redemption constituted by the cross in the child's head, and the nativity sign of the star. He did this as part of a larger development of the story in terms of sign, for, if there is any

(71) Foster, p.xxxv; Wilson, pp.428-9.

(72) Keane, "The Theme of Kingship in The Chester Cycle," p.81.

(73) Life, 617 parallels Chester, VI, 653. Wilson notes the verbal echo. The Chester account seems to owe as much to the Life's account of the star as the Magi saw it (Life 1755-60).

notable difference between the two accounts, it is Chester's presentation of the story as a search for, and receiving of sign. Octavianus seeks the signs of the true reign:

Sybbyll, I praye thee speciallye
by signe thow would me certyfy
what tyme that lord soe royallye
to raigne hee shal beginne. (353-6)

The Sibyl replies "Syr, I shall tell you witterlye/his signes when I see verelye" (357-8). When Octavianus sees the sign of Christ, he properly recognizes, as other men do from God's signs, that it proves Christ to be omnipotent: "Sycker yt may non other bee/but this childe is prince of postye" (671-2). The Sibyl extends this interpretation of what she calls Christ's "tokeninge" (678). Also, when referring to the Church of the Ara Caeli, the Expositor offers it to us as a "verey signe" that the events just dramatized actually took place. In the Life, the Church's role as a contemporary sign is not brought out (637-44). So, if Chester has indeed used the Life in its presentation of this story, it has vastly developed what it found, in the direction of signification. There were no explicit directions in the Life to guide the author towards developing the episode in terms of sign except that it is cited as a nativity miracle. The treatment of this material in ways so suitable to the cycle's wider interests is the Chester author's own work.

The legend of the Salvatio Romae which the Chester Expositor narrates at VI, 572-635 is clearly based upon the account at 481-564 of the Stanzaic Life

of Christ. It alters the order of some of the material but sometimes echoes the Life closely. (74) It simplifies the Life's version, omitting its discussion of the eternal flame (538-41) and of what a "legion" is (533-6). Chester's interest in idolatry and evil leads it to change the idea that Romans consulted the builder about the life of the image (542-5) to the builder consulting the devil about this (VI, 620-7). Chester has included this material because it is one of the nativity miracles which function as signs of the child's grandeur. It signifies the coming of the true God before whom all idols fall, and it signifies the divine imperium which is now to supersede the Roman. Once again, therefore, the cycle's interest in sign can be seen to explain a borrowing.

Chester omits two of the Life's miracles attendant upon the birth: the well of oil (Life, 565-80) and the golden image of Romulus (Life, 645-84). The former miracle involves the Sibyl in that she had prophesied it as an indication that Christ was born. This may have contributed to its omission from the Expositor's narrative of nativity miracles. The Chester author may have felt that this diverted attention from the main sign which the Sibyl announced, but apart from this I can see no very good explanation of why it should have been omitted. The reason for Chester's omission of Romulus's image is clear: it essentially duplicates the

(74) For example, Life, 501-4 parallels Chester, VI, 588-93. Foster gives parallel texts of this legend, pp.xxxi-xxxiv.

miracle of the Salvatio Romae and has the additional disadvantage of making the pagan Romulus appear to be a true prophet.

Chester does adopt a further two nativity miracles, and does so for the, by now, obvious reason that they function as signs of Christ's divine grandeur. In each case, however, the author avoids the further specifically symbolic meaning which the events have. He includes them as miraculous signs but does not wish to analyze them further in an exegetical fashion. Thus the trinitarian significance of the three suns which were seen to unite (Chester, VI, 636-9) is not brought out. It would have been easy in the narrative mode which Chester has adopted here to follow the clearly and briefly expressed significance set out in the Life (585-92). The Life signals its meaningfulness: "Quich sight may wel signifye..." (585). This omission is actually in keeping with Chester's general reluctance to analyze its miracles: opportunities for exegesis of even the clearest and most easily accomplished kind are set aside for the simpler, more theophanous signification of pure miracle. Chester's particular reluctance to engage in moral signification probably lies behind its merely noting the miracle that ox and ass, brute beasts that they were, "honored Christe in theyr intent" (641). The Life's moral development of this - "wonder is then but men of witt/shulden bysy be his birth to her" (690-1) - is not found suitable.

Foster considered that the Life was the source for Chester VIII's episodes of the Magi watching on Mt Victorial, seeing the star and travelling to Judaea. The close parallel of detail in the works' descriptions of the Magi's swift dromedaries encourages this view. (75) There are, however, differences of detail. Wilson noted that the description of the star in the Life is different from that seen by the Magi in Chester. (76) Although I felt that the difference in the two works' accounts of the Ara Caeli could be explained as a desire in Chester for a comprehensive sign, I cannot see, here, why the cross which is seen in the child's head by the Magi in the Life should be deliberately unmentioned in Chester if the text was in front of the author. My explanation would be that the influence of the Life on Chester here was of a similar kind to that exercised in the Abraham and Melchysedeck story. The presence of the material in the Life encouraged its inclusion in Chester but little more. Although some details stuck in the mind of the dramatist others were less vivid. The site at which the star was seen, and the speed of the dromedaries were retained but the author fashioned the shape of the star in terms of the immediate action - the Magi were searching for a mother and child, and that is what appeared to them. Although

(75) Foster, pp.xl-xli. The parallel lines are Life, 1777-80 and Chester, VIII, 101-4.

(76) Wilson, p.422. The Life's star is shaped like a beautiful child with a cross in his head; the Chester Magi see a mother and child. (Life, 1755-60; Chester, VIII, 69-80).

such specific explanations are speculative, my general point about the relationship between the texts seems correct. Only the bare outline of the story is shared, for the Chester author has completely envisaged the scene, as the story of Octavianus was envisaged, as a search for and receiving of sign. He has done so without guidance from the Life. When the Magi are hoping and praying for evidence that Balaam's prophecy has been fulfilled they seek "some tokeninge" (5), "some signe" (52), and remember that the prophecy says "A starre should ryse tokninge of blys" (11). When it does appear, it is considered a "vereye tokeninge" (80) which proves the fulfilment of prophecy - a function which the nativity signs regularly perform. The usual concomitant of the presence of sign, that is, emphasis on the responses of men to the sign, is a further addition which Chester makes. Prudence leads the Magi to hesitate when the star first appears; this does not suggest unbelief but rather shows a trust in God to confirm the belief and hopes they already have:

Yea, lest this bee some fantasye
yett praye we all speciallye;
for if hee bee borne verelye
more sygnes he will us shewe. (85-88)

The Life is not interested in such shades of response; it takes the trouble to indicate that they did not doubt "for thai bileueden fully" (1791).

Of the Magi's trip to Jerusalem and confrontation of Herod, Wilson writes: "The only material in this section definitely assignable to the Stanzaic Life is the detail that when the Wise Men reached Jerusalem,

the star disappears." (77) The Chester author may well have taken this detail from the Life but he certainly did not use it in the way the Life's explanation of the disappearance would authorize. In Chester it is not stated why the star disappeared, nor is it exactly clear whether it disappeared because it came into Herod's area of control or because the Magi did. First King says, "But when we came to your land here/then vanished it away" (219-20). The cycle's general interest in presenting evil characters as blinded to the truth suggests that the sign of the true King has disappeared from the ken of a false king. The disappearance is symbolic of Herod's blindness, just as Christ's disappearance in XIII symbolizes that of the Jews. What the dramatist could not have taken up was the lengthy explanation in the Life (1909-56), an explanation which ran quite counter to Chester's distinction between good and evil, and to its view of sign. It would have been quite inappropriate to Chester's favourable view of the Magi to suggest, as the Life does, that they lost the help of the star because they sought earthly guidance from Herod. The star disappears before the Chester Magi meet Herod's messenger. Even more unsuitable was the Life's distinction between the Magi who were possessed of only one prophecy and the Jews who, being God's people, knew of his goodness through many prophecies. Chester does not wish to adopt such a distinction because it also

(77) loc. cit.

lowers the status of sign in relation to prophecy. In the Life, the Magi needed the star because

signes verrayly shewede bene
to sich as knowen not God expresse,
that they moun leue thyng that þai
sene. (1942-4)

The chosen people, on the other hand, have prophecy, and the star disappeared to ensure that the kings could get instruction in prophecy, as well as sign. This explanation is additionally unsuitable in Chester because, as we saw in our discussion of linguistic signs, the prophecies are used in play VIII as signs. Therefore, any explanations are inappropriate which lower the status of the Magi in comparison with Herod, sign in comparison with prophecy, or which assert a distinction between sign and prophecy when Chester wishes to let them function in a similar way. The Chester treatment of this episode displays that 'creativity of restraint' which we noted in its use of the Bible as a source.

It is likely that Chester went to the Life for its account of Simeon brought to belief in the virgin birth by a miracle. The episode is unique to Chester among the cycles and the play follows the outline of the story in the Life though it changes some details. (78) The obvious attraction of the episode is that it provides yet another miraculous sign, which, in this case, proves Christ's divinity by proving the virgin

(78) Stanzaic Life of Christ, 2741-2812; Chester XI, 1-118. This play will be discussed more thoroughly in chapter IV.

birth, the main nativity attestation of his nature. Care has again been exercised in the alterations of the source. Anna Vidua has been introduced by the Chester author and the recurrent juxtaposition of contrasted response to sign is thereby created. The Life stresses that it was the fairness of the writing which revealed its supernatural origin to Simeon (2777-80 and 2793-6). Chester seems to stress the emphatic nature of the substituted phrases, rather than just their beauty, by specifying that the first change of text was into red letters and the second from red to gold. The manuscript conventions of emphasizing in red and decorating with gold seem to be involved here rather than a general appreciation of beauty in the writing. But in any case, Chester's main interest is in the miraculous change of 'a good woman' to 'a virgin'. This change is miraculous enough for Simeon; the audience has seen it taking place, and an interest in the fairness of the script would divert attention from the central issue: that the scriptural text has been restored in a miraculously significant way. Interestingly, the Chester author has not here introduced explicit signficatory terms as has happened on so many other occasions. There is no doubt that the episode is being used for the sign it dramatizes and the response that sign receives, but the words 'sign' or 'token' nowhere appear. This might reflect different authorship but, even with Chester's tendency to be explicit about signs, there are many places throughout the cycle where signs are central but

not explicitly named. The fact that most of the other borrowings from the Life have added explicitness as they have developed sign is not really strong enough evidence for distinct authorship here.

The major part of play XVII which deals with the Harrowing of Hell has long been considered a borrowing from the Life (79). Wilson writes that it "seems to require no source but the Stanzaic Life. It follows the outline of the story with great exactitude, and even includes a few verbal parallels." (80) I think that this judgment is probably correct and such borrowing therefore makes the variations between the accounts more significant. The Chester author has added some speeches for their climactic force. Michael and Satan thus have opposing speeches at the time the souls are taken out: the power of God and defeat of the Devil are thus fixed in the verbal texture of the play as in its action (213-228). A further addition is Adam's joyful invitation to the ransomed souls to sing, and this provides the liturgical climax to the episode. (273-6).

There are other additions which accentuate sign in the play. In Adam's recognition that the light "ys a signe" we see Chester's characteristic explicitness about such things though it would appear to have been a popular explicitness about this, as the York/Towneley play also has it. Chester also adds the explicit reference to John the Baptist's lamb as a "tokeninge"

(79) Foster, p.xli.

(80) Wilson, p.414.

("token" MS. H) in line 67. Sign is again picked out by the author when he indicates that the Good Thief was saved through recognizing signs at the Passion. What these signs are is not explained.

When I see synnys full verey
 [ARH signes, B sines]
that hee was Goddes Sonne, sooth to saye,
to him devoutely I did praye. (261-3)

Neither the Legenda Aurea nor the Life make this point although other Latin versions do make it clear that it was the signs and wonders seen in Creation at the time of the Passion that convinced the thief. (81) This is probably assumed by the Chester author. Nicodemus has a climactic speech in XVIA when he asserts that these natural disruptions have been signs that Christ is God's Son (XVIA, 469-71). It is possible, therefore, that the inclusion of this detail argues Chester's use of a Latin version, other than in the Legenda Aurea, alongside the Stanzaic Life of Christ, but it is just the kind of statement which the Chester author could arrive at independently if he considered the cycle's recurring interest in sign, and was aware of Nicodemus's speech in the previous play.

In two places David is given a speech which emphasizes the significatory character of the scene he is beholding. He is added at 89-96 to the series of Patriarch's and Prophets who are interpreting what the light flooding Hell signifies: "I hope that tyme nowe comen ys/delyvered to be of languor." When Christ is

(81) See M. R. James, trans., The Apocryphal New Testament (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1924).

outside the gates about to burst into Hell, David recognizes that this is a sight which proves the fulfilment of his prophecy. In other words, it is a sign, and he emphasizes the patent evidence which the scene offers to our eyes:

I, kinge Davyd, nowe well may saye
my prophecye fulfilled is, in faye,
as nowe shewes in sight verey,
and soothly here ys seene. (185-8)

In the corresponding lines in the Life (8009-20), much more space is given to the terms of the prophecy and little to the sense that the scene is a sign of its fulfilment. To be fair to the Life however, it does not really present the action of the Harrowing, in general, as any less significatory than Chester does. The devils ask who it is who comes with such a mixture of grimness and grace, "Apertely preuyng his pouste" (7818) and they see that Satan's joy has turned to misery "as showes in sight apertely" (7840). This is very much Chester's emphasis also. When asked who the King of Bliss is, David replies that there is no one like him "as ys soothly seene by thys" (202). I do not think that Chester adopted the story of the Harrowing because of any intrinsic value it had for the pattern of signification. Having decided to adopt it, however, it added to and made more explicit its sign elements, and retained its general tendency to present the actions of Christ as signs of fulfilled prophecy or defeated Satanic power and, in one case, it altered the emphasis in the Life in order to accentuate this idea.

The last area where influence from the Life seems

highly probable is Chester's account of the Ascension (XX, 104ff - 152). There is verbal evidence of Chester's use of the Life. (82) At the same time Chester has changed the Life, and the Life changed the Legenda Aurea, in the ordering of the reasons why Christ retained the blood of his wounds on his body. The following is the order in the Latin with the position given to the detail in the English works: (83)

1. ut fidem resurrectionis adstruat; Life, 1; Chester, 2.
2. ut pro hominibus supplicando eas patri repraesentat; Life, 2; Chester, 3.
3. ut boni, quam misericorditer sint redempti, videant; Life, 3; Chester, 4.
4. ut reprobi, quam juste sint damnati, recognoscant; Life, 5; Chester, 5.
5. ut perpetuae victoriae suae certum triumphum deferat; Life, 4; Chester, 1.

Chester has opened with the fact that Christ has triumphed (125-8); has then noted the reason which shows how the triumph was achieved, namely, that the blood is evidence of the Resurrection (133-6); it has much abbreviated the point that the blood will be presented to God (137-8), and has done so in order to emphasize the juxtaposed responses of the good and evil men seeing the blood (139-44 and 145-8). This juxtaposition, so recurrent in Chester, is the key change to the order. The passage has an intrinsic value to Chester because it presents the blood as a sign which men will behold at the Last Judgment and

(82) Compare Life, 8977-88 with Chester XX, 105-117 or Life, 8993-6 with Chester, XX, 121-4. Wilson noted that these parallels in Chester's translation "seem to mark it definitely as derived from the poem" (p.418).

(83) Stanzaic Life of Christ, 9001-40; Chester, XX.

understand:

good men that on yearth be lent
shall knowe appertlye
howe gratuslye that I them bought (139-41)
.....
...the wycked may eychone
knowe and see all one
howe worthelye they [forgone]
that blysse that lasteth aye. (145-8).

It also notes that the blood bears witness to the Passion and Resurrection - it is a sign of Christ's struggle and victory (133). So, within the meaning given to Christ's appearance, there is material attractive to a development of sign and men's responses to sign. But the whole section must also have appealed to the author for this reason. It is a major example of signification of precisely that kind which Chester is developing in the plays after the Resurrection. The cycle accentuates Christ's body as itself a sign; it presents men and women coming to understand its significance. The Ascension, as the author found it in the Life, is just like this. It focuses upon the appearance of Christ; angels discuss the meaning of that appearance. The difference is that Chester has Christ act as his own Expositor, as he has done since play XIII, while the Life narrator himself explains the significance. Since I will be looking later at the pattern of sign following the Passion, I will restrict these remarks to noting that the whole episode is essentially signficatory in the source and, within the significance given for Christ's blood, there is further scope for developing sign. It is clear that the Chester author of this play has been drawn to the material for

its significatory value. We saw also, in the first part of this chapter, that the cycle chose not to dramatize the Transfiguration. We can see now that the decision to dramatize the Ascension is part of the same conception of Christ's signs. The Ascension is not a momentary theophany; it is the climactic sign in a series. That is fully brought out by the Chester author who adds to his source the responses of the disciples observing and believing. Once again the typical Cestrian interest in human response to sign has been shown by an author.

PHILIPPUS

For knowe we mone by sygne vereye
that hee ys Godes Sonne, sooth to saye.
Therefore yt ys good we goe to praye
as he commanded here.

JOHANNES

Nowe mon we leeve yt no leasinge,
for both by syght and handlinge,
speakinge, eatinge and drinkinge
hee prooves his deitee.

JACOBUS MAJOR

Yea, also by his uppsteyinge
hee seemes fully heaven-kinge. (173-82)

The Chester cycle is not related to the Life in any single way. Sometimes the Life has merely suggested inclusion of an episode; sometimes there are clear passages of borrowing; there can be verbal echoes, but equally they may appear in passages with divergent details. Sometimes details are changed, or added, or re-ordered or omitted in ways which suggest direct authorial decision to diverge from the Life; sometimes details are included or preferred to those of the Life

in a way which suggests critical use of the Legenda Aurea along with the Life. Sometimes the Life has suggested the outline of an episode with some details in it, but does not seem to have been used in the dramatisation itself. Sometimes it is difficult to see why a particular detail in the Life has been omitted, but in general it is very clear what principle has guided inclusion, alteration or omission of material. That principle is that the material should contribute to the development of signification in Chester. Chester goes to the Life for episodes which either possess signs and have a signficatory element in the way they generate meaning, or which could readily be made to fit a pattern of signification. The authors have generally made sign more explicit; have made it more dramatically central, abstracting it from the argumentative treatise structure of the Life; have developed it in terms of the human search for signs and human responses to them. It is also clear that borrowings have been adopted in a way which fits them not just into the cycle's general pattern but into the sign pattern of that part of the cycle they are entering. As impressive as the sense of what to include is the authors' sensitivity to what is best left out.

It may well be, though I have not assumed it, that much of the borrowing from the Life was the work of one man adding passages to existing plays. The records do not offer the evidence to refute this. I think it just as likely that the Life was always considered an

important and influential text in Chester and that this helped to direct the content and shape of certain parts of the cycle. There was no compulsion to use it when creating, but it could offer ideas on what episodes to include and, if an author was considering the addition of sign material, he might automatically think of that contained in the Life.

CHAPTER 111

SIGN AND THE OTHER MYSTERY CYCLES

In this chapter, I have generally adopted the approach of comparing the cycles individually with Chester. I have not organized the chapter around topics, because the topics which emerge from an analysis of one cycle in relation to Chester are not always relevant to the other cycles, and because such an organisation would not permit me to look as closely as I would wish at the styles of writing in particular cases. Because Towneley offers rather less to a study of sign than the other cycles do, I have included in the Towneley section points which relate to both York and Towneley either because of the cycles' textual overlap, or because it is helpful to see Towneley in the perspective provided by York.

York

As the flood waters flow round the Ark, the following exchange takes place between Noah and his daughters. It is a dialogue which should help us to appreciate the difference between York's interest in signification and Chester's.

SECOND DAUGHTER

Fadir, what may þis meruaylle mene?
Wher-to made god medilerth and man?

FIRST DAUGHTER

So selcouthe sight was never non seene,
Sen firste þat god þis worlde began.

NOE

Wendes and spers youre dores be-dene!
For bettyr counsell none I can.
þis sorowe is sente for synne...
(IX, 157-63).

Here we have a wondrous and obviously significant sight whose meaning is being sought by an internal audience. To this extent there is a parallel with the signs offered so frequently in Chester. Next, the meaning of the event is brought out, as it might also be in Chester by the perceiver recognizing the event as a sign and appreciating that it has a particular function such as, in Chester, proving Christ's birth or his identity as Son of God. In having the essential elements of (a) a source of significance (b) perceiver(s) of this source and (c) the eliciting of the significance, York seems to be identical with Chester. But there are important differences. The flood has not apparently been provided as a sign but as an act of vengeance (IX,37). The significance which it yields is of a moral, not a fideistic, kind: it concerns sin primarily, not belief. Thirdly, there is no internal contrast of response to the event. Two people ask its meaning; the third gives it. The typical Cestrian episode involves the provision of a sign to which two people react in opposite ways, one believing, and instructing us in the point of belief as he or she achieves it, the other refusing to believe that the sign is a sign, or rejecting the significance claimed for it, or resenting

and lamenting that significance. (1) One notes, therefore, that the point of the York questioning is to yield the moral meaning, whereas in Chester the point of a sign episode is more frequently the depiction of contrastive reactions to sign. The fideistic meaning will arise, certainly, but it is equally important didactically that the episode demonstrate the poles of spiritual response: the character who sees with insight and the one who does not. If we now look at the relationship of the signification to the dramatic action a further difference emerges. When Noah is asked the meaning of the flood there is a moment of cleverly arranged dramatic action, for the author gives the impression that the dire practical necessities of the event are bearing upon Noah too urgently to permit him to reply immediately to the request. He orders them to go and shut the doors; then he tells them why the flood has been sent. It is not that the action intrudes on the interpretation, but that the action and the exposition of its meaning are carefully blended to avoid a crude sermonising disjunction between story and meaning. Richard Collier, who has written interestingly on the expository style of York, concludes: "...the homiletic motive of the plays has to a great extent, been integrated with the dramatic action..." (2) If we think of the many Chester episodes in which sources of

(1) The range of such responses to sign will be set out in ch. V.

(2) Richard J. Collier, Poetry and Drama in the York Corpus Christi Play (Hamden: Archon, 1978), p.64.

significance are perceived by characters, are responded to and explained or rejected, we must come to the conclusion that, in Chester, the significatory process when it is being dramatized is not being carefully blended with the action, it is the action. If York elicits meaning from its action, Chester uses the provision of meaning with its attendant character responses as the action it wishes to dramatize. York may use signification of meaning as a didactic device skilfully deployed in the action, but Chester is interested in the significatory process as a whole, that is, including the reactions that men and women make to signs. This is why one senses a certain obsessive self-consciousness about Chester and also, I suspect, why it is the York cycle that has been so frequently preferred for performance. York does what we expect a medieval drama to do, i.e., teach, and it does it without forfeiting dramatic interest. Chester, on the other hand, teaches but does so by showing us characters learning or failing to learn. A direct involvement of the audience with the play is therefore not so obvious when Chester is read as it is when York is read.

One of the differences between the Noah episode and sign episodes in Chester was that the Flood was not actually provided as a sign. This is true, but the fundamental difference in interest which we noted above still holds good where events in York have been provided as signs to men. In keeping with its intention

to draw moral meaning from historical events York has Christ and Mary explain that they participate in certain actions to offer moral examples to men. These actions are moral signa data therefore.

Joseph asks Mary why she went to purification when there was no need. One of her explanations is that it provided "a sample of mekenesse" (XLI, 221). Later, John the Baptist similarly asks Christ why he should participate in an unnecessary baptism. Christ replies:

Mankynde may nozt vn-baptymde go
to endless blys.
And sithen my selffe haue taken mankynde
For men schall me þer myrroure make,
I haue my doying in ther mynde,
And also I do þe baptyme take.
I will for-thy
My selfe be baptiste, for ther sake,
full oppynly.

(XXI, 90-8)

Here Christ is speaking in the expository "voice" which Collier notes moves from character to character. (3) The action is having its general significance elicited for us, and one of the explanations shows it to have been a deliberate sign offered for our instruction. It should be noted that in both these examples the explanation which renders the action a signum datum is only one of the different explanations given. This is a good indication of the priority which the cycle gives to the eliciting of meaning over the provision of signs as Chester would understand it. York, however, comes close to Chester here; its phrase "full oppynly" (98) has its Cestrian equivalent in the characteristic

(3) Collier, p.65.

adverb associated with signs: "apertly." But the York concern is with exposition, not with reactions to sign. John's role as the observer of sign is to provide the impetus for Christ's explanation. His wondering is of little didactic value in its own right, and there is no other perceiver whose reactions are being played off against his. Another example of this treatment of signa data can be found at the close of the Temptation where the angel provides the impetus for exposition: "A! mercy lorde, what may þis mene,/Me merueyles þat ge thole þis tene" (XXII, 181-2) and Christ replies, this time as the only explanation, "For whan þe fende schall folke see...þare myrroure may þei make of me" (193 and 195). Later, when he washes the disciples' feet, Christ explains that he does so in order that they will take example from him to be meek (XXVII, 65-8). The exemplary nature of Christ's actions is summed up in the play of The Judgement Day where God says of his Son "Sethen in erthe þan gone he dwelle/Ensaumpill he gave þame hevene to wyne" (XLVIII, 37-8). York therefore draws significance from Christ's and Mary's actions and further states that the actions took place to provide this significance but, lacking an attention to contrastive, or even didactically instructive, reactions to sign, the York cycle shows that its interest is in the exposition of meaning not the signifiatory process itself.

This preference is evident also in York's use of sign terminology. York can happily use a range of terms

relating to signification and not discriminate in its use according to the nature of the sign or the kind of meaning it is yielding. Thus the word "ensaumpill" can be used for the exemplary actions which Christ and Mary deliberately provide as moral signs, but also for the proof Christ gives of his corporeal resurrection by eating the honey and fish (XLII, 62). It can be used for the moral significance which a scene has rather than just for an exemplary action within the scene. Thus Christ says that in the episode of the "Woman Taken in Adultery,"

Ensample schall be sene,
Whoso schall othir blame,
Loke firste þam-self be clene.
(XXIV, 84-6)

York can use the word "sign" precisely as Chester would use it - to refer to a theophanous miracle (XXIV, 111-2 and 188-91) - but it can use the word quite incidentally, without any didactic weight and without its uses forming a didactic pattern. The first three examples of sign vocabulary in York are of this kind and one is certainly not encouraged to develop an attention to the signficatory process by this deployment of its terms. The sun and moon are created as signs (II, 60 following Genesis i.14); God has set his sign on Adam and Eve more than on any other creation (III, 81 presumably expressing Genesis i.26-27) and thirdly, a "token" is set upon Cain (VII, 131 following Genesis iv.15). Chester avoids the first and third examples, where the Vulgate has signum and refrains from expressing the exemplarist relationship

between Man and his Creator in terms of sign, preferring "to our likenesse" (II, 82) as an expression of "ad imaginem suam." York, of course, is not interested in the significatory process per se and therefore does not feel the need to be careful about where it uses significatory vocabulary. In these examples we see that York can follow the biblically authorized uses of "sign" whereas Chester needs to eschew them. One can find this incidental usage elsewhere in York. Lamech, for example, knew that the world would be drowned "By sartheyne signes he couthe wele see" (IX, 35). The use of the word here has no didactic implications. The line could never have appeared in Chester unless the author was wanting to say something about Lamech's spiritual insight.

The difference between York and Chester in their use of signification means that we cannot expect the terminology of sign to create in York the kind of effects it can permit in Chester. In chapter V we will be looking at the way in which the Chester dramatists can use the tightly controlled pattern of sign vocabulary to reveal the pretensions of evil characters in their misuse of such terms. Throughout the Chester cycle, our understanding of what a true sign is becomes more acute; our alertness to false signs grows accordingly. We have already seen that the author could impart a dark irony to Judas's kiss because he had Judas describe it as a "verey signe" (XIV, 411). This phrase recalled the more frequent true signs of

Christ's Ministry. The traitorous identification of Christ to his attackers therefore became a parody of the gracious revelation of himself by Christ to potential believers. York does not have a developed context of theophanous sign to work with, but equally it does not have a previously controlled use of the word "token" to give to it a suggestiveness or associative power when used of Judas's kiss (XXVI, 253; XXVIII, 178 and 233). The word is used in the cycle but not in a way that creates verbal echoes. (4)

The main point which I have made about York's preference for eliciting meaning over studying the signficatory process has direct bearing upon the topic of linguistic signification. We saw that even in Chester with its persistent self-conscious concern with the process of signification it was not always easy to see whether or not an author had an interest in linguistic signs. It was not enough merely to show that texts or words had meanings which expositor-figures brought out. That certainly fell within the tradition of regarding linguistic phenomena as signficative, but it did not show that the authors were consciously fore-grounding the linguistic phenomena as signs. We did find good grounds for proposing that this is how

(4) Interestingly, the Ludus Coventriae is able to impart irony to Judas's kiss. The parodic force comes from the nature of the act which is a perversion of the many good and spiritual kisses which have taken place in the cycle. See Richard J. Daniels, "A Study of the Formal Literary Unity of the N-Town Mystery Cycle," Dissertation Abstracts, 33 (1972-3), 6304A-05A (Ohio State).

Chester regards such phenomena: its presentation of texts and words as probative and theophanous paralleled its treatment of non-linguistic signs such as the miracles; its concentration on the responses of men and women to linguistic phenomena also found a parallel in episodes of non-linguistic sign; it brought the two kinds of sign structurally together in the ministry plays and had Christ associate them explicitly.

York is even closer than Chester to the tradition of exegesis which depended on seeing words, and particularly biblical words, as signs. The nativity section opens with biblical exegesis no less than 144 lines long. In it, Prologue takes a series of statements from the Old and New Testaments, translates and glosses them. The following is an example:

Quoniam in semine tuo benidicentur omnes gentes,
etc.

God hym self sayde this thyng
To Abraham als hym liste,
Of thy sede sall vppe sprynge
Whare in folke sall be bliste.

To prove thes prophettes ordande [wer]
Er als I say vnto olde and yenge.
He moued our myscheues for to merr,
For thus he prayed god for this thyng,
Orate celi desuper

(XII, 33-41)

The speech flows beautifully, it is education made sweet, and it brilliantly merges into the action of the play for, at the end, the Prologue comes to what Saint Luke said of the Assumption and instead of giving the Latin he invites us to see the play: "how þe Aungell saide,/Takes hede, all þat will here" (143-4). As in

the "Noah" dialogue, instruction is carefully worked into the action, and although it is not unobtrusive, neither is it tonally or structurally disruptive. At issue, however, is whether the author writing this is conscious of the texts as linguistic signs or interested in presenting them as such. I do not think that he is. Despite his remark that the prophets were ordained to "prove," the author here does not seem to be using the texts in the probative way they are used in Chester. There, characters are actually confronted and brought to recognition of Christ by the prophetic texts. But here the author is not even using them to prove a case to the audience; he is engaged in recounting the story of our redemption as the Bible has it. Prologue's speech is another lengthy introduction in the sequence which begins with Deus in VIII, continues through Noah in IX and Abraham in X. It is part of the developing instruction which sometimes occurs in moments of exposition within the action but can also appear as a preliminary to the action. This speech is written by an author whose primary interest lies in drawing meanings and providing information, rather than in the signficatory function of texts or words. When the prophecies are briefly rehearsed by the Kings in front of Herod (XVII, 157-78) there is none of the probative intensity of Chester. Certainly the Kings cite them as authorities, as proofs that a child is born to be King and Saviour, but the York account lacks the formality of Chester. These proofs simply rise out

of the conversation. Herod does not command a search for the truth in the biblical texts; there is no formal citation and commentary; there is no formal conclusion such as Herod's Doctor gives in Chester. If anything, Herod's response is dramatically weaker than when the Kings announced the star to him. Now he simply says "Allas! þan am I lorne,/þis waxith ay werre and werre" (178-9). The prophecies do not call out either a declaration of disbelief or of hate-filled acceptance of their authority. Instead the author is interested, as are the authors of the York pre-Passion plays, in the twists and turns evil is capable of. The dramatic force of the scene passes very quickly from the recitation of prophecy to the quiet words of guile that the Counsellor offers to Herod: "My lorde, be ge no-thyng a-bast,/þis bryge shall well to ende be brought..." (181-2). The drama is not geared to the probative force of textual sign but to the shifting relationship of the Kings and Herod.

Later in the cycle, we find the citizens associating Christ's teaching with his acts as evidence of his kingship. The third Citizen notes that Christ raised Lazarus from the dead; the fourth immediately responds by noting that Christ preached against wrong (XXV, 139-42). This suggests that York is regarding Christ's preaching as a revelatory sign. But it is one thing to recognize such an effect in Christ's teaching; it is quite another to dramatize it having this effect. York may recognize that Christ's words and deeds were

evidence of his kingship but it does not dramatize the full signficatory process by which characters are confronted with these two kinds of sign. There is not in York the close structural parallelling of the two kinds of revelatory sign. Christ is the expositor of action not the provider of linguistic signs which exist as the focus of belief and disbelief. To sum up: York, like the other cycles, includes the interpretation of biblical text, but it does not present the texts as signs with the evidential function which they have in Chester. It recognizes that Christ's words could reveal his grandeur in the same way as his deeds do but it does not arrange its ministry plays to bring this out. In neither case are we aware of a questioning, responding internal audience for whom linguistic phenomena provide a fideistic challenge.

Having looked at different kinds of signification I would now like to concentrate on York's treatment of the miraculous. York differs from Chester as the synoptics do from John in the terms used for miracle. Chester and John are primarily interested in the signficatory status and function of miracles. "Sign" is therefore the word they consistently use. York and the synoptics prefer to emphasize the wondrous nature of the event and York's characteristic phrase is "selcouth syght." There are exceptions to this but we have already noted that it is partly York's lack of consistency in the use of sign vocabulary that reveals its lack of interest in the signficatory process. It

is also inconsistent in the kind of signification it presents. When York dramatizes the "Lazarus" episode it follows the Johannine treatment of it as a theophanous sign. If anything, it makes the significatory more explicit. In the Vulgate, Christ says that Lazarus's sickness is "ut glorificetur Filius Dei" (John xi.4); York reads "And goddis sone schall be glorified/By þat sekenesse and signes feere" (XXIV, 111-2). Lazarus offers an interpretation of the episode's significance in two lines which in sentiment and phraseology could almost come from Chester: "By certayne singnes here may men see/How þat þou art goddis sone verray" (XXIV, 190-1). There is no doubt that the York authors are aware of the theophanous signification of Christ's life. Satan comes to recognize Christ from his signs: "Be any syngne þat I see, þis same is goddis sonne" (XXX, 162). God declares at the Transfiguration that Christ has shown himself to be God's Son "by synges sere" (XXIII, 173-4). But whether these references are to miracles or to a wide range of things, such as those recounted by the citizens in XXV, is more difficult to say. One can say categorically that York does not concentrate its attention on a particular kind of signification as Chester did in its ministry. Theophanous miracle is mixed with morally exemplary action. To a certain extent our judgement of how far York was interested in revelatory miracle has been complicated by the loss of material. The records indicate that York did have a play of the Wedding at

Cana. (5) This might have been treated as John directs to provide a sign of Christ's nature. A leaf is lost from the episode of "The Woman taken in Adultery." Unhappily it is from the central passage of action in which Christ convicts the accusers by what he has written on the sand (XXIV, 54ff). We do not know, therefore, whether this miraculous knowledge of Christ's was presented as a revelatory sign. The development of the scene, however, suggests that it was not. A comparison of the Chester woman's response with that of the York woman is helpful:

Chester's Mulier: For godhead full in thee I see
that knowes worke that doe wee.
(XII, 277-8)

York's Mulier: A! lord, ay loued mott þou be!
All erthely folke in feere
Loves hym and his high name,
þat me on þis manere
Hath saued fro synne and schame.
(XXIV, 70-74)

The York woman seems to step out of the historical event after her first line of praise; she becomes a commentator. We must love Christ because he saved her. The miraculous manner of the salvation is left unspecified, and the woman does not come through the sign to a recognition of Christ for what he is though she may respond to the kindness of his act. This is a good example of the way miracles which in Chester would function as signs do not do so in York, even although characters such as God, Satan or the citizens may imply

(5) Alexandra F. Johnston and Margaret Rogerson, eds., York, 2 vols., Records of Early English Drama (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 1979). See Index under "Vintners."

that they do have such a role.

On more than one occasion we can see York by-passing the significatory power of miracle. When Moses sees the Burning Bush he immediately responds "A! mercy, god, mekill is thy myght,/What man may of thy meruayles mene..." (XI, 97-8). On the face of it, this does look like a recognition of God from his signs. But Moses' response may be as much a colloquial ejaculation as a statement that he is recognizing God's might. Indeed, he immediately advances to see "If it be werke of worldly wight" (103). If this were in Chester we would be thinking of the speech as a falling away from true response to sign into doubt, rather as we find in the story of Simeon. But York is not really interested in the nature of Moses' response. His advance to investigate is simply the occasion for God to warn him off the holy ground. He does not regret any moment of doubt or declare any new recognition of what the Bush signifies. Similarly, the story of Zacheus shows York drifting away from sign in a scene which includes potentially significatory material. When Christ heals the blind and lame in XXV the responses of the men cured stress the acts as loving and gracious rather than revelatory, but then Zacheus begins to question and the episode looks as if it will develop towards recognition of Christ through his signs: "What it may mene?/I can nozt say what it may be" (XXV, 396-7). But this questioning about the miracles is simply the initiating factor in a penitential story. The author is

not interested in Zacheus as a discoverer of Christ through signs but in Zacheus as the sinner who responds to a loving welcome by Christ. When Christ calls Zacheus down from the tree he does not allude to the miracles again and reaches immediately the full extent of his recognition of Christ as Lord. There is no explicit suggestion that he has reached the recognition through contemplation of the signs. The true association between the episode of the healing and the episode of Zacheus does not lie in the significatory nature of the miracles, though the transition between the two episodes seemed to promise this. It lies in the loving kindness which Christ shows in healing the physically and spiritually sick and which leads on to the climactic act of love on the cross.

In the miracles which take place in the Garden, and in the second Trial we find York at once close to Chester and very different from it. It is close to Chester in that it shows miracles which evil characters are unable to understand or to accept as miracles but which the audience can appreciate in their full significance. It is unlike Chester in that it does not encourage the audience to see the failure of evil as a specific failure to read signs, but simply encourages the audience to enjoy the way in which the fatuous pretensions and chaotic activity of evil are undercut and disrupted by miraculous expressions of God's power.

When the soldiers come to take Christ in the Garden light suddenly shines round about him. The

audience knows what it means; the soldiers fail to appreciate its meaning: "Me meruayles what it may mene" (XXVIII, 265). But York is not essentially interested in this episode as evidence for the Jews' lack of insight into miraculous sign. The motivation for including the event is that it shows how, at a moment of apparent weakness, God has full power to confound his attackers. It is the exercise of power in miracle not the revelatory function of that miracle that York seems most concerned with. One thinks also of the plagues of the Moses play; they were also present as direct expressions of power by God, not as signs to illumine Pharaoh or the Israelites. When the banners bow to Christ during the second Trial and then, accompanied by Pilate, do so again despite the Jews' precautions, the York authors are more interested in the signficatory value of the miracles. Christ is being berated in the most vile terms and his claims to be God's Son and King of the Jews have been rejected. When the audience sees these miracles it realizes that they signify that Christ is both God's Son and King. The Jews, of course, fail to recognize this and, in the customary way, try to explain it all in earthly terms - the men have not held the banners firmly enough - or as sorcery. I do not think, however, that the York author is as concerned with the specific failure to read signs as he is to dramatize in the most comic and forceful way the ludicrousness of evil at the moments of its apparent victory. The placing of the miracles in the

action suggests this. The banners first bow just after the soldiers have been lording it over Christ in a flow of alliterative abuse:

- i Mil. O man, thy mynde is full madde,
 In oure clukis to be clowted and
 clapped,
 And closed.
- ii Mil. þou bes lassched, lusschyd, and
 lapped.
- i. Mil. Ȝa, rowted, russhed, and rapped,
 þus thy named with noye sall be
 noysed.
- ii. Mil. [To Pilate] Loo, this sege her, my souerayne,
 þat
 ze for-sente.
 (XXXIII, 151-7)

Pilate has just time to ask them to keep Christ where he is when the banners bow down and the soldiers' abuse is replaced by the "We, outte" and "Ȝa, harrowe" of Caiphias and Annas. The second miracle occurs in a similar position - just after Annas has challenged Christ: "Alle creatures þe accuses, we commaunde þe comme in,/And aunswer to þin enemys, deffende now thy fame" (267-8). We can see the same strategic placing of miracle in the Resurrection play. There, Pilate, Cayphas and Annas have just concluded that the crucifixion was a worthy and legal act when the Centurion enters "A! blissid lorde, Adonay,/What may þes meruayles signifie..." (XXXVIII, 37-8). The descent of the Holy Ghost has a similar effect in that it takes place immediately after the Jews have reviled Christ and determined to kill the apostles unless they live as the Jews wish them to. From a position of weakness the apostles are strengthened by the action of God's power upon them and again the fierce antagonism of the Jews

is revealed as weak.

It would be wrong to suggest that the miracles are without precise significance. The descent of the Holy Ghost, however it may function in the action, has a signficatory power. Mary says, "Nowe may we triste his talis ar trewe,/Be dedis þat here is done þis day" (XLIV, 101-2). The Centurion reports the signs at the Passion as "tokenyngis trewe" (XXXVIII,81) that Christ was God's Son. At the time of the Passion he and Longeus recognize the miracles of darkness and of Longeus's restored sight as signs of God's mercy, and they respectively recognize Christ as the saviour and God's Son (XXXVI, 300-24). In an equivalent of the miracle of the Vernicle, the third Mary declares:

This signe schalle bere witesse
Vnto all pepull playne,
Howe goddes sone here gilteles
Is putte to pereles payne.
(XXXIV, 187-90)

What I would assert is that York's interest in using miracles is more for their capacity to disrupt and undercut evil than for their capacity to carry significance. Also, if it is interested in showing how some people such as the Marys, Longeus and the Centurion can understand the meaning of the miracles that is because its real concern is to demonstrate the various tomfooleries of evil and one of these is a reluctance to believe that the miracles are miraculous at all. I do not wish to underemphasize the similarity here between York and Chester: both cycles are dramatizing miraculous sign; both are showing evil

blindness to miracle. But the patterns that emerge in the cycles' use of the miracles indicate that Chester's primary interest is in the miraculous sign as theophany and as a challenge to spiritual insight, while the York cycle values the power of miracle to disrupt evil and reveal its idiocy. This is why Chester has the bulk of its signs during the Ministry rather than in the episodes immediately before the Passion, and why the York cycle gives full scope to miracle to speak for Christ against his opponents at a time when Christ is not willing to speak for himself.

In a third of one chapter it is not possible to investigate sign in York with the particularity possible in our study of Chester. Nevertheless, the preceding section has set out the leading characteristics of York's use of signification and its presentation of signs. If I conclude that York shows itself more interested in the eliciting of meaning than in the process of signification, less controlled in its use of sign terminology and less consistent in its treatment of miraculous sign it should not be thought that I am criticizing the work. Neither am I praising it where it comes closer to Chester's treatment of sign. Where I have noted such an approximation my intention has been, if anything, to show how partial the similarity is. The cycles are different in their aims and methods; consistency is a necessity in one; variety is not a vice in the other. The value of the above comparison is that it provides us with material

for discussing fundamental differences between the cycles, not just differences in the dramatization of shared material but basic differences between the authors of the two cycles in their attitudes to the signification of meaning. While one cycle is eliciting meaning from significant events in a traditionally expository way, the other is making that very activity the subject matter for its didacticism to work from.

Towneley (and York)

We began our study of York with an extract from the Flood and it is illuminating to compare a typical passage from the Towneley version of the event:

Noe. This is a grete flood/wife, take heed.
Uxor. So me thoughte, as I stode/we ar in grete drede;
These wawghes ar so wode./
Noe. help, god, in this nede!
As thou art stere-man good/and best, as I rede,
of all;
Thou rewle vs in this rase,
As thou me behete hase.
Uxor. This is a perlous case:
help, god, when we call!
(III, 424-32)

The author is concerned to evoke the turbulence of the storm not its moral significance. Throughout the play speech is rapidly exchanged between the characters: commentary on the depth and surging of the water, the cosmic disruptions, the crashing down of castles and towers and the danger to those in need of a divine steersman. This makes the Towneley Noah an excellent example of imaginative poetry accomplishing what theatrical properties could only minimally represent. When the moral commentary on the event is made it comes

at the end of the action when Noah and his family are back on land, and it takes the form of comment, not of exposition of the flood's significance:

Noe: To dede ar thai dyght/prowdist of pryde,
Euer-ich a wyght/that euer was spyde,
With syn,
All ar thai slayn,
And put vnto payn.
(543-7)

The characters do allude during the action to signs. Noah sees the tops of hills and the bright weather, and his wife notes that these are "of mercy/tokyns full right" (470-471). When the dove brings back the olive branch Noah's wife declares it to be a "trew tokyn." But it is important to note that these allusions to sign are completely embedded in the action. They have no didactic implication. The olive branch is no more than a practical sign that the flood is over and it has its evidential force wholly tied up with other pieces of practical evidence:

Uxor: A trew tokyn ist/we shall be saved all:
for whi?
The water, syn she com,
of depnes plom,
Is fallen a fathom,
And more hardely.
(517-22)

If one compares this with the formal and weighty significance which the Chester Noah sees in the branch, the differences in tone and emphasis become obvious: "This betokeneth God has done us some grace,/and is a signe of peace" (MS.H, III, 22-3; App. 1A). This play is not unrepresentative of the Towneley Old Testament plays, and indeed of many of the New Testament ones. The cycle is largely given over to the verbal evocation

and exploration of action and the emotional intensity that words can create for the action. It is not a cycle in which action is continually having its meaning elicited by Expositors or by characters speaking expositorially. It is unlike York, therefore, as regards this kind of signification. The John the Baptist play excepted, it generally lacks an interest in presenting the action of characters such as Mary and Christ as exemplary - this being the more deliberately signficatory action that York includes. It may, as in the Pharaoh or Thomas of India plays, display the inadequate responses to signs of evil or misguided men, but it has none of the developed patterning of response to sign which reveals Chester's interest in the signficatory process and which provides Chester's leading spiritual imperatives: observe with insight, and believe.

We found in the York cycle that the first three references to sign were without pattern and seemed to be prompted by the Bible rather than by any authorial sense that signs were of importance. Thereafter we found various references which were purely incidental to the action. The same is true of Towneley. Abraham kisses Isaac as a "tokyn" that he may live (IV, 278); Jacob raises a stone as a "sygne" that he will hold to the Church and tithe for the rest of his life (VI, 55); Caesar Augustus wants a penny as "tokynyng" that he is lord (IX, 220); the third shepherd says that the fragments of Moll's pitcher were a "tokyn" that she had

broken it (XII, 160). All these references to sign are imbedded in the action or conversation without providing the didactic point of the section in which they appear. A cycle as attentive to sign as Chester could not use the sign vocabulary in this way.

A major contribution to Chester's development of significance in the Old Testament plays is made by the typological value of the Abraham play. The action of this play is shown to be significatory when the Expositor explicitly translates it into New Testament terms. Chester is the only cycle to be thus overt. (6) Neither York nor Towneley encourages the onlooker to view its Abraham play as typologically significant. Given York's liking for moral exposition it is surprising to find this lack. The play has a lengthy narrative introduction but no expository conclusion. Emphasis seems to fall on the episode as a stage in the history of the Jews: it continues beyond Isaac's salvation to his proposed wedding and the increase of descendants (X, 357-70). Much has been written about the question of typology in the cycles and I will be taking up the theme in chapter VI, but it is nevertheless important in this comparative study to recognize that the difference between York and Towneley on the one hand and Chester on the other is not simply a difference in explicitness about typological meaning. To claim this is to blur the distinctly separate

(6) Kolve makes this point, The Play Called Corpus Christi, p.74.

attitudes that the cycles have to the signification of meaning.

It is one thing to include in a play details which derive from and reflect its subject matter's traditionally typological importance. It is another to encourage the audience to become aware of them and therefore consciously aware of the episode's typology. It is still another to assert, as Chester does, that the principal significance of the material lies in its typological aspect. I would not deny that all the cycles contain material which reflects the typological tradition of interpreting the Abraham story. (7) What I would deny is that all cycles expect or even wish the onlooker to become consciously aware of the typological significance which these details traditionally have. The section of York plays in which the Abraham occurs seems to employ long instructive introductions coupled with speeches of exposition within the action. Neither of these elicit typological significance. This strikes me as a good indication that the onlooker is not expected to search out such significance independently. Towneley is even less encouraging: the whole literary endeavour of the play is towards the creation of an

(7) See R. Woolf, "The Effect of Typology on the English Mediaeval Plays of Abraham and Isaac," Speculum XXXII (1957), 805-25, and Robert M. Longworth, "Art and Exegesis in Medieval English Dramatizations of the Sacrifice of Isaac," Educational Theatre Journal, 24 (1972), 118-24. For a critical account of the importance of typology in the Old Testament plays see Arnold Williams, "Typology and the Cycle Plays: Some Criteria," Speculum, 43 (1968), 677-84.

imaginatively powerful and convincing action and away from the interpretative mode favoured by Chester. David Berkeley has very properly reminded critics that realism on the literal level is not incongruous with "allegorical" interpretation. Indeed, the development of typological meaning is only possible because the events from which it is drawn are historically true. (8) Nevertheless, we must accept that the style of a work gives us clues as to how it should be read, and if there are no explicit references to typological meaning we have a right to claim that a work the style of which suggests interest in non-significatory effects is not encouraging us to make interpretative efforts on our own account or to see the play's action as having an important, significatory function.

One feels in Towneley the attraction of practical, naturalistic detail. Just as Noah's wife was drawn away from the sign of the olive branch to the water level which had fallen since the branch was brought back, so the ass which is to accompany Abraham and Isaac does not seem to the onlooker to be a typological sign because Abraham points out that it must "bere our harnes les and more" (IV, 118). The Towneley plays up to this point have a very domestic atmosphere drawn partly from the presence of families such as Adam's and Noah's, but also from the minutiae of ordinary social

(8) David S. Berkeley, "Some Misapprehensions of Christian Typology in Recent Literary Scholarship," Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900, XVIII (1978), 3-12.

intercourse. Abraham's conversation with his servants (145-59) is too long to quote but it is the very length at which the niceties are exchanged that sinks the onlooker into the reality of the event. As Abraham and Isaac travel on alone to the hill the typology of Calvary may be behind the action but Towneley demands instead that we listen to lines such as these "we must go a full good paise,/ffor it is farther than I wend" (161-2). In other words, it is creating a real geography for us, convincing us here, as in the Noah play, of the reality of the surroundings. Other details such as Abraham's lying to Isaac or the boy's cry "What have I done, fader, what have I saide?" further the imaginative power of naturalistic action. Even more striking than such detail is the sense one is given that events have a natural ordinary dynamism of their own which God cannot supernaturally control but has to work with. He has to urge the angel, "hy with all thi mayn!" in case Abraham actually goes through with the sacrifice. The angel has to wrestle Abraham to the ground and then convince him of his orders because Abraham has finally broken through the restraint of his agony and is rushing to get the sacrifice over with before the sight of Isaac blunts his purpose. The play's naturalistic rather than significatory accent is finally displayed when Abraham thanks God in two lines and then says "To speke with the haue I no space,/with my dere son till I haue spokyn" (273-4). The distance between this and Chester is immense, and it is the

difference between a cycle which is primarily interested in the signficatory, and one that is not.

Like all the cycles, Towneley intermittently shows the evil of some characters through their attitude to signs. The cycle shares the Pharaoh play with York, and therefore includes an episode which finds various analogues in Chester, though Chester was unable to include it. (9) I refer to Pharaoh's request for a sign that God has commanded him to let the Israelites go (Towneley VIII, 243; York XI, 230). Pharaoh is at fault in requesting a sign rather than immediately believing. As we know from the New Testament, it is a wicked and adulterous generation which asks for a sign and this idea underlies Moses' reply: "He [God] sayd thou shuld dyspyse/both me, and hys commaundement" (244-5). As in so many episodes in Chester, the evil man asks for a sign and, having received it, refuses to believe that it is one. Pharaoh comes only to the conclusion that Moses is a "sotell swayn" (259). The miracle by which Moses' rod turns into a serpent and back again is evidently the result of magic not of divine power. York and Towneley also present their Herods as earthbound in their attitude to the star of the nativity. All cycles regard the star as a sign and have their shepherds and Magi draw various significances from it. Herod in both York and Towneley refuses to accept the signficatory role of the star. The York Herod abuses the Magi:

Now I se wele ze roþe and raue.

(9) See pp.114-115 for an explanation of this lack.

Be ony skymeryng of the skye
When ze shulde knawe owthir kyng or knave?
(XVII, 122-4)

This accords well with the later insistence of Cayphas and Annas that the Centurion at the Passion only saw an eclipse not a miraculous darkening of the sky - a section which is shared by both cycles (York XXXVIII; Towneley XXVI). The Towneley Herod is similarly scornful: "when thare wytt in a starne shuld be,/I hold thaym mad" (XIV, 293-4). He later asks if the Kings saw any "tokynyng" in the sky (377-8) and on this occasion shows his evil simply by lamenting the significance which he has now accepted. Because he has accepted that the star is a token of the new King, Herod's subsequent consultation of the biblical texts is divested of the ironic and evidential power which it has in Chester. It seems merely to augment the existing evidence and intensify Herod's existing anguish. These two cycles do, therefore, show evil men responding wrongly to signs, but there is nothing like the consistent and coherent presentation of evil as a perverted attitude to sign that we will see in Chester. There was enough direction in the Bible to encourage any cycle to show evil in such contexts, but in none of the cycles save Chester is there such a concern with the significatory process that it continually defines evil as a perversion of that process.

Although both York and Towneley contain frequent references to the star as a sign they really do not do as much with its significatory function as Chester. The

York shepherds know by Balaham's prophecy, that a star will "schyne and signifie" and know that this will mean redemption (XV, 14-24). The Towneley shepherds know that they must seek the child whom the star "betokyns" (XII, 321). One might feel that they were engaged in the interpretation of textual signs when they proceed to explain the prophecies of Christ's birth but this is far from the author's mind. The action veers towards comedy when one of them displays knowledge of Latin (388-92) and although the author wishes to have the prophecies adduced (and includes them on several further occasions) he is not specifically interested in them as linguistic signs. In neither of the cycles is there the questioning of visual sign and involvement in the meaning of linguistic sign that we get in the Chester Shepherds.

Sign in the Towneley Offering of the Magi seems much more grounded in the plot than functioning beyond it to teach the audience through the interpretations and responses of the characters. The star's first appearance is intended to undercut Herod's pretensions rather as the miracles are used in pre-Passion York. No sooner has Nuncius reported Herod's claim that he is the only King and Mahound the only true God than the star appears. When Chester stresses the Magi's expectation of the sign and their prudent caution before accepting it as a sign despite their longing, Towneley concentrates more on the action of the Magi's meeting, their wonder, the exotic places they have come

from in search of the star. In order to intensify the mood of wonder Towneley risks an unconvincing change in the Magi from ignorance to a remembrance of what the star signifies. Again it is action and mood that Towneley is creating; it is not following an interest in the nature of signs and the proper responses of men to them. York also prefers to dramatize the transition from the Magi wondering what the star will signify to knowledge of its meaning. Neither cycle explores the "signs" which Herod can set up against this true sign. (10) Also, neither cycle approaches the significance of the Magi's gifts with the same intensity found in Chester. The suitability of the gifts rather than their signficatory nature is the accent York prefers with its emphasis falling heavily on the adoration which precedes the giving (XVII, 253-88). Towneley, on the other hand, is explicit that the gold signifies that Christ is King and that the myrrh signifies that he will die. The incense is offered up as suitable to Christ's divinity (XIV, 541-58). But this is done in eighteen lines whereas Chester's account is a lengthy examination of a whole range of significances. It is the expository function of these signs in enriching the revelation of Christ that Chester is mainly interested in. Both York and Towneley prefer the giving of gifts to remain a piece of climactic action rather than of climactic signification.

We were able to distinguish York from Chester in

(10) This will be discussed in chapter V.

terms of York's less consistent treatment of signification in the plays of Christ's Ministry. The Towneley cycle can be distinguished from Chester by its almost complete refusal to dramatize the events of the Ministry. The only two major events which take place in Towneley between Christ's boyhood debate with the Doctors and his capture in the Garden are the Baptism and the raising of Lazarus. Towneley does not have a sacramental presentation of the Last Supper and lacks, therefore, any material relevant to an analysis of sacrament as sign. (York's presentation of the event is also brief and shows no interest in the signifiatory). The Towneley Christ does wash the disciples' feet as an "Ensampyll" but the cycle is following the Bible closely here and there is no very developed context of such exemplary action to make this of any importance to our study of signification. The Lazarus play gives every indication of having been compiled with more attention to the contemporary taste of the compiler than to the style of the existing part or of the rest of the cycle. (11) But even in the first half of the play where the text does remain close to the Bible there is no attempt to represent the sign's theophanous quality which is, of course, the Johannine emphasis.

(11) There is no manuscript evidence for this compilation of the play's parts. Though the play, as a whole, is obviously displaced, it has not been suggested that this has a bearing on its internal shape. The Towneley Cycle. A Facsimile of Huntington MS. HM1, with an introduction by A. C. Cawley and Martin Stevens, Leeds Studies in English (Leeds: The Univ. of Leeds School of English, 1976).

When the play changes to a "morality" description of the horrors of death (line 103ff.) the audience is invited to see Lazarus as its "myrroure," "boke" and "sampill." This kind of signification is wholly atypical of Towneley.

Also atypical are the flashes of sign and significant action that we encounter in the John the Baptist play. John interprets the angel's command that he wait for Christ to come to baptism:

By this I may well vnderstand
That childer shuld be broght to kyrk,
ffor to be baptysyd in euey land;
(XIX, 85-7)

He interprets the angelic remark that the river of Jordan is suitable despite the lack of a church there as showing that men should please God because his work is to be done as he wishes (94-6). Later, Jesus gives the significance of the two angels present at his baptism: God has sent them "In tokyn I am both god and man" (145-6). John declares that Christ's receiving baptism is also a sign. By it, Christ gives men a "true tokyn" that this sacrament is divinely instituted and is worthy of being observed (195-200). It is strange to come on this oasis of sign in a cycle which has resolutely refrained from interpreting its action as John does here. The glimpse of sign revealing the hypostatic union is a quite unique use of the method in the Towneley plays. The play is obviously unlike Chester in the very variety of signification it includes, but also unlike Chester and closer to York in its preference for the eliciting of meaning over the

dramatization of response. The nearest it comes to the latter is at the start where we can see John working out the significance of what the angels have commanded him but, of course, there is no contrastive evil response to the signs and one is left, therefore, with the impression that the elicited meaning and not the process of arriving at it is the author's main interest.

It strikes me as wholly consistent with the cycle's evocation of mood and action through speech that it should prefer several verbal accounts of Christ's Ministry to a dramatic enactment of its events. We see this same preference for narrative to intensify emotion in the repeated accounts of the Passion which Christ and the disciples give after it has taken place. The theophanous signs of the Ministry are reported along with Christ's teachings in three successive plays: The Conspiracy, 92-133; The Buffeting, 65-108; The Scourging, 152-87. The author or authors are freed by this mode of presentation to include signs which Chester could not manage or felt inappropriate for dramatic presentation, such as Christ's walking on the water, the healing of the Centurion's son and the casting out of devils. Any dramatic value which these reports have lies in their undercutting the evil attitude of those who report them. The report is able to create more love of Christ in the audience because it is fleshed out with emotional detail which runs counter to the mood of the

reporter. The following stanza illustrates this well:

ijus tortor. A lepir cam full fast/to this man that
here standys,
And prayed hym, in all hast/of bayll to
lowse
his bandys;
his trauell was not wast/though he cam
fro far
landys;
This prophete tyll hym past/and helyd hym
with
his handys,
ffull blythe.
The son of Centuryon,
ffor whom his fader made greatt mone,
Of the palsy he helyd anone,
They lowfyd hym ofte sythe.
(161-9)

Details such as the far distance which the leper had travelled; Christ's happiness to cure him; the Centurion's grief and subsequent praise give a positive emotional colour which evokes for us the loving nature of the Ministry though in the mouth of Christ's opponent. The writer of this is involved in essentially the same literary enterprise as the author who evoked the Flood through such lines as

Behold to the heuen/the cateractes all,
That are open full euen/grete and small,
And the planettis seuen/left has thare stall,
These thoners and levyn/downe gar fall
ffull stout
(III, 343-7)

This literary enterprise is clearly distinct both from York's eliciting of significance and Chester's dramatization of men and women responding to divine signs.

The mock crowning of Christ as king loses in Towneley the ironic power it takes in Chester from a preceding sequence of signs of Christ's kingship, and the remark that if Christ is really God's Son he will

be able to preserve himself from the crucifixion remains a simple mock and has none of the weight that it takes in Chester from being an evil invitation to Christ to give a sign of his deity. The Towneley cycle does not say that Judas's kiss is a "sign" or "token" and if it did no irony would accrue to it. Instead real self-destructive irony is created in the imagery of knighthood which the torturers use to describe their nailing of Christ to the cross. While they mockingly offer the analogy of a knight on his horse for Christ on the cross the image is providing the true perspective in which to view the action. The audience can see Christ as the lover-knight jousting against the devil. (12) It is typical of the difference between Chester and Towneley that this irony in Towneley arises on the imagistic plane in speech whereas the ironies in the Chester Trial depend on the outward dramatized action being presented as sign.

York, Towneley and Chester all dramatize the sequence of evidential signs by which Christ proves himself to be risen, and risen in the flesh. His wounds both in their visible and palpable aspects, his breaking of bread and disappearing from the sight of the pilgrims, his eating the honey and fish - all identify him and prove his corporeality to Mary,

(12) See R. Woolf, The English Mystery Plays, p.258 and n.41 and in "The Theme of Christ the Lover-Knight in Medieval English Literature," Review of English Studies, N.S., 13 (1962), 1-16; Sister Jean Marie, "The Cross in the Towneley Plays," Traditio, V (1947), 331-4.

pilgrims, disciples and Thomas. Of the three accounts of the episodes York's is the most restrained. Brief dramatizations of the signs are used to prove the folly of the grief and fear which the disciples have experienced, and eventually the folly of Thomas's obstinate disbelief. The signs are being used in a not dissimilar way to the miracles which revealed the folly of evil in the pre-Passion plays.

In Chester and Towneley one is aware of a drama of response emerging strongly from these instances of signs. In Towneley this comes about by the considerable length and tension of the Thomas of India play in which the disciples recount the variety of signs which Christ has shown and Thomas rejects every one. The heavily penitential conclusion emphasises the point that signs are to be taken as the focus of belief. In my view, however, the Chester account of these signs has a greater impact. This impact is partly created by the determinedly austere presentation in which attention is not diverted from these tests of faith into the emotions of the characters, or into evocative narratives of the crucifixion intended to intensify the moral anguish of the audience. This section also gains in power and appears more integrated into the cycle because it is really extending beyond the Passion the account of true and false attitudes to sign which was so thoroughly developed during the ministry plays. Only Chester can give to these signs a literary rationale in the sense that they can be fully associated with the

rest of the work.

The post-Passion plays offer the cycles an opportunity for a different kind of signification. Of necessity, the principal dramatic image of this section is provided by Christ's body. Like visible signs such as the nativity star or, indeed, passages of dramatized action, the risen but wounded body has a powerful significance for us. The analogy between the body and other signs is clearest in Chester, where, as we shall see, the author repeatedly focuses attention on it and its appearance is questioned. The context of signs which Chester has provided makes this concentration on Christ's body appear to be a climactic development of a theme running through the whole of history. Just as fideistic imperatives arose from the signs of the ministry, so they do now when we are asked to believe that Christ is "verey prynce of peace/and kinge of free mercye" (XVIII, 162-3) or "forbyer...of all mankynd through grace" (XX, 115-6). The York and Towneley cycles also use this kind of signification though it is less fully dramatized. In the Towneley play of The Resurrection of the Lord, Christ while rising (XXVI, 226-333) continually demands that we contemplate his body and although this 107 line speech is frequently directed towards affective ends which Chester would avoid, (13) the Towneley author also ensures that the

(13) For a discussion of the likely emotional effect of such monologues see J. W. Robinson, "The Late Medieval Cult of Jesus and The Mystery Plays," P.M.L.A., LXXX (1965), 508-14, pp.511-2.

body's appearance declares many significances to us such as the fact that we were bought at a great price (232); that having been cleansed we should not defile ourselves again (236-7); that we owe Christ love (242-3 and 295); that the pain Christ suffered can be imputed to us (260-1); that the guilt was ours not his (266-7); that Man's soul is saved from Hell (272-3); that Christ loves us faithfully (290-1); that the blood can cleanse us (301), and so on. Chester's Resurrection speech is roughly parallel to this one in the first stanza and the last two (Towneley 226-31 and Chester XVIII, 154-61; Towneley 321-333 and Chester XVIII, 162-85). What Chester does not have is the multiple moral significance of the central section. It keeps carefully to statements about Christ's nature and the expression of that nature to us in the Mass. This is in keeping with Chester's preference for the fideistic over the moralistic. York is much less interested in developing a concentration upon Christ's body for this kind of signification. It lacks the Towneley Resurrection speech though it shares the play, and it reserves its commentary for a very lengthy prayer and admonition by Christ before the Ascension (XLIII, 33-178). This speech is not expository as earlier speeches in York were since it ranges through narrative of past events to prophecy of future ones. Only in one place does it touch on significant meaning and that is where Christ says that he has risen to provide a "figure" of the general resurrection at Doomsday (103-8). Nor is the

speech tied to the signification of Christ's body for it does not use the body as the source of the ideas it investigates. The closest York comes to the significatory function of Christ's body is in his meeting with Mary. There Christ presents the body figuratively as armour (XXXIX, 94-109). The physical thus comes to signify his redemptive achievement, the crown of thorns betokens his dignity, his diadem signifies his immortality. Because his body is visible before us this passage functions rather like the exposition of visible signs that we have encountered earlier in the cycle, but the figurative style is quite unlike the usually deictic approach of passages where signified meaning is being elicited. To express the beauty of the relationship between Christ and Mary, and create the subtle modulations of tone and feeling possible in this reunion seem to be the author's main literary goals. He is not really interested in presenting the body of Christ as a kind of iconographic sign as Chester does or generating a fund of moral meanings from it as Towneley does.

Towneley is a cycle in which the verbal evocation of action is frequently preferred to the physical dramatizing of action. The plays, in general, aim to move the audience by verbal power rather than to instruct it expositively. With few exceptions, the drama avoids presenting events as of exemplary significance, and even when it has the opportunity to include theophanous sign in the Lazarus play it avoids

this, preferring a narrative account of the Ministry to a dramatization of signficatory events. Where it shares with York and Chester a particular feature of sign, such as evil reaction to sign or the treatment of the nativity star as a sign, it does very little with this and is to be associated with York rather than Chester. An exception is the Resurrection speech in which neither York nor Chester contains Towneley's amount of moral significance. But this, like its other centres of sign the John the Baptist and Thomas of India plays, appears unusual in the cycle. One cannot claim that we ever become aware of signification as an interest in itself. The sign vocabulary Towneley uses is frequently incidental to the action and does not have any didactic implication. Its Old Testament material is written with a concentration on the naturalistic which discourages any attempt to consider it as typologically significant.

The cycle is most interesting as an attempt to create an imaginatively convincing and emotionally powerful world through words, and its achievement in this respect perhaps explains why it is the work which offers least to a study of expository signification or of the dramatizing of the sign process within plays.

Ludus Coventriae

This cycle possesses several examples of evidential signs which reveal the spiritual status or identity of a person associated with them. When Mary

ascends the temple steps reciting the fifteen Psalms of Degrees, the Bishop realizes that this is a "hey meracle" performed by God and showing that Mary will have God's grace in her.

Episcopus

A gracyous lord þis is A mervelyouse thyng
þat we se here all in syght
A babe of thre ger age so zynge
to come vp þese grecys so vp-ryght
It is An hey meracle and by goddys myght
no dowth of she xal be gracyous.
(77:144-9)

As in Chester, there is a miraculous event; an internal audience to perceive it; a concentration of the audience's vision and thoughts upon the action performed, and the eliciting of significance from that event. Unlike Chester, there is no contrast of response and this is a characteristic of Ludus Coventriae as it is of York and Towneley. None of these cycles takes its interest in signs to the point of dramatizing a significatory process which yields contrary responses to sign, and which thereby makes the recognition of sign, and insight into the meaning of signs important spiritual achievements for the audience. There is an exception to this in Ludus Coventriae where the Bishop interprets the barrenness of Joachim and Anna in these terms: "It is a tokyn þou art cursyd" (66:79), but Joachim, realizing that God is present with those in tribulation, can say to God, "þis is a tokyn þou lovyst me" (67:129). This is a singular example, however, and the contrast of interpretations is valuable in clarifying God's loving nature, but not as a

demonstration of right and wrong reactions to sign.

The Baptism also includes evidential sign though here it is probably not the miraculous nature of the events which bears the revelatory significance to the perceiver. John the Baptist declares:

Here I se with opyn syght
The sone of God þat þou erte
the hooly goost ouer the doth lyght
þi faderys voys I here fful smerte
(191: 105-8)

The appearance of the Holy Spirit and the presence of God's voice are theophanous signs revealing Christ's identity. Here again we find an emphasis upon what is seen. The first line refers to the scene before John and, I suspect, includes the aural evidence which he has received. The whole action has demonstrated that Christ is the Son of God.

As in York and Chester, the raising of Lazarus follows the revelatory pattern in John. Christ declares that the action will show the might of God and himself to the people, who have not hitherto believed in it (233: 413-6). When Lazarus has been raised, two of the disciples announce what this has proved about Christ. The elements of their announcement are identical with those we find in Chester with the exception that, as in the previous examples, the Ludus does not use sign vocabulary though its action may be miraculous and theophanously significant.

Petrus

be þis grett meracle opynly we fynde
Very god and man in trewth þat ze be.

Johannes

þat þou art very god every man may se
be this meracle so grett and so meruayll.
(224: 435-8)

The reason that this cycle does not often use sign terminology although it does sometimes use miracles to reveal Christ is that its stress is very much on the revelation rather than the process by which such significance is conveyed. One repeatedly finds the phrase "opyn syght" in Ludus Coventriae. Peter says that they have perceived God's status openly. In the last speech of the play Christ indicates that it is time for him to go to Passion now that he has revealed himself fully:

Now I have shewyd in opyn syght
of my godhead þe gret glorye
to-ward my passyon I wyl me dyght
(225: 449-51)

It is this emphasis on the clear vision of Christ rather than on the signficatory process that lies behind the cycle's treatment of some of the common post-Resurrection signs. Cleophas declares to the disciples that he and Lucas "have seyn hym [Christ] with opyn syght" (345: 264). When Thomas has been converted to true belief he says to the audience "Ffor now I have seyn with ful opyn syght/Quod mortuus et sepultus nunc resurrexit" (348: 367-8). When Christ rebukes the disciples for wavering belief, therefore, his objection is not that they have wavered despite the signs offered them (which is Chester's objection, XX, 33-6) but that their inadequate belief remains despite his open appearances to them:

Ffor I wyl vse to 3ow wordys pleyn

þat ȝe be so hard of herte to be-leve
þat from deth to lyve I am resyn Ageyn
Not-with-stondyng As ȝe knowe serteyn
to ȝow viii sythys Aperyð have I...
(349: 6-10)

For this reason also, when Christ eats the honey and fish he does not do so here to provide a sign of his corporeal resurrection, as he does in the other cycles. Instead, his reappearance to the disciples is the sign of his rising - his ninth such proof, as he rather wearily points out - and the eating is a communal act which simply emphasizes his presence among them and does not signify to them. Christ simply tells them to fetch food: "Ffor I wyl Ete/with ȝow And ȝoo" (349:16-17).

It is only by looking at the phrase "opyn syght" in a variety of contexts such as those provided by the post-Resurrection plays that one realizes that it derives from a sensibility which values the sight of Christ, his appearance as an image, rather than from a conscious desire to make the process of signification the subject of teaching. The phrase "opyn syght" has its Cestrian analogue in "apertely" but one is never in doubt in Chester that the openness of sight is the result of spiritual insight into signs. In Ludus Coventriae revelation to the eyes can be enjoyed and its spiritual and moral implications explored without an associated interest in the capacity of men to read signs and an associated didactic imperative that we, the audience, should also do this. What distinguishes the other cycles from Chester is as much their

inconsistent treatment of areas which they share with Chester as their outright differences. We have seen that the emphasis on 'open sight' actually leads the Ludus author away from signs in the post-Resurrection plays. However, in the very Chester-like speech of Centurion at the Passion we find an interest in signs as the means by which the open sight is achieved:

In trewth now I knowe with ful opyn syght
that goddys dere son is naylid on tre
these wundryful tokenys Aprevyn ful ryght
quod vere filius dei erat iste.
(307: 1018-21)

The theophanous, miraculous signs are heavily stressed in this section. Centurion has three speeches in which he responds thus, noting that the "tokenys" prove Christ to be a peerless lord (1029) and that the darkness and earthquake show Christ to be both God and man (1045-6). It is this kind of inconsistent interest in sign that one finds in all these cycles and which I would like to investigate more closely in Ludus Coventriae.

One would have thought that the interest in sign evinced in the Centurion's speeches would have led on to a sign-centred treatment of Longeus. This is the case in Chester. Both cycles recognize that the sudden return of sight does not permit Longeus to recognize Christ whom he has not seen before. Both, however, want him to make such a recognition. Ludus Coventriae rather slurs over the process of recognition:

but ho is þis þat hangyþ here now
I trowe it be þe mayndonys sone
and þat he is now I knowe wel how
þe jewys to hym þis velany han don.

(310: 1123-6)

The punctuation and interpretation of the third line are difficult to ascertain but if there is any reason given for how Longeus recognizes Christ it is that he knows the Jews to have crucified him and therefore makes the connection with what he sees. There seems no good reason for his immediate response to Christ as God: he falls on his knees, addresses Christ as "good lord" and begs forgiveness. Chester, on the other hand, both permits Longeus to recognize Christ and justifies his statements of belief in the Resurrection and of an intention to serve Christ. It does this by grounding both in signs. Longeus recognizes Christ when he makes the connection between his own healing and those in the past. At first Christ is a 'man' only. Then the process of deduction takes place:

But this I hope be Christ verey
that sycke and blynd hasse healed aye.

.
Jesu, mych have I hard speake of thee,
that sycke and blynd through the pittie
hasse healed before in this cittie
as thou hasse me todaye.

(XVIA, 396-7 and 400-3. My emphasis)

The key to his recognition comes in the last line but it clearly underlies the process of reasoning. The recognition of Christ through his miracles of healing also justifies Chester's presentation of Longeus coming to fideistic conclusions about the Resurrection. Ludus Coventriae's emphasis was not on the process by which Longeus came to recognize Christ but rather upon the penitential response he made: "Mercy mercy mercy I crye" (310: 1131). The Ludus wanted to project to the

audience a simple didactic message: it wished to associate a salvific act with a penitential response. By doing this, it was reinforcing the moral demands of the main Crucifixion action. It was emphasizing the penitential to the audience at the point where the audience could see dramatized the event which gave penitence its value: the act of mercy on the cross. Chester, on the other hand, with an established interest in the way men come to fideistic conclusions through sign, was much more careful about Longeus' recognition of Christ. Only with this reasonably established would it move to the final statement in which Longeus declared belief in a miracle yet to occur: the Resurrection.

The Ludus Coventriae has a tendency to by-pass the signficatory function of miracles in order to generate other kinds of meaning and effect. The miracle of the Vernicle, for example, is not used evidentially but as the occasion for affirming the beneficial effects of viewing images. Christ promises "I xal þem kepe from all mys-ese/þat lokyn on þi kerchy and remembyr me" (296: 724-5). This development is quite understandable in view of the cycle's continual embodiment of meaning in visual image, (14) but it is not how Chester would have dealt with the miracle had it been included. What we find throughout a comparison of Chester with the

(14) For an analysis of this signification of meaning through the visual images of the Marian plays see Theresa Coletti, "Devotional Iconography in the N-town Marian Plays," Comparative Drama, 11 (1977), 22-44.

Ludus is that the latter is immensely superior in the richness of didactic meaning it carries to the audience and in the range of dramatic techniques it uses to make that meaning strike the audience powerfully. But Chester, with a much more limited number of lessons to project and a deliberately more austere style of presentation, is doing something that Ludus Coventriae would not do: it is exploring the significatory process by which meaning is offered, and drawing the lessons which can be learned from the reception that signs receive. Since iconography is one of the main media by which the Ludus projects meaning it is not surprising that the miracle of the Vernicle is organized to offer a powerful visual image to the audience with an attendant confirmation that the viewing of such images is a valuable spiritual act. (15) Chester, however, could not have thus by-passed the theophanous character of the miracle because it would have found the event valuable for its significatory nature.

The episode of "The Woman taken in Adultery" provides an even more striking example of the differences between the two cycles. We have already seen that the action in Chester was so treated as to accentuate the miraculous sign of Christ's writing and diminish the importance of his moral challenge to the

(15) The author is clearly aware of the contemporary attacks on the wrong use of images and relics for he makes it clear that benefit will accrue to those who look on the Vernicle and remember the one signified by the image. Observation without remembrance is insufficient.

Pharisees. (16) The episode as a whole worked towards Mulier's recognition of Christ's Godhead from his sign. Ludus Coventriae completely avoids the theophanous signification of the event. Indeed, it even by-passes the miraculousness of Christ's knowledge. Instead the author is aiming to use the whole action in the style of sermon narracio to exemplify his themes that one should never be afraid to ask for mercy (200:5 - 201:16) and that one should be merciful to others because one shares a common sinfulness with them (201:25-32). (17) Christ's moral challenge to the Pharisees therefore receives full attention. It is not ignored by them as it is in Chester, but instead functions as the main challenge which his writing of their sins on the sand immediately serves to intensify rather than to replace. The Woman's response, which in Chester was strongly fideistic, contains no reference to the miracle by which she has been saved, and is heavily penitential (208: 257-64):

O holy prophete graunt me mercy
of myn synnys vnresonable
With all myn hert I am sorry.
(262-4).

This tone is very far from the formal declaration of intent and of spiritual recognition from sign which we have in Chester:

Hethenforth filth I will flee
and serve thee in good faye.

(16) See pp.93-4.

(17) Peter Meredith discusses the sermon style of this play in an excellent article, "'Nolo Mortem' and the Ludus Coventriae Play of the Woman Taken in Adultery," Medium Aevum, XXXVIII (1969), 38-54.

For godhead full in thee I see
that knowes worke that doe wee.
(XII, 275-8).

Even an example of evidential sign in Ludus Coventriae serves to show that the cycle is not consistently interested in such signification. When the cherry tree bends down at Mary's command to permit her to pick the cherries, Joseph realizes from the miracle that his unkindness to her has been an offence against God. He also recognizes through the agency of this sign that Mary's child is divine:

Ow I know weyl I haue offendyd my god in trinyte
Spekyng to my spowse these vnkynde wurdys
Ffor now I beleve wel it may non other be
but þat my spowse beryght þe kyngys son of blys
(137: 43-6)

This is a good example of the evidential sign - it reveals Christ for who he is as well as showing the moral fault of Joseph. But the management of the episode shows that the author's interest is more in how this action contributes to the characters and relationship of Joseph and Mary than in the signifiatory value of miracles. The episode begins at line 23 (p.136) with Mary asking Joseph the name of the tree. It is a cherry and in season would be able to offer its fruit to Mary. The author is approaching the miraculous events gently, establishing the reality of the scene in question and answer and in the quite proper remark that the cherry tree would bloom in season. Mary then urges Joseph to see the now-blossoming tree, but Joseph's ordinariness has now become culpable for he ignores her request, urging her

to hurry up. Earthly blame which would come on them if they were late to register means more to Joseph than what his wife is reporting about a miracle. He is bound up in the ordinary exigencies of life. Mary repeats her request adding politely that she would appreciate some of the cherries. Chester would never have spent this amount of time on the chat of the couple nor on creating the naturalistic atmosphere through which the audience will recognize the relevance of the action to its own moral life. But even if it had got to this point it would certainly have taken the opportunity to show Joseph now struck with the significance of the miraculous blossoming. The Ludus has Joseph ignore this first miracle, in order to present his comic earthliness more powerfully in building up to the second miracle. Joseph turns round, sees the tree, and replies,

3pur desyre to ffulfylle I xal Assay sekyrly
Ow to plucke zow of these cheries it is a werk
wylde
Ffor þe tre is so hyz it wol not be lyghtly
þefore lete hym pluk zow cheryes be-gatt zow with
childe.

(136: 35-8)

Joseph's response here is not an act of disbelief in sign; he ignores the sign. His recalcitrance derives solely from his physical discomfort. Mary does not draw attention to the miraculousness of the event either. Throughout the episode, she provides a patient and forgiving standard which her husband cannot meet. It is the way she speaks rather than what she says that matters. The author has been interested in showing how

the moral recalcitrance of Joseph is changed to penitence and illumination but, in doing so, he has developed the character of the sinner, the comic potential of the scene and the delightful balance in contrast of the protagonists at the expense of a redundant miracle. It is, in any case, an unhappy hiatus in an otherwise well-arranged scene, but it is the kind of hiatus which could not occur in a cycle devoted to examining how men and women respond to signs.

When Joseph and the midwives are outside the stable about to enter they see the miraculous light of the Nativity. They react in very different ways to it and one might think that here was the typical Cestrian contrast of response to sign appearing in Ludus Coventriae:

Zelomye

In to þis hous dare I not gon
þe woundyrfull lyght doth me affray

Joseph

than wyl my-self gon in Alon
and chere my wyff if þat I may
(140- 165-8)

In fact, the author is not presenting the light as a sign, nor is he stressing its miraculousness. The midwives are simply afraid in the presence of what we know, but they do not know, is an expression of divine power, and Joseph simply shows a human courage such as a man might feel if he thought that his wife needed assistance. He does not show, any more than the midwives do, a consciousness of the evidential force of

the light. One might then think that the author was concerned here to show the blindness of Joseph to sign, but the explanation of the light by Mary (141: 177-80) does not call forth an answering response from Joseph. He does not declare that he has now understood its meaning. Instead, the scene veers off into a new demonstration of his earthly vision when he complains that Mary is smiling (even though she has just explained to him why she is smiling). It is moral reaction that interests this author. The sins of disobedience, of lack of faith, of unkindness and their penitential outcome form the framework of these episodes. The reason is that the author is using these apocryphal actions to represent on stage the moral world which his audience inhabits in reality. Repeatedly, the sinner has his or her sin revealed or punished; repeatedly, forgiveness is asked with penitence; repeatedly, forgiveness is granted. It is not surprising that miracle performs only an auxiliary rôle in the didactic scheme. It reveals sin, but the action must develop beyond this revelation into events by which the onlookers can be instructed in their proper response to the sin they recognize in themselves. The episode of Salome exemplifies this well, and is the last case I wish to adduce in proposing that Ludus Coventriae may include miracles and may even use them in a signficatory way but is finally committed to a more copious moral education.

When Salome has her hand withered in punishment

for her Thomas-like doubting, she realizes that her "fals beleve" has led her to offend God. Her offence is specifically against "Goddys myght" (143: 258) because she has refused to countenance a power which could bring about a virgin birth. The miraculous sign reveals her sin and assures her of Mary's "pure clenness." The speech in which she shows such acceptance is not, however, uttered in tones of fideistic illumination but much more naturalistically as a lament. In this respect the Ludus (143: 253-144: 264) is parallel to Chester where there is also a stanza of miserable regret (VI, 540-7). The two cycles differ markedly in their subsequent development of the action. Chester holds closely to the sequence of miracles - the punitive one is quickly followed by the appearance of the salvific sign of the nativity star and the Angel immediately affirms that the miraculous birth derives from God's power. He briefly urges Salome to seek forgiveness from the child; she does so and, healed by another miracle, immediately declares her belief in Christ as Saviour. The whole action is over in twenty-three lines and the connection between belief and miraculous sign is inescapable. Ludus Coventriae also has a fideistic dimension. After she is healed, Salome declares of the child, "þe sone of god for sothe he is" (145: 294) just as Salome in Chester said,

Nowe leeve I well and sickerlye
that God is comen, man to forbye.
And thou, lord, thou art hee.
(VI, 561-3).

Ludus Coventriae's Salome extends her account of what

she now believes to include the ideas that God has been born of a virgin; he is born in our likeness and he is born to save (145: 297-304). There is no doubt therefore that this cycle uses the miracles as theophanous signs with an internal perceiver arriving at belief through their operation. But that was essentially all that Chester sought to do with the episode and there was no need to do more, for the action, so treated, fitted well into a cycle which was mainly interested in the signficatory process as the link between God's power and Man's belief. Ludus Coventriae, however, feels a moral responsibility to demonstrate that the salvific promise to Man is dependent on his moral life, his penitence, and his search for forgiveness. It presents the penitential part of this several times through Joseph, and through the detractors who falsely accuse Joseph and Mary. It now presents the full moral scheme through Salome. At the point where Chester brings in the nativity star and thus represents the salvific intentions of God in a visible sign, the Ludus has Salome give an account of the moral life she has led up to now:

O lord of myght þou knowyst þe trowth
 þat I haue evyr had dred of þe
 on every power whyght evyr I have rowthe
 and gove hem almes for loue of þe
 Bothe wyff and wedowe þat Askyght for the
 And frendles chylderyn þat haddyn grett nede
 I dude them cure and all for the
 and toke no rewarde of them nor mede.
 (144: 265-72)

The speech suggests the kind of acts of corporal mercy which God refers to at the Judgement and upon which our

salvation partly depends. The audience might not have thought of the speech as an allusion to the Judgement but it would not have failed to recognize in it the moral life which it should follow and upon which its hope of salvation would partly rest. Salome's cry is the cry of the sinner who hopes for forgiveness, and it is being used by the author to assert that good works are an essential concomitant of the next stage in Man's attempt to gain salvation: penitence. Salome's next speech is penitential in the style we have come to expect of Ludus Coventriae. She confesses her sin, requests mercy, shows worship in kneeling and humbly hopes for "Sum wurde of comforte" (144: 288). Beyond Salome's fideistic recognition, therefore, is the representation by the author of the moral behaviour necessary to gain the salvation the central act of which the cycle celebrates. It is in accord with this that the author does not let Salome leave the scene on the high note provided by her recognition of Mary and Christ through the signs, but instead has Mary remind her and us of the need to avoid sin: "...of his hyz mercy þat lord so zow blysse/þat ze nevyr offende more in word thought nore dede" (145: 311-2).

To sum up, this cycle is not interested in examining the signifiatory process as a whole, that is, it does not follow up the responses of men and women to sign in order to distinguish between proper and improper reactions. Secondly, Ludus Coventriae prefers to give its evidentially significant miracles

an auxiliary role whereby they contribute to the development of moral patterns. Chester, by contrast, gave them a fideistically central role. Thirdly, Ludus Coventriae prefers to describe the clear vision of Christ which men and women can enjoy. This results in a frequent use of the phrase "opyn syght" to characterize Christ's visible availability to us. This goes with a reluctance to make the significatory a central medium of revelation. Fourthly, although the preceding conclusions do represent the cycle's emphases, nevertheless, one must further note that in being true to one of its themes, the cycle can treat others inadequately. Though sometimes signs will have a revelatory function, at others the development of the penitential theme may lead to inconsistent or awkward treatment of auxiliary signs. This is an inconsistency which Chester never suffers from in its treatment of sign.

As one might expect of a cycle so devoted to presenting its "historical" material as of contemporary moral relevance, Ludus Coventriae is frequently engaged in the eliciting of significance from its action. When this happens in the Chester cycle through such intermediaries as the Expositor, or more immediately from Christ as interpreter, one feels it to be extending the pattern of sign and response which one observes taking place within the action. When it happens in the other cycles, without a comparable dramatization of sign, it appears quite distinct - a

natural expression of the significatory medium which such drama inevitably uses because it is providing the visible action with meaning. Of course, the significatory process is common whether it is operating within the action or outside it. In each context something is observed, recognized to be significant, and its meaning declared, but I hope that it is now clear that the dramatization of the process permits a great deal more than the mere provision of meaning, though it shares that with the expository mode by which the meaning of the action is overtly declared for the audience's instruction. Equally important, however, is the fact that the dramatization of the significatory process in Chester's action makes the receiving of meaning from an Expositor into a spiritually sensitive action. We are not simply receiving information when a Chester Expositor speaks to us: we are directly engaging in the same process as the characters have been engaged in. They saw their signs; we have seen the action. They came or did not come to a proper understanding of the signs' meaning; we are being encouraged to appreciate the meaning of the action before us. I will be discussing this further in later chapters but it is necessary to state it briefly here since it points up an important difference from the Ludus Coventriae: when meaning is provided by exposition in Ludus Coventriae it is valuable to us solely because it contributes to our understanding of correct morality. The business of giving and receiving

such significance is not itself spiritually important, as it is in Chester, because the action is also devoted to the analysis of morality rather than to dramatizing the significatory process. The point of contact between the action dramatized by the Ludus and the meaning it provides more overtly to the audience is the correct moral behaviour which both urge. In Chester, the point of contact between the dramatized action and overt exposition outside the action, is the process of signification itself - shown within the plays, and fundamental to the medium.

The following are some examples of the exposition of action in the Ludus. Abel interprets for Cain the meaning of the "gret wondyr" he has seen, that is, the brightly burning sacrifice of Abel (33: 131-43). Noah explains to the audience that the Flood is "for synne of mannys wylde mood" (41: 202-5). The Bishop explains that the fifteen temple steps, with the Psalms associated with them, represent Man's passage from Babylon to the New Jerusalem (74: 81) and the recitation of the Psalms is a valuable action if a man is hoping to amend his life. Elizabeth declares that in staying with her to await John the Baptist's birth Mary is showing us "wrecchis" how to be meek (120: 113-4). Christ says that in taking baptism he is giving an example of meekness (190: 70-8) and John develops this significance further in a homily to the audience (79-87). John explains that Christ goes into the wilderness to show that we should also do penance for

our trespasses (192: 135-8). Christ explains to the audience that he has rebuked the devil "to teche þe how þou xalt rewle the" (200: 203). He rides into Jerusalem on an ass showing "exawmple of humylyte/Devoydyng þe Abhomynable synne of pryde" (240: 264-5). Although some of these actions have been provided as exemplary, and in other cases a character is simply eliciting meaning without the suggestion that the action has been deliberately carried out to provide it, one does not feel that it is appropriate to make such a distinction in the Ludus. It is the moral meaning which the action or event yields to us that is of importance and so these episodes are essentially no different from each other nor are they different from others in which a moral action, such as the penitential, was dramatized without an overt statement to the audience of its significance.

We have seen that evidential signs such as frequently formed the action of Chester could only find a secondary role in Ludus Coventriae's more morally directed action. In the same way, texts such as the Ten Commandments, while of vital importance for the significance which can be drawn from them, appear to be less important as kinds of sign than they were in Chester where there was an intense concentration on the signficatory nature of things. Moses in the Ludus takes the terms of the Commandments one by one and elicits their meaning applying it to the contemporary world of the audience. An Angel analyzes Mary's name

acrostically to draw out her significance (80: 244-51). Mary herself gives the "gostly" application of the fifteen Psalms of Degrees (74: 84). But in all of these cases it is the meaning generated rather than the signficatory value of its source which is stressed. One does not find any encouragement, either in such cases or when Christ himself is speaking, to consider text or word in terms of linguistic signification.

The strong moral emphasis of the cycle also accounts for its treatment of the Mass for, although the Ludus recognizes the figurative quality in the sacrament (as Chester did not), (18) its main interest is in generating moral instruction from an interpretation of the Old Testament sacramental forms. A typological relationship is drawn between the old Paschal Lamb and the new Agnus Dei and it is this relationship that the author uses to develop a moral programme for the New Testament Christian. Christ tells us how we should set about partaking of the new Lamb:

And how ze xal ete þis lombe I xal zeve
infformacion
In þe same forme as þe elde lowe doth
specyfye
As I shewe be gostly interpretacyon
(255: 714 to 256: 716)

We must take it without hate or envy, with contrition, believing in the hypostatic union, trusting in God to supply what our intelligence cannot, with a continent and virtuous life, with a dedication to preaching, in a

(18) Christ announces the superseding of the Paschal Lamb by the Mass by saying "þis fygure xal sesse A-nothyr xal folwe þer-by" (254: 682).

spirit of readiness for the unknown time of Judgement (256: 718 to 257: 757). Each of these points emerges by 'ghostly' interpretation of the Old Testament sacramental forms. (19) As on so many other occasions in the Ludus, it is the teaching itself which is of primary importance. The status of the old sacramental forms as signs is not in the author's mind; only the moral lessons which can emerge from them interests him. One does not feel either that he is interested in the Mass as an outward and visible sign of an inner grace, though he may instruct us in how to prepare ourselves spiritually for the sacrament. Neither is he concerned with the nature of the Mass as an effectual means of the grace which it signifies. Far more important is its replacement of the Paschal Lamb's effective force. As the Lamb was eaten "to be destruccyon of pharao" so this Lamb of God is to be eaten to the destruction of the devil (255: 706-9). The idea that the Mass infuses grace is certainly implied here but the author is more interested in the sacrament as a kind of weapon in the moral war Man wages.

From the preceding account it is clear that the Chester cycle is engaged in a quite different didactic enterprise from the other cycles. Though all the cycles share the expository mode in which actions are seen to be significant and have their meaning elicited, only in

(19) Woolf notes the traditional nature of such an interpretation and the sources for it, p.234 and note 56.

Chester is this kind of signification accompanied by a coherent, consistent interest in dramatizing the significatory process within the action. Only Chester creates fideistic imperatives from a repeated attention to the responses of men and women to signs. Only Chester is consistent in its use of the terminology of signification, in its presentation of miracle as theophanous sign, and in its accentuation of this kind of sign by avoiding other moral teaching and affective evocation. Though other cycles may share certain aspects of Chester's treatment of sign, they never develop these as fully as Chester does, nor as consistently. They may include theophanous signs but frequently either by-pass the significatory power of miracle or give it a subordinate role, letting it contribute to actions whose didactic point lies elsewhere. They may show evil reactions to sign but, lacking a coherent pattern of sign, they lack also a coherent account of evil as a perversion of sign. Though the other cycles may elicit significance from texts or words, they never encourage an attention to these phenomena as linguistic signs, and although they may recognize that Christ's words gave as much offence to the Jews as his deeds, this recognition never issues in a close structural and didactic association of the words and deeds comparable with Chester's. Christ may act as an expositor but he is not, in these cycles, the provider of linguistic signs. The most important conclusion, however, is that Chester is the only cycle

to be self-consciously concerned with the giving and taking of meaning. While the other works do just what we would expect medieval plays to do, that is, recount, evoke and, on occasion, draw meaning from biblical and apocryphal events, Chester does precisely what we would not expect of medieval drama (though we find a similar narrative enterprise in some of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales), that is, shift the didactic emphasis onto the more ahistorical subject of how people react to the signs given them and thus develop a drama from the provision and reception of meaning itself. There is no doubt, of course, that Chester is making straight didactic demands in urging that we believe in God's power, Christ's identity as his Son, the Mass, and indeed the points of faith which become codified in the Creed, but its fundamental didactic demand is provided by the very way in which it treats its action: that we make ourselves open to the signs God provides and that we view them with insight. In promoting this demand Chester has become the only extant cycle to make the signficatory process its central dramatic subject rather than simply employing signification to provide didactic instruction.

CHAPTER IV

SIGN AND THE LITERARY INTEGRITY OF THE CHESTER CYCLE

It may seem strange to talk at all about "the" Chester Cycle. Its recent editors write that, "no one of the five cyclic manuscripts closely approaches presentation of all the lines available from a conflation of all five manuscripts." (1) Neither do the minor variants permit us to establish one text as superior to the others. (2) In addition, the manuscripts divide into the "Group" MSS, HmARB, on the one hand, and MS. H, on the other. The editors note "eight major differences" dividing these two versions of the cycle. (3) But there is variation also within the "Group": MS. Hm does not contain the opening play of the cycle, though it is present in all other MSS. The five major texts which we have were not written down during the performing history of the cycle but some sixteen to thirty-two years after its last performance in 1575. (4) The editors' forthcoming volume of notes will show that there is no evidence that any of these manuscripts represents an actual performance of the cycle, or that the cycle was performed with the same text on two or more occasions. The manuscripts, on which any literary study is based, differ from each other in omissions and different

(1) Lumiansky and Mills, p.xxvii.

(2) *ibid.*, p.xxix.

(3) *ibid.*, p.xxviii.

(4) *ibid.*, p.ix.

versions of material, and are constructs after the fact by their scribes rather than transcriptions of actual performances.

Lawrence Clopper's study of the Chester records has revealed that the drama which those variant texts "represent" was itself subject to considerable change. Originally an extended, single-location Passion play performed at Corpus Christi, it was first expanded and shifted to Whitsun during the last twenty-five years of the fifteenth century and the first two decades of the sixteenth, and then expanded again into processional form and played over three days. By this time the Passion play had become a cycle. (5) Throughout its history, plays were added, such as plays V and I; deleted, as was the Wives' play of the Assumption; deleted and included again - which was the history of the Last Supper play; divided - plays VIII, IX and X; expanded, as was play XIV, and there were very many revisions throughout the cycle. The various, late and differing texts which we have therefore contain material which was the result of a discontinuous process of composition over many years by several, if not many, authors and revisers. When we talk of "the" Chester Cycle it is this gathering of material to which we refer, and if we are to claim any "literary integrity" it must be of a kind which respects the multiple authorship and discontinuous composition which created this range of literary material. If we look at

(5) Clopper, "History and Development," p.243.

the texts of Chester to see whether they show interest in sign and signification of meaning, a surprising fact emerges: despite textual variation, despite multiple authorship and continual revision, there is enough evidence of a corporate and enduring interest in this topic for us to be able to talk of the "literary integrity" of the cycle.

An analysis of the explicit uses of sign vocabulary throughout the texts shows a marked uniformity between the texts, and a widespread interest in sign throughout the cycle. (6) There are forty four exact correspondences between all MSS in the use of sign vocabulary. There are a further thirteen cases where the difference between the MSS is a matter either of number, for example, where a text has "signes" for "signe," or of a choice of a related word, for example, where a text has "token" for "tokeninge." There is one further case where MS. B has "singe" in error for "signe" (Hm. XI, 143), but evidently means "signe" and can therefore be considered with the above instances of correspondence between texts. There are a further ten instances of divergence between MS. H and the Group MSS as a group. In six of these cases, five of which fall in the Old Testament, MS. H has sign vocabulary not in the Group. In the other four cases, the Group MSS agree in having sign vocabulary which is not in MS. H. Three out of these four also occur in the Old Testament

(6) I have listed all occurrences of vocabulary based on 'sign' or 'token' in Appendix 1. This argument is based on that list.

section. There is one further case where MSS. Hm and B of the Group have an example of sign vocabulary but the other two Group manuscripts AR omit it along with a larger group of lines. (It is not in H.) There are four further occasions (in MSS Hm, A, AR, H) when manuscripts have sign vocabulary in error. In every case this would appear to be purely scribal having arisen from the orthographic similarity of the correct word to the sign term. Thus three of the errors relate to sign/sin, and the other to token (=sign)/token (=took). These mistakes do bear witness to the scribes' consciousness that sign was a recurring feature of the cycle.

There is therefore a high degree of agreement between the texts, and particularly in the New Testament plays where the bulk of references to sign appears. But it is not just agreement between manuscripts to which we should attend. Since they were all copied out from the Chester play-book, the Regenall, the divergences between them are more interesting than their similarity if we are to gain a proper sense of how 'normal' a concern with sign was for the various authors. We shall look at some of these variations shortly. What is remarkable is the frequency of reference to sign throughout the cycle: there are sixty-nine such references, excluding the last-mentioned scribal errors. Only plays I, II, X, XII, XVIII and XXIV lack such explicitness about sign, and they do not all by any means lack an interest in

signification, or fail to include signs. A simple word-count, though it cannot represent the richness of sign in Chester, can represent it enough to establish a prima facie case: different Chester authors and revisers were conscious of sign as an important dimension of the cycle and their contributions attempted to further this established interest.

As the above account shows, the problem of textual variation does not affect the cycle's explicitness about sign to any marked degree. Even where there is variation, there is still evidence, in one of the variants at least, of an interest, and perhaps a scrupulosity about the use of sign vocabulary. It is not now possible for us to determine which of two readings is the earlier, and it seems inappropriate to claim 'correctness' for one text over another simply because it uses sign vocabulary and the other, equally comprehensible, does not. However, having discovered the importance of sign throughout the cycle and between the texts, we can establish that a variant which does use the customary sign vocabulary is more "normative" than one which does not, and that the inclusion of an interest in sign, whether or not represented in explicit vocabulary, is evidence of "normative" creation, that is, creation in keeping with the cycle's most frequently recurring themes. We can also judge which of two variants more finely articulates the presentation which sign tends to receive in the rest of the cycle.

In play XV, Christ rejects the Old Testament sacraments after he has fulfilled them. In MS. Hm he refers to them first as "signes and shadowes" (70) and then as "figures" (72). MS. H also contains this idea, and makes reference to such signs at both places. Neither text could be called more "normative" than the other in content or in expression. But MS.H by reading "figures" for the "sygnes" in Hm, 70 avoids confusion with those signs which characterize the New Testament: Christ's miracles. It is much clearer in showing that the signs now being rejected are the prefigurative ones of the Old Testament. One cannot say here which reading is historically more correct. Not having the Regenall, we cannot know whether H's "figures" in line 70 is not an accidental transference by the scribe of the "figures" two lines later. There is no doubt, however, that the H reading is better in a literary sense, that is, more effective as an articulation of the theological point being made.

MS. H seems to have the more normative reading in the passage where Herod welcomes Christ who has been sent to him by Pilate. MS. Hm reads: "Jesu, mych have I hard of thee,/Some vertue fayne nowe would I see" (XVI, 171-2). The context makes it clear that Herod is hoping for a sign, and the language elsewhere in the passage is similar to that used generally in the cycle. Herod asks Christ, for example: "prove some of thy postie" (176). This is a standard request for sign, expressed in the usual terms. One wonders therefore why "vertue"

was used in line 172. The Bible reads "et sperabat signum aliquod videre ab eo fieri" (Luke xxiii. 8). MS. H is therefore closer to the Bible and is more normative in reading "signe" for "vertue." The Hm reading must have been in the Regenall, however, since the Group MSS have it: the scribes could hardly have arrived at it independently. We therefore have to accept that a decidedly abnormal reading was present in the Chester play-book but that a more normative one probably was also. It is impossible to say whether one is a revision of the other and, if so, which one. I would suggest tentatively that the H reading is a normative revision of the Hm. reading, but speculative possibilities are endless. The fact is that one of the texts represents a more normative interest in using the customary sign vocabulary.

Though MS. Hm has been less normative and less sensitive to sign in the two instances discussed, it is far more interested in sign than MS. H is in its version of the immediate responses to Christ's death. Quotation of Centurio's speech in both texts is revealing. Each is based on Mark xv.39 which reads, "Videns autem Centurio, qui ex adverso stabat, quia sic clamans expirasset, ait: Vere hic homo Filius Dei erat."

MS. Hm: Lordinges, I say you sickerlye,
this was Godes Sonne almightie.
No other, forsooth, leeve will I,
for needes so yt must be.
I knowe by manner of his crye
hee hasse fulfilled the prophecye
and godhead shewed apertlye
in him, all men may knowe. (XVIA, 360-7)

MS. H: Lordings, I say you sickerly
that we have wrought wilfully,
for I know by the prophesy
that Gods Sonne is he.
Therefore, sirs, very ferd am I
to hear this noyce and this crye.
I am ashamed, verely,
this uncooth sight to see. (App.1c, 1-8)

Neither passage contains explicit reference to sign, though Hm's "shewed apertlye" is a phrase frequently used in the texts for signification. The speeches are markedly dissimilar in their attention to sign and to the belief which is a regular product of a recognition of sign. Hm presents first the identification of Christ as God's Son with the additional point that he is "almightie." Both points are recurrent in the cycle. It then stresses this identification as a matter for belief, both the centurion's belief and that of "all men." The cry is envisaged as a sign which, quite characteristically in Chester, proves the fulfilment of prophecy and is revelatory of Godhead. The H version, however, underplays the signification of the event and emphasizes the emotional response. As with the Hm version, God's Son is recognized by the Centurion, but he knows as a result of the prophecy not by a revelatory sign. The cry, like the sight of Christ, is a matter for dismay; it is not used as a sign. Put at its strongest, the linguistic signification of the prophetic texts could be said to have enlightened the Centurion, but one certainly does not feel that the author is concerned with linguistic sign here. MS. H is not interested in the belief achieved by the Centurion or in the fideistic imperative which the scene offers

to all men.

The difference between the texts continues in the reply by Cayphas. In MS. Hm he accuses the Centurion of being unable to see properly: "thou must be smuted; thou canst not read" (XVIA, 369). The accusation is wholly consistent with a cycle which has developed a connection between sign and sight: has shown physical and spiritual illumination in connection with sign, and has affirmed that those who do not recognize Christ's signs for what they are and for what they prove must be spiritually blind. Cayphas's reply is deeply ironic therefore for he reveals even more fully his own blindness to the truth in his accusation of another. MS. H's Cayphas, on the other hand, does not reply in such visual terms. Instead there is a rather banal order to be quiet:

peace, and speak not of that dede,
for of him thou getts no meede!
What needes the so to say? (10-12)

The third main difference between the two versions lies in how they introduce the Longeus episode. Both MSS have the miracle, and therefore both an example of a sign which is intrinsically related to the theme of illumination in the way that the healing of Caecus was. But only the Group texts embark upon the episode in a consciously signficatory way. MS. H simply presents the spearing as part of the continuing hatred of Cayphas. He has rejected the Centurion's words out of hand; has interpreted them if anything, as an attempt to get reward; he now moves to the next assault: "But

Longeus, take this spear in hand;/to pearce his hart
look thou ne wand" (13-14). In Hm the whole Longeus
episode is significatory and ironically so because
Cayphas has asked Longeus to spear Christ specifically
to disprove the claims made by the Centurion. To
Cayphas the spearing will be a sign that Christ is not
"Godes Sonne almightie": "But when thou seest his hart
bleede,/lettes se what thou can saye" (370-1). These
two lines precede the command to Longeus, which is
shared by both MSS, and they substitute for H's weak
lines "for of him thou getts no meede!/What needes the
so to say?" They are not only creating an obvious
signification for the scene but the irony with which
they do so is itself normative, for evil characters in
Chester regularly set out to prove something and,
having thus accepted the significatory value of what
they will find out, then have to cope with its proving
the opposite of what they wish.

The version represented in Hm may be a revision of
that in MS. H; the version in MS. H may have been
written independently of that now in the Group MSS, or
it may be a poorly remembered version of it. What seems
impossible to believe is that the H version is a
revision of MS. Hm's version. All the data permits us
to say is that one of the accounts of the scene is
decidedly more normative in all respects relating to
sign and signification. Whether it is normative by
creation or revision is another matter and, given the
nature of Chester's compositional history, the

distinction is perhaps not an important one.

The nature of variation in Chester is such that we cannot always claim that one author has seen the cycle's themes more clearly or has expressed them more normatively than the other. Play V exists in two versions, one possessed by the Group MSS, one possessed by MS. H. The central material of Balaam and his ass and then Balaam with Balaack is shared, though scribal error in Hm would appear to have led to the omission of one of the "cursings." (7) The versions are different in the flanking material. They have different accounts of Moses receiving the Ten Commandments at the start of the play, and after Balaam's final nativity prophecy, MS. Hm develops, in narrative and dialogue, the story of the Israelites and the Midianitish women, while MS. H has a processus prophetarum. Yet, neither version is to be wholly preferred; neither makes a more coherent contribution to the drama; both are normative, in their different ways, when they present sign and signification.

One can see why the Balaam and ass story appealed to the author of play V. It contains a miracle in which an animal is shown to have greater spiritual sight than its master. The spiritual sight and blindness of the ass and Balaam are represented in terms of physical sight. The Ass has stopped because it can see the

(7) MS. Hm refers at lines 316 and 318 to three "cursings" having occurred before the final prophecy of the orietur stella. This is correct biblically, and H has all three, but MS. Hm has only dramatized two of them.

Angel: "That sight that before mee I see/maketh mee downe to lowte" (Hm, 230-1; H, 175-6). While the brute beast kneels in worship, Balaam is blinded by his evil intention to contravene God's command and curse the Israelites (Hm, 240-1; H, 185-6). This representation of spiritual insight in terms of physical sight is to be found also in the miracles of plays XIII and XVIIA. Characters' capacity to see with insight is one of Chester's chief themes. The story of Balaam and Balaack is intrinsically connected with seeing since Balaam is taken up to the mountain to look down on the people he is to curse (Numbers xxii.41). There, the play is able also to exploit signification, for the scene means one thing to Balaam and another to Balaack or, to put it more precisely, it occasions only hatred in Balaack. Balaack leads Balaam to the mountain and says:

Lo, Balaham, now thou seest here
 Godes people all in feare.
 Cittye, castle, and ryvere -
 looke now. How lykes thee? (Hm, 272-5) (8)

What Balaack sees, he sees only as opposition to himself. When Balaam looks he can see much deeper into the sight's meaning:

How may I curse here in this place
 that people that God blessed hasse?
 In them is both might and grace
 and that is ever well seene
 (Hm, 280-3; H, 217-20)

When Balaam goes to the north side of the mountain the significatory power of what he sees is even more

(8) MS. H lacks this speech and thus lacks the phrase "How lykes thee?" which we encounter in a later episode of signification: Pilate's inscription (XVIIA, 222).

evident. After four lines in which he describes the beauty of the world below him, he concludes "I wott well that God made all this,/his folke to lyve in joye and blys." (Hm. 308-9; H, 269-70). Balaam can see God's grace, his might and his love signified by the condition of the chosen people. This must have been a major reason for the inclusion of this episode which is unique among the cycles. This material provides an excellent preparation for the New Testament action in which men and women see significance or blindly react against signs and in which the chosen people is transmuted into the community of those who believe from the signs they have received.

In both versions of play V there is a further agreement in that Balaack, quite unbiblically, is brought to a final recognition of God's power through the signs he has seen. (9) In MS. Hm, the evidence of God's power would appear to be the whole preceding episode in which Balaam has been unable to do anything except bless the Israelites. Balaack concludes:

...God is both crop and roote,
and lorde of heaven and hell.
Now see I well noe man one lyve
agaynst him is able to stryve. (Hm, 830-3)

The processus prophetarum, although only found in the H version, is tied into the same enlightenment of Balaack that we find in the Hm version. These prophecies certainly work predictively; they are also interpreted

(9) In Numbers xxiv.25 we read merely that "Balac quoque via, qua venerat, rediit." Neither version, of course, implies that Balaack has been converted, even if he has been illuminated.

exegetically as signs, but they function also as evidential signs in the same way as those of play VIII. It is after these prophecies that Balaack makes the speech corresponding to the one in Hm just quoted.

At the point where MS. H is developing its prophecies as signs, MS. Hm is being equally normative in the story of the Midianitish women. This episode contributes to the cycle's interest in idolatry, an interest which I have suggested it may have because idols are false and useless signs and because worshipping them is a useless sacramental sign. The Israelites are brought to idolatry in a way consistent with the cycle's attention to sight. The Israelites allow their physical sight to take precedence over their spiritual insight:

For when they had of them a sight
manye of them agaynste right
gave themselfe with all theyre might
those women for to please. (Hm, 396-9)

The women are described as being "full of illusion," and this perversion and subjugation of the Israelites' spiritual sight is the preliminary to their use of false signs in the worship of idols. MS. H, on the other hand, does not lack an interest in the Israelites seeing and responding, but it has it much earlier in the play and the response is a proper one. When God appears to the people in a blazing light the Israelites evidently react correctly to what they see:

Ah, good lord, much of mighte,
thou comes with so great lighte;
we bene so afraide of this sighte,
no man dare speak ne looke. (H, 25-8)

The two versions agree in having a sign of God's power offered to the Israelites in the early Moses episode. They disagree on what it is. In MS. Hm concentration is very much upon the Ten Commandments and Moses, referring to them, says "By this sight now e yee may see/that hee [God] is pearles of postee" (37-8). The same lines occur at 37-8 of MS. H but they refer to the light which has encompassed God as he appeared to the Israelites. In one version it is textual sign which proves God's power; in the other it is visual sign.

As the above account shows, the authors of both versions of play V were creating in a normative way. Their contributions were intended to cohere with the cycle's themes as dramatized elsewhere. But, more importantly, writing towards the norm evidently meant including signs, visual and linguistic, including material which related to physical and spiritual sight, and including men's responses to sign, their rejection of it or illumination by it.

To this point, we have been discussing textual variants and alternative versions and these inevitably bear witness to the discontinuous composition of the cycle. There are places, however, where there are no significant variants or alternative versions but where it is at least possible, indeed highly likely, that the extant single version is the product of discontinuous composition. To the critic educated in the concepts of the single author and the structurally unified text

this appears to offer a major challenge, but it does not always offer in Chester the kind of challenge which might be expected since the plays can achieve internal unity, and consistency with the cycle at large despite this. The unity and consistency which I see in the cycle's parts I do not propose because of critical dogma. They are literary facts which must lead us to consider the creative intentions of the authors and revisers of the cycle.

The prophets section of play VIII (269-345) and the opening thirty nine lines of play XIII were both proposed by Salter as late revisions. (10) There is no doubt that each section is stylistically unlike the rest of the play. Of course it is difficult to prove Salter incorrect. What seems important, and possible, is to investigate whether these "revisions" have been integrated with their plays, and whether they contribute normatively to the cycle.

In both cases, we are dealing with instances of sign, for the prophecies act as signs to Herod of Christ's identity and true reign, and the opening speech of play XIII is a major instance of self-revelatory linguistic sign from Christ. This signficatory function appears to be their chief role in the plays. In fact, those lines in play VIII which impart a signficatory function to the prophetic texts are not in the passage which Salter suggests is a

(10) F. M. Salter, "The Banns of the Chester Plays," Review of English Studies, 15 (1939), 432-57, pp.445 and 449.

revision. Herod's request that the prophecies be searched for "the truth" occurs at 257-68, the Doctor's explanation of what "by prophecie is proved" at 346-9, and Herod's angry reaction to these signs, following this, at 350. The significatory fabric of the episode is not part of the proposed revision. One must conclude that the material in the disputed section represents at most a revision of content or style with no implications for the way in which the prophecies are seen to function.

In play XIII, we discover a similar structural integrity for the opening lines. If we examine their source in the Bible the following rough scheme emerges:

lines 1-3 : John viii.12
line 8 : John x.30 (a phrasal substitute for viii.19)
lines 18-21 : John x.11
lines 26-8 : John x.16
lines 31-5 and Latin : John viii.31-2.

The opening use of John viii neatly continues the use of this chapter from the episode of the "Woman Taken in Adultery," which is found at John viii.1-11. The author then leaves chapter viii for chapter x. Though several of the ideas enunciated by Christ in x can be found in his sermon at viii, the author has preferred x because it is less disrupted by debate. The sermon of viii is punctuated with Jewish arguments and Christ's answering rebukes. The author returns to viii at the point where Christ turns aside from his enemies to speak to those Jews who believed: "Dicebat ergo Jesus ad eo, qui crediderunt ei, Judaeos: Si vos manseritis in sermone meo..." (viii.31). He thus re-establishes the biblical

sequence whereby the healing of Caecus which occurs in John ix can follow the speech of Christ in viii. So far, this is an inspired revision if it is, in fact, an insertion of material not previously in the play. Further investigation shows how totally this speech forms part of the whole conception of the play, for the material which the author borrowed from John x in this speech is correspondingly absent from its proper biblical position, namely, with Christ's speech between the "Caecus" and "Stoning" episodes. I have already, in chapter I, shown how this opening speech can be seen to fit the development of sign in these Ministry plays. We have three possibilities: firstly, that the lines are not the product of revision but have been written in a different style because of their importance as self-revelation by Christ at the opening of an account of his great signs; secondly, that they are merely metrical or stylistic revision of material already in the play; thirdly, that they are wholly, in content and style, the work of a reviser. If the third of these possibilities is accepted then we have yet another excellent example of normative revision. If the second, then we are dealing with revision which respected the value of material already present in the cycle, and merely sought to highlight it by stylistic means.

The evidence of revision in Chester is clearly stronger than simple metrical discontinuity. Documentary evidence exists to show that the opening of play XIV was once different from the form it has in the

extant texts. Clopper has demonstrated, using the records of payment to different characters, that up to and including the 1550 performance of the cycle the anointing of Christ by Mary followed the version in John xii.1-8. This is what we would expect given the strong Johannine bias of the ministry plays. But Clopper correctly points out that the text we have places the action in the house of Simon the Leper (Mark 14.3-9), whereas the version in John places it in the house of Lazarus where Simon is not present. (11) The difference is that Simon Leper has been introduced after 1550. I think that this also has implications for the development of the anointing into the section where Simon and Judas object to what they have seen and Christ explains it with a parable. This passage, based on Luke vii. 36-50, was presumably absent before 1550 when Simon was not on the pay list for characters, and the episode of the anointing followed John. It is relatively easy to see why the reviser brought Simon into the beginning of the play. By doing this he accentuated Christ's signs by including both of the men whose very bodies constituted signs of Christ's identity. The speeches of Simon and Lazarus are clearly paralleled in declaring the manifest evidence in them of Jesus's power, and these speeches do not otherwise contribute to the action (XIV, 17-20 and 25-8). In the later addition, Simon's reaction to Christ's passive acceptance of Mary's anointing furthers the cycle's

(11) Clopper, "History and Development," p.232.

pattern of men questioning the significance of what they see. Christ's identity is also tied up in the significance of his inaction, for after Simon has said, "A, Judas, why doth Jesus soe?" he goes on to speculate "And if hee [Christ] verey prophet were,/hee should knowe hir life here" (XIV, 61-2). This revision was not the most normative of those carried out on Chester. Although there is the attention to sign and significance which we have noted above, the section after the anointing is too concerned with Christ's parabolic utterance to fit easily into a cycle in which parables do not otherwise appear. In addition, the significant action of Christ here is actually inaction, and this is very unlike the ministry plays. But there is some evidence, nevertheless, that the addition of the character of Simon contributed to the existing development of sign and signification.

In the above cases we can see that revision, if it took place, either did not affect the development of the cycle's signification pattern, or contributed to it. We have now studied textual variation in single words, speeches, and alternative versions of a play. We have looked at three proposed revisions of a speech and sections of plays, each of which implies discontinuous composition for the cycle. In all cases we have found an attention to sign, and suggestions that revision and creation have been directed to those interests believed by the revisers and authors to be already central to the cycle. The last section of this chapter enlarges

discussion to take account of a whole play and its contribution to the cycle.

The biblical account of Mary's purification and Christ's debate with the doctors would seem to encourage the association of the two episodes in a single play. Though twelve years separate the events, they share a location: the temple in Jerusalem. In addition, the proximity of the episodes to each other in the Bible might have encouraged the linking of them in a play. They are recounted in Luke ii.22-51, and only verse forty provides a nominal separation: "Puer autem crescebat, et confortabatur, plenus sapientia: et gratia Dei erat in illo." Yet only in the weavers' pageant of the Coventry cycle and in play XI of Chester are the two episodes thus linked. I believe that the association was created in Chester in order to provide a transition between the nativity section and the plays of the early ministry. (12) This transitional function is revealed by a study of sign in the play.

It might well be argued that a play so apparently lacking in internal unity could not have a definite function in the cycle. The two episodes are written in different metres: the "Purification" and the final speech in which there is reference back to Simeon appear in rime couée; the "Doctors" episode is

(12) Woolf writes of the transitional nature of the various "Doctors" episodes. She considers the event to be inherently transitional between nativity and ministry. Woolf, p.212. I believe that in Chester, transition depends upon the joining of the "Doctors" with the "Purification."

completely composed in cross-rhyme. (13) This metrical difference derives from the use of a different source for the second episode. The "Purification," as we saw in chapter II, is based on the Stanzaic Life of Christ. But of the "Doctors" episode, Woolf writes: "The curious feature of the five surviving plays of the doctors is that four of them are closely related, Towneley, Chester and Coventry all being variants of the play first recorded in the York cycle." (14) The York cycle version is written in cross-rhyme. This does not seem to argue for a close relationship between the two parts of the play. Even if we examine the play in terms of signification we find that explicit reference is made to signs and tokenings in the first half but not in the second. These differences between the two halves of the play are indubitable. However, they do not deny the play an intelligible function in the cycle, for there are major elements which link the two episodes and, in addition, the play is successful in providing a transition precisely because it marries internal unity with variation. I would like to set out first the ways in which the play is internally united, and then to discuss the means by which it effects a

(13) Salter noted this as partial grounds for claiming that two hands were responsible for the play, and that the cycle had been emended by a cross-rhyme reviser. "Banns," RES, 15, p.452.

(14) Woolf, p.212. Hardin Craig was even more specific, considering the Chester account to be "an imperfect version, just such as would have resulted from oral transmission." Hardin Craig, ed., Two Coventry Corpus Christi Plays, Early English Text Society, Extra Series, 87 for 1902, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1959), pp.xxxiii-iv.

transition from nativity to ministry sections.

Chester's recurrent interest in light is present in both parts. Simeon's gloss on the Nunc dimittis includes the line "Lightninge is comen nowe through thee" (173). And towards the end of the "Doctors" episode Mary declares, on finding her lost child: "Nowe blessed be hee us hither brought;/in land lyves non so bright" (303-4). Also, both episodes are concerned with the Mosaic law at the point in history where it is fulfilled and superseded. Mary comes to be purified according to Moses' Law "though yt be no neede" (127), and Christ shows his knowledge of Mosaic Law to the doctors. In addition, the relationship of characters to Holy Writ is brought out in both episodes. In the first, Simeon tries to emend the biblical text; in the second, Christ shows his divine authority by his miraculous knowledge of the text. In both parts, though with a variation which I will discuss later, our attention is drawn to the relationship of the different Persons of the Godhead. Simeon refers to the coming of "Godes Sonne" (14) and Anna looks to the coming of Christ "from the Father in majestie" (43). In the "Doctors" episode Christ frequently stresses his relationship with the Father (233, 235-8, 282, 298, 320). The frequent attention which Chester pays to the mystery of the Godhead makes this a more notable parallel between the episodes than might at first appear.

The unity in the play mainly derives, however,

from the dominance of sign in its action. In the first episode, the miraculous appearances of the word "virgin" on the two occasions when Simeon has substituted "a good woman" constitute signs to him of the truth of the virgin birth. That he first discovers the miracle when searching for the time of God's coming (53-6), as well as its manner, gives to this sign the portentous quality possessed by another major nativity sign: the nativity star. Then, when Mary and Joseph come to the temple, Joseph offers a sign of her virginity:

A signe I offer here alsoe
of virgin waxe, as other moo,
in tokeninge shee have lived oo
in full devotion.
And, syr Simeon, leeve well this:
as cleane as this waxe nowe is,
as cleane is my wife, iwys,
of all corruption. (143-50) (15)

This sign, therefore, also attests for Simeon, the true identity of Christ. In the second half of the play, the action again centres on signs when the child Christ displays his divinity by his miraculous knowledge, and thus reveals himself as the future Saviour.

In both halves of the play we find Chester's characteristic juxtaposition of contrasted spiritual

(15) Foster suggests, and Wilson largely agrees with her, that the Stanzaic Life of Christ may have influenced the scene of the presentation itself. I am struck instead by the fact that the explanation of the candle here is far more specific than the candle is a sign and specific about what it signifies than is the passage upon which it was possibly based: Life, 2877-84. If one is strict about the parallel, it is actually the case that neither the Life nor the Legenda Aurea contains the significance which Joseph gives the candle in XI.

attitudes and, as so often, the responses juxtaposed are being made to miraculous sign. Simeon apparently cannot rise above earthly knowledge to realize a power by which miraculous signs are created, but Anna can:

SIMEON

Dame Anne, thou may se well here
this is amended in good manere;
for a wonder thinge yt weare
to fall by any waye.
Therefore, as yt was amisse,
I have written that soother ys:
that a good woman shall iwys
conceive, and not a maye.

ANNA

Syr, marvayle yoe nothings thereon;
forsooth God will take kynd in man.
Through his godhead ordayne hee can
a mayd a child to beare.
For to that high comly kinge
impossible is nothings.
Therefore I leeve yt no leasinge,
but sooth all that is here. (64-79)

In the second half, Tertius Doctor fears the deleterious effect which Christ's signs will have on his own authority, while Primus Doctor reacts with commendable admiration for the child's knowledge:

TERTIUS DOCTOR

Lett him wend forth on his wayes;
for and he dwell, withouten dread,
the people full sonne will him prayse
well more then wee, for all our deede.

PRIMUS DOCTOR

This is nothings to my entent;
such speech to spend I read we spare.
And wyde in world as I have went,
yett found I never so farrely fare. (259-66)

Once it is accepted that play XI is not internally fragmented, it becomes easier to entertain the possibility that it has a definite function within the

developing New Testament plays. This transitional function depends upon the special blend of variety and unity between the episodes. With the variety, the audience can be carried more easily from the nativity period of Christ's life to the ministry period; without the play's internal unity, the two periods would remain distinct and the audience would be thrust abruptly from the earlier to the later.

The "Purification" and the "Doctors" share a quality which makes them suitable for transitional purposes, particularly if joined in one play. Each has an ambivalent relationship to its nearest context in the life of Christ. By this I mean that each is suggestive of that context but distinguishable from it. This ambivalence is inherent in the episodes' biblical position but accentuated in the drama.

Chronologically, the "Purification" is an extension of the nativity action. Chester envisages it as happening after the traditional forty days from the birth, at which time Christ is obviously still an infant; in Luke it follows almost immediately upon the story of the shepherds. But Chester also emphasizes the association of the "Purification" with the nativity plays by structural parallels.

As with the stories of the shepherds and the Magi, the story of Simeon begins in spiritual need and ends in the Adoration of the Child. In all three, signs precede the child's epiphany: the nativity star in the earlier plays, the miracle of the writing for Simeon.

In all three, Joseph verbally confirms the virgin birth, which is the central nativity sign of Christ's divinity. In the earlier plays, this supports the evidence of Joseph's aged appearance, and in play XI it takes the form of his explaining the significance of the symbolic candle. Woolf notes that the interpretation chosen for the candle - that it represented Mary's virginity - was the less common one. (16) More common was the idea that it signified the "lumen ad revelationem gentium." This latter interpretation would have enabled the author to develop further the cycle's established interest in light and to show yet again the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy. Instead, he chose that significance which would further his structural paralleling of the "Purification" with the nativity action. Through Joseph, then, the central sign of the virgin birth is again mediated. In all three stories, men who have received signs are not immediate in their full spiritual response to them. Simeon finds the need to prove the truth of the first sign he receives by again expunging the word "virgin" from his text: "Naye, faye, after I will assaye/whether this miracle be verey" (60-1). The shepherds were held back by their incomprehension of the nativity star (VII, 300-57); the Magi were prudently cautious in case it should prove "some fantasye" (VIII, 85). In the Simeon scene, as in the nativity plays, an angelic intermediary between God and man is present and, as

(16) Woolf, p.199.

earlier, the Angel is associated with the signs offered to men. In play VII, he gives the reason why the star was sent, in the Gloria; in play VIII his presence confirms that the star is not a fantasy; in play XI he is directly responsible for the miraculous changes in the writing.

It is clear that each of the nativity plays has its individual character and function, and the parallels noted above should not obscure the many differences between them. There are these basic similarities, however, which for the onlooker would surely associate the "Purification" with the earlier material. Where this episode parts company with the nativity sequence is in its location and in the 'direction' of its actions. Although it climaxes in an adoration like the others, this adoration takes place in the temple, not a stable; and the child has come to its adorer. Simeon has not travelled in search of Christ like the shepherds and Magi. These changes are sufficiently fundamental to the action to modify the association of the episode with the nativity plays.

The "Doctors" episode has a similarly ambivalent relationship with the ministry plays. Like them, it shows a powerful Christ directly giving signs of his identity and nature to men. It also shows the first of many confrontations in the ministry between Christ and mocking opponents who fear loss of public acclaim. But what gives the action its point also removes the section from too close an association with the

ministry: Christ, however powerful, is a child, not the adult of the ministry. His knowledge appears miraculous because of that. Also, however much Mary regards Christ's sayings as commands to be obeyed, Christ's relationship is with his parents and not yet with disciples.

We are carried easily, therefore, from the nativity into the ministry because the first half of play XI is partially retrospective and the second half partially anticipatory. The essential internal development which provides the basis of the transition, however, is the change in the kinds of signs offered. The signs which Simeon receives both in the miraculous writing and in Joseph's candle are directed first towards confirming the virgin birth. In the "Doctors" episode, on the other hand, deity is proved not through such intermediary signs but in Christ's very action of giving signs himself. Accordingly, the Angel who was a conveyor of signs in the first half has no such place in the second half nor, indeed, at any later point in the ministry. Through the transformation in the kind of sign presented in this one play, the audience is brought out of a nativity dominated experience and is prepared for the kind of action recurrent in the ministry.

An important link which I have not yet described furthers this transition created by the different kinds of sign. In the first half, Simeon is given a prophecy about future signs; that prophecy is fulfilled by the

signs in the "Doctors" episode. Simeon's speech, which is based on Luke ii.34, bears some examination. He says:

And Marye, mother, to thee I saye:
thy sonne that I have seen todaye
is comen - I tell thee in good faye -
for fallinge of many fonne;
and to releeve in good araye
manye a man, as hee well maye,
in Israell or hee wend awaye
that shall leeve him upon.
Many signes hee shall shewe
in which untrewē shall non trowe.
(175-84)

The Vulgate reads: "Et benedixit illis Simeon, et dixit ad Mariam, matrem eius: Ecce positus est hic in ruinam, et in resurrectionem multorum in Israel, et in signum, cui contradicetur." According to the Latin, Christ himself is the sign which shall be spoken against.

Although on one occasion he uses the gerund form "fallinge," the Chester author consistently translates the passage by verbal, rather than nominal, constructions: Christ has come to Earth "to releeve in good araye"; "many signes hee shall shewe." Certainly the author may have been prompted to this by a desire for clarity, but it was not just clarity, I believe, which led him to translate "in signum" by line 183 rather than by using a nominal construction. The translation "manye signes hee shall shewe" indicates that the author was altering the Bible to direct the minds of the hearers to that kind of sign which was to characterize the succeeding ministry section, namely, deeds actually performed by Christ. The change to these signs is reflected also in the change of emphasis from

the power of the Trinity, specifically praised by Simeon after receiving his signs (82) to the more Johannine emphasis on the relationship of the First and Second Persons. The rest of the Ministry is characterized by this relationship of power.

It is possible, then, to demonstrate through a study of signs that elements of internal unity and variety make play XI transitional between the nativity and ministry sections. This raises anew the question of normative creation.

We have already noted the major differences between the episodes. The documentary references to them do nothing to counteract the impression that play XI is the product of more than one creative act. The "Doctors" episode is not specifically mentioned until the Late Banns (dated 1548-1561); yet the "Purification" presumably belongs to the oldest layer of the cycle's composition since the smiths with their play, the Purification, appear in both the Harley list of guilds (c.1500) and the original Early Banns (1505-21). One cannot say with certainty, however, that the reference to the "Doctors" only in the Late Banns proves the episode's absence earlier, for in the extant texts the play, with its "Doctors" section, is still simply entitled the Purification. Also, neither set of Banns actually describes the cycle as we have it, so the presence or absence of a particular episode in the Banns is not a wholly reliable guide to the date of that episode's composition.

We are left with a fairly simple choice: either the author who wrote the first half of play XI was responsible for joining the "Doctors" to it, or he was not. If the first alternative is true, then the author of the rime couée "Purification" was content to borrow the cross-rhyme version of the "Doctors" from another cycle. We must then credit him with appreciating the relevance of York's account to Chester and, perhaps, with appreciating that the transitional nature of the play would not be vitiated by an internal change of metre. If the second alternative is true, and I feel that Chester's history of revision makes it more likely, then we have to account for the internal unity and sophisticated function of the play as a whole despite its discontinuous composition. We can only do so by claiming that the reviser who added the "Doctors" did so with a strong sense of what themes the first episode invited and the cycle as a whole encouraged. We have to accept, therefore, that major acts of revision such as could introduce a complete episode into the cycle, could be carried out in a way which emphasized and, indeed, articulated more finely, the cycle's existing interests. Chester's leading concern with sign and Simeon's prophecy of Christ's future signs may have been all the reviser needed to prompt his inclusion of the "Doctors"; but in doing so he added considerable structural sophistication to the cycle by offering a transition between its major movements. This play and the sections we have already studied prove that, even

if Chester's compositional history is full of revision and accretion it is also a history of normative writing by men who respected the literary integrity of the cycle.

CHAPTER V

SIGN, BELIEF, AND EVIL

Chester affirms a simple distinction between good and evil characters, and we are never in any real doubt about which class a particular character belongs to. Despite this, and despite the didactic obviousness of the cycle juxtaposing characters with opposite reactions to sign, Chester manages to show an interesting range of spiritual attitude in the good characters, and achieves a major literary and didactic triumph in its varied account of evil's different perversions of sign and signification. This chapter shows that the Chester authors are not simply interested in expressing good and evil in terms of a straightforward contrast between recognition and non-recognition of sign.

Good characters are not only those who, like the woman taken in adultery, Mary, and Nicodemus, promptly recognize events as signs and appreciate their fideistic significance. We have seen that the shepherds have to move hesitantly from their ignorance to understanding. They do recognize that the star is a divine sign because they ask the Lord to tell them why it was sent (VII, 340-57). But, although the author inconsistently hints that they know the star will lead them to their "elders lord" (339), the episode stresses their ignorance of the star's meaning and their need for its explication, and in this Chester differs from the other cycles where the shepherds can show a considerable knowledge

of prophecy. (1) It is their subsequently slow, yet delightful, mysterious, and instructive appreciation of the meaning of the Angel's song which the author concentrates on, not a prompt recognition of significance leading to a statement of belief.

In the episode of Salome, the salvific nature of the sign is as important as the midwife's perception that it identifies the baby as God, for the author is concerned to use the conversion of Salome from doubt by a healing sign in order to reveal the soteriological message of the birth. Unlike the author of the Ludus Coventriae play, the Chester author is not essentially interested in Salome herself, but rather in the general admonition that belief should come from sign and in the facts that this episode of conversion reveals the promise of God to the sinner - salvation is now possible - and, by its physical nature in the healing of Salome's hand, promises that the salvation will be physical - we will rise in our bodies.

The story of the Magi also includes more than a simple recognition of sign. Though as heirs to Balaam's prophecy they know what the Nativity sign will be and what it will betoken, and although they long to see it, and they pray for it, the Magi are wary when it appears. The author makes it clear that they are believers, and permits them first to recognize the star as a sign (VIII, 73-84). But, having established their rectitude, he shows that it is not necessarily wise to leap to a recognition of sign. The first

(1) Towneley XII, 332-403; York XV, 1-24; Ludus Coventriae, 147: 26-148: 61.

King says:

Yea, lest this bee some fantasye
yett praye we all speciallye
for if hee bee borne verelye
more sygnes he will us shewe.
(VIII, 85-8)

The point of this development upon the basic scheme of sign and recognition is that we are to see at the meeting of Herod with the Magi that things can be presented as signs which are either insignificant or signify something different from what is claimed for them. If the kings who observed Antichrist's signs had shown the caution of the kings at the nativity they might not have fallen into "heresy" (XXIII, 590). The hesitation of the Magi is therefore a spiritually proper act included as part of the play's message about the existence of false sign and its dangers.

It is clear also that the author of the Simeon story is interested in more than simply dramatizing a recognition of sign. Rosemary Woolf, though she praises later parts of play XI, is not attracted to the opening scene:

In the Chester cycle the attention is also upon Symeon but not in so illuminating a way. The author is here once again following the Stanzaic Life of Christ, and this accounts for the play's most startling and disconcerting features, namely the long episode of Symeon's twofold and ineffectual attempt to expunge the word 'virgin' from Isaiah's prophecy and to replace it by 'good woman.' This story...is certainly an infelicitous invention since it destroys the dignity of Symeon and the Chester author was unwise to adopt it. (2)

Enough has been said about signs to justify the presence of this miraculous material, but it is also possible to defend the play against the charge that Simeon is badly presented.

(2) Woolf, The English Mystery Plays, p.199.

The Chester author takes great care to avoid destroying the dignity of Simeon though, at the same time, he wishes to show the potential seriousness of Simeon's doubt. Simeon has a more individually important didactic role than have the later characters who recognize Christ from his signs, and who have a powerful admonitory effect on us because they are part of a sequence, their recognitions taking on a cumulative insistence.

Simeon's disbelief is directed against the main Nativity sign of Christ's Godhead. Like Salome earlier, he cannot believe that a virgin could bear a child. In rejecting this major sign Simeon is also by implication denying to God the absolute power which creates signs and which the nominalistic Chester continually stresses as a characteristic of divinity. An attack is thus also being made upon the terms of the prophecy, and prophecy has a double value in Chester since, as the cycle makes clear, it is a power derived from God, and can operate as probative textual sign. Simeon's disbelief is therefore essentially an attack on prophetic truth, upon God's power as manifested in sign, and upon the special relationship which exists between them. When we state his error baldly like this, Simeon appears not so much lacking in dignity as potentially disruptive of the spiritual fabric of history. But his disbelief, though forcefully expressed, is not simply presented. The author certainly wants us to be aware of the nature of the doubt, of its deep spiritual implications, but he wishes on this occasion to preserve the doubter from the considerable spiritual limitation which such doubt would

indicate. One reason for this balanced view is that the author wishes to present in each half of play XI the process of change from doubt to belief. This process is a valuable preparation for the Ministry plays in which the groups of believers and unbelievers are more rigidly separated - a separation which, for the audience, is ultimately propaedeutic to the Last Judgement. The audience sees in Simeon's change of mind and in that of the doctors the possibility of turning from spiritual inadequacy to illumination. (3) It has seen this also in the conversion of Salome, but Simeon's character requires particularly careful treatment, for he is not only a doubter who changes to full belief but a doubter who proceeds to validate and confirm the truth of what he previously doubted. When he repeats the erasure of "virgin" he does so specifically to test whether the sign he has received is a true sign: "Nay, faye, after I will assaye/whether this miracle be verey" (XI, 60-1). He is less like Salome in this and more like the Magi, though he goes beyond them in consciously setting out to prove the sign, rather than simply requesting confirmatory ones from God. In fact, the dignity of Simeon is enhanced, not diminished, by his initiating the probative action which confirms the Virgin Birth. The author manages to separate Simeon from the implications of his doubt by several methods.

Firstly, although he rejects the idea of a virgin

(3) The first Doctor changes his attitude between line 246 and line 263 in response to Christ's claim to divine power, and the third Doctor changes between line 262 and line 299 in response to Christ's continued teaching.

giving birth, Simeon does respect the basic tenor of the prophecies which promise the arrival of Christ:

tyll Godes Sonne come, the sooth to say,
to ransome his folke, in better araye
to blysse come never wee.

That Christe shall come well I wott,
(XI, 14-7)

Secondly, though by implication he is denying power to God in rejecting the miracle of the virgin birth, he does not openly deny God's power. Instead, he marvels at it in the very same speech as his rejection:

A, lord, mich is thy power;
a wonder I fynd written here.
It sayth a mayden clean and cleare
shall conceive and beare
a sonne called Emanuell.
(XI, 25-9)

This may be simply a colloquial ejaculation but it serves to suggest a degree of moral rectitude nevertheless. Thirdly, there is in this stanza and the next the suggestion that his opposition is not primarily directed towards God or Isaiah but towards the transcriber of his text. This is the force of his concentration on what is actually written.

it is wronge written, as have I heale,
or elles wonder yt were.

He that wrote this was a fonne
to writte "a virgin" hereupon
that should conceive without helpe of man;
this writinge mervayles me.
(XI, 31-6)

He does not say that Isaiah was a fool but that the person who wrote what is before him was a fool. This also makes his erasing the text a much more likely act. It is the correction of a faulty text, not a direct attack upon the sacred word. Fourthly, the repetition of the miracle does not bring home to Simeon any sense of error. He is not

presented in a penitential way; rather the final proof given him of the Virgin Birth inspires a prayer in which he seeks the additional grace of seeing the future Saviour, a prayer which is, of course, granted. Finally, we may well feel that Simeon's testing (60-1) and hence proving of this major sign informs the author's happy treatment of his meeting with the Virgin herself, who addresses him as "Ryghtwise Simeon."

Ryghtwise Simeon, God thee see!
Here am I common here to thee
purified for to be
with myld harte and meeke.
Receave my sonne nowe at mee
and to my offringe bryddes three,
as falles, syr, for your degree
and for your office eke.
(XI, 135-42)

The potentially serious nature of the doubt and the fact that the author wishes to contrast Simeon's doubt with Anna's belief must be understood in the context of the author's generally sympathetic treatment of Simeon. With his double function as doubter changed to belief by sign, and as validator of the truth of sign, Simeon has a special place in the cycle, and himself becomes proof of the Incarnation to the audience. We can believe with greater assurance because, from a position of doubt, he has reached full belief. (4) The doubter of sign who changes to belief, and who does so by a conscious exploration and validation of sign takes on, himself, the evidential force of sign. This is the point of the Angel's reference to him at the end of the play:

(4) This is the function that Thomas of India has in the Ludus Coventriae but Simeon cannot be criticized as Thomas can because Simeon does not reject a series of signs recounted to him by others.

Now have you hard, all in this place,
that Christ is comen through his grace-
as holye Esau prophecied hase -
and Symeon hase him seene.
Leeve you well this, lordes of might...
(XI, 327-31)

We can see, therefore, that the Chester author is giving Simeon a larger didactic role through the first episode of XI than he would have if he were simply to reveal his spiritual goodness in recognizing Christ from signs at the time of the Purification, or if he were to be straightforwardly converted from doubt to belief through sign.

Octavianus, too, is given a special place in the cycle's presentation of goodness in relation to sign. As we saw in an earlier chapter, Octavianus waits for and enjoys a sign of Christ's Incarnation. Like the Magi, his belief precedes the revelation which he enjoys but, unlike them, he shows that he has earned such a revelation, despite being outside the chosen race. The Magi were in the line of descent from Balaam. Octavianus is born a pagan. Nevertheless, he can attain a partial revelation in the iconographically theophanous sign of the Ara Caeli. (5) Octavianus shows his spiritual propriety in his proper interpretation of more earthly things. He sees the true significance of his own nature and appearance and the conclusion he draws from them admits him to a vision of higher sign. When the senators wish to deify him Octavianus refuses because he can read in himself the signs of

(5) An interesting account of the Octavianus legend and Chester's presentation of the Emperor can be found in Ruth M. Keane, "The Theme of Kingship in The Chester Cycle," Diss. Liverpool 1977.

mortality. The phraseology of vision and proof which the author employs here enforces an association of this episode with others in which characters behold more miraculous signs. Octavianus says, "of my life moste parte is gone,/age shewes him soe in mee" (VI, 327-8). Nothing other than flesh, blood, bone and an earthly birth "sheweth" itself in him (321-4). He concludes:

Wherefore by verey prooffe shewinge,
though I bee highest worldly kinge,
of godhead have I noe knowinge.
(VI, 333-5)

Octavianus is unlike his Jewish underling Herod, who manages to pervert and reject signification in a number of ways.

In turning now to a discussion of Chester's evil characters, I am dealing with a major justification for the thesis that this cycle is uniquely interested in sign. While the Bible authorized some wrong attitudes to sign, such as false requests for it or disbelief in the face of theophanous sign, and while the other cycles occasionally include such attitudes, only Chester consistently distinguishes its good and evil characters in terms of their relationship to sign. We have seen that this basic moral distinction still allows the authors to give to their characters a range of didactic function. Salome, the Magi, Simeon, Octavianus, and the later good characters who declare recognition of Christ are all developing in different ways the central concern with response to sign. The didactic functions of other good characters such as Joseph and the disciples have only been omitted here because they require a more extensive treatment, which the next chapter will permit. The evil characters show an equal

diversity but have the added artistic attraction of representing the proper uses of sign and responses to sign as if they were in a distorting mirror. This precise perversion is at its height in the play of Antichrist but extends through the whole cycle also.

Since the extant Lucifer play was the last new play to enter the cycle, (6) its presentation of evil is of particular interest. It shows that the author was aware that the rest of the cycle understood evil as a subversion of the spiritual norms of signification. He accordingly developed those parts of his material which would provide a good introduction to this pattern. Lucifer's first error concerns his misdirected vision. God declares:

Behoulde the beames of my brighte face,
which ever was and shall indewer.
This is your health in every case:
to behoulde your creator.
(I, 116-9)

The admonition, though directed at Lucifer and the angels, is a proper introduction of the audience to its chief spiritual task over the rest of the cycle. It too will behold its Creator in a series of revelatory actions. God's bright beams will continue to shine from the gilded face of Christ and, in the plays after the Resurrection, contemplation of the risen body of Christ will provide spiritual strength and fideistic instruction. This divine injunction associates spiritual health with a properly directed vision and so ushers the audience into the religious and aesthetic experience which the cycle offers, and provides a major justification for the dramatic

(6) Clopper, "History and Development," pp.228 and 243.

depiction of sacred things. When God temporarily absents himself from the sight of the angels he does so with the promise of a quick return, but Lucifer's vision is uncontrolled by a recognition of God's status as Creator. It is immediately directed upon himself, upon God's throne, upon the other angels. Closely associated with this error is one more precisely related to sign. Lucifer fails to appreciate the true significance of his own beauty: it is a sign of God's power and graciousness. Before line 126 while God is still present, Lucifer's and Lightbourne's speeches have roughly balanced delight in their own natures with recognition that they have been made beautiful by a Creator. When God is no longer visible, the meaning of what can be seen changes; the proper link of sign and significance is replaced. Lucifer and his fellow rebels regard his beauty as evidence of his own pre-eminence. Lucifer declares:

Aha, that I ame wouderous brighte,
amongst you all shininge full cleare!
Of all heaven I beare the lighte
though God hymselfe and he were here.

(126-9)

Lucifer does not only himself take the wrong significance from a thing, he tries to offer this false signification to others. Repeatedly from 126-213 he demands that others focus their sight upon him in contravention of God's original command and he seeks, by implication, to have his beauty and, latterly, his possession of God's throne, accepted as signs of his divine authority. (7) Evil characters regularly

(7) The Ludus Coventriae also presents the taking of God's throne in terms of sign. Lucifer says "In evydens pat I am more wurthy/I wyl go syttyn in goddys se" (18: 55-56).

fail to appreciate correct meanings and try to make others accept false ones. Most of Lucifer's errors display the single misconception that properties, qualities and values can exist outwith the divine scheme of signification. Signs, to him, have negotiable and transferable meanings. Thus to sit in God's throne is to appropriate the significance of a throne, and to use God's words is to give linguistic signs of one's own deity. Hence Lucifer's perversion of signification extends into the linguistic area. His climactic speech of usurpation (178-93) is not just an announcement of rebellion, it enacts the substitution of God by Lucifer linguistically by borrowing God's words and attempting thus, to present them as transferable signs of deity. (8) Before line 126 when the spiritual direction of Lucifer's and Lightbourne's speeches is difficult to define, one cannot be sure whether they use God's words in a spirit of aspiration or, as the good angels do, in a spirit of assent to god's authority. (9) At the time of the rebellion, however, it is clear that the verbal echoes are intended to function as verbal signs to convince the good angels of Lucifer's rightful claim to divine authority. Lucifer is also at fault in the area of verbal signification in that he does not realize the true significance of his own name. He knows that he is "bearer of lighte" (101, 128) but beyond this literal appreciation he perverts the title

(8) Compare the following lines for example: 184 with 11; 187 with 31; 188-9 with 116-7; 192 with 123 and 193 with 20-1.

(9) The angels, for example, echo God's phrase "cleane and cleare." Compare 79 with 76 - an immediate echo which suggests assent rather than imitation.

implying that the light is his own and not God-given.

Lucifer's errors of signification express his pretensions but show their fatuity also. That Lucifer needs the other angels to accept the meanings he offers marks him as an inferior being. God may be the "angells comforture" (123) but Lucifer is even weaker than the spiritually well-attuned angels he attempts to seduce: "What saye ye, angells all that bene here?/Some comforte soone now let me see" (132-3). Indeed, that Lucifer deals with sign at all shows his inferiority. When God uttered the words which Lucifer appropriates he was not giving signs of his deity; he was simply stating it. (10) Later, he will communicate by sign deliberately, for fallen Man requires to come to spiritual understanding through signs. At this point in history, however, God states truths to which unfallen angels merely need to assent. Lucifer, on the other hand, cannot present facts; he has to work upon interpretations. He needs to offer signs because his claims are not self-evident. The irony is that the visual sign he offers, his beauty, actually signifies the opposite of what he claims, and in using words borrowed from God as signs of his deity, he tacitly admits the authority he is trying to cast off.

Evil characters tend to err both in the perceiving of significant things and in offering significances to others. We have already encountered Cayphas's refusal to accept the Centurion's account of what Christ's cry has signified.

(10) The author was, of course, signifying God's deity stylistically by the aureate terms he chose for God to utter but God was not being presented as offering signs within the action.

Although the Jews continually challenge Christ to show some of his power (and reveal their evil by such false requests for sign), (11) when his power is made evident they ascribe the resulting events to "witchcrafte" (XVIII,297) and "sorcerye" (XVIII, 60). Herod similarly rejects the significance of the textual signs given him by the prophecies. Balaack fails to appreciate what the prosperity of the Israelites signifies about their relationship to God. It is wholly appropriate, therefore, that the founder and head of evil in the world should be the most blind to sign. The blindness becomes evident in the episode of "Christ in the Wilderness."

Though we emerge from the "Temptation" with the heightened understanding provided by the Expositor, we enter it with Satanic paradox. Satan points out that there is a mass of apparently conflicting evidence about Christ. Mary's virginity and Christ's own blamelessness, together with the honour accorded him by other men seem irreconcilable with the fact that he is "man from foote to crowne" (17). Satan embarks upon the temptation to resolve this paradox. His search for the signs which will identify Christ as God or man inevitably fails. At the end of the first temptation he is still at an impasse. He realizes that Christ suffers as men do, yet "aye hee winneth the victorie/as godhead in him weare" (91-2). After the second, he realizes nothing but his failure (125-8), and after the third, he realizes his ultimate fate and Adam's salvation, but still has not understood Christ's dual nature. But to what do we attribute

(11) See, for example, XVI, 10; XVI, 172-8; XVIIA, 301-8.

this failure? Alan H. Nelson feels that Christ is "Masking his identity from Satan, and refusing to reveal it in spite of all Satan's wiles." (12) David L. Wee has provided the fullest account of the traditional background to this question. (13) He shows that it was indeed legitimate for Christ to deceive Satan, though his studies indicate that York and Ludus Coventriae develop this theme to a greater extent than Chester. The question of whether Satan's failure is attributable to deception by Christ is particularly important in Chester because the cycle so frequently uses response to signs as its measure of spiritual attainment. Also, play XII creates a contrast between the limited understanding which Satan achieves and the full understanding of the episode which the audience reaches through the Expositor. One must ask whether the only difference between Satan and the audience is that the latter are favoured with interpretative assistance and the former is baulked by deception.

We must distinguish between deception by Christ and Satan's inherent limitations. Although the Expositor says that Satan "was cleane disceived" about Christ's Godhead, (14) we feel that he is deceived only by his own limitations, for Christ has indeed given Satan signs.

(12) Alan H. Nelson, "The Temptation of Christ; or the Temptation of Satan," in Medieval English Drama, Essays Critical and Contextual, ed. Jerome Taylor and Alan H. Nelson (London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1972), p.229.

(13) David L. Wee, "The Temptation of Christ and the Motif of Divine Duplicity in the Corpus Christi Cycle," Modern Philology, 72 (1975), 1-16.

(14) I accept the H MS reading Sathanas over the Group's soothness for line 215. The verb disceiven cannot be thus used with an abstract noun as the direct object.

Christ's reactions to temptation are signs of his nature, but although Satan can see evidence of Godhead and humanity, he can never accept that the two conditions are united in Christ. Although he recognizes as early as line 43 that Christ might be "God in mans kinde," he never actually acknowledges this as a fact, even when he is brought to acknowledge what he himself (at line 44) considered its corollary: his own eternal damnation (150-60). A desire for signs and the presence of signs do not guarantee understanding of them. If Herod and the Jews can reject the spiritual implications of the signs they receive, then Satan can fail even to understand the signs he set out to gain. The traditional theme of deception is thus altered by Chester to an emphasis on the spiritual capacity of the beholder of signs. This is made even clearer by the association in the one play of this episode with that of "The Woman Taken in Adultery" in which the woman does recognize Christ for who he is from the single sign he vouchsafes. The whole structure of play XII, with its interpretative framework eliciting for the audience the significance of the two episodes, in each of which characters are confronted with signs, is designed to focus our minds upon the recognition and acceptance of true meaning. The real didactic success of the play does not lie in its particular points of instruction such as the reversal of Adam's sins by Christ, (15) or even in its revealing Christ's grace (214) or lack of variability (79 and 295), or

(15) This is the Gregorian interpretation of the first temptation, adopted by the author for his Expositor.

loving kindness (311-2). It lies in its contribution to the cycle's insistence that onlookers should observe and contemplate, look alertly at the signs God gives and carry over the significance into their belief.

In The Harrowing of Hell Satan is still suffering from the limitation we perceive in play XII. While all around him are recognizing signs, he has knowledge of data without knowledge of its significance. Adam sees the light which floods Hell as a sign:

This ys a signe thou wilt succour
thy folkes that lyven in great languor,
and of the devill be conquerour,
as thou hast yere beheight.
(XVII, 5-8)

By presenting the light as a sign the author makes the succeeding statements of Isaiah, Simeon, John the Baptist, and Seth appear to function as exposition of the sign. David sums up the expectations which this sign permits: "I hope that tyme nowe comen ys/delyvered to be of languor" (91-2). Satan, on the other hand, knows that Christ is God's Son (102) and that he is also fully human (105) but he has not yet realized the significance of this dual nature. His hatred of Christ blinds him to the signs Christ has performed:

Such as I made halt and blynd,
he hasse them healed into theire kynd.
Therefore this bolster looke ye bynd
in bale of hell-brethe.
(109-12)

It is, of course, a lower devil who appreciates the paradox in Satan's claim to power over someone who is a man and yet has already opposed him. The Second and Third Demons can understand the raising of Lazarus as a sign while Satan

thick-wittedly considers it only as a conspiracy:

SECUNDUS DAEMON

Syr Sathanas, ys not this that syre
that rayseed Lazour out of the fyre?

SATHANAS

Yea, this ys hee that would conspire
anonne to reave us all.

TERTIUS DAEMON

Owt, owt! Alas, alas!.
(137-41) (16)

Christ's entrance into Hell constitutes a sign to the devils that Satan's power is ended (165-70); to David that his prophecy has been fulfilled (185-6), and also that Christ is the invincible "kinge of blys" (198-202). It is ironical that only by this sign, the victorious entrance, does Satan truly discover Christ's identity, in the sense of discovering Christ's significance for him. It is as the unique, omnipotent King of Bliss rather than as God's Son or as man that Christ has meaning for Satan.

A capacity to recognize signs is not an infallible guide to a good spiritual condition, though it is its most frequent indication. In the play just discussed some devils were able to recognize the miracle of Lazarus's resurrection as significant. But there is no indication that this marks a spiritual grace in them. Chester assumes that for a devil such a recognition does not carry the implications it would normally have for a man. Aquinas draws a distinction between the belief that a true believer takes from signs and that

(16) The importance of Lazarus in plays of the Harrowing is discussed by Mark C. Pilkinton in "The Raising of Lazarus: A Pre-figuring Agent to the Harrowing of Hell," Medium Aevum, XLIV (1975), 51-3.

which a devil takes. In the former, the belief is achieved by a cooperation of will and intellect, in the latter only intellect is involved:

The devils' faith is, so to speak, forced from them by the evidence of signs. That they believe, then, is in no way to the credit of their wills...The devils detest the fact that the signs of faith are so evident that they are forced to believe. Their sort of belief in no way, then, diminishes their wickedness. (17)

Chester is probably assuming and expecting that its audience tacitly accepts just such a distinction in the case of the devils. The more unusual example of recognition of sign failing to denote a firm spiritual attainment comes in the next play.

When Christ rises from the tomb, the light surrounding him constitutes a sign to the soldiers. They recognize from it that the crucifixion was a wicked act and the Third Soldier makes the kind of declaration which we have come to associate with good characters and which was last made when the good thief declared how he was saved following his recognition of Christ as God's Son (XVII, 261-7). The Third Soldier says:

Hye we fast we were awaye,
for this ys Goddes Sonne verey.
Stryve with him wee ney maye
that mayster ys and more.
(XVIII, 226-9)

Despite this recognition and their decision to tell the truth openly, they are clearly inadequate spiritually. Like Balaack, with whom they share the rather grudging appreciation that strife is now useless, they can recognize significance and still be unconverted to good. The light

(17) Summa Theologiae, 2a 2ae, 5, 2; pp.156-7.

perhaps clarifies them in one way but it also blinds them temporarily (220-1), and in this blindness they remind us of the Jews rather than those to whom Christ restores sight. Despite the similarity of this episode with Balaack, it still comes as a surprise, after the Ministry revelations, that recognition of significance can coexist with an evil disposition. We had grown to distinguish good and evil by the very act of recognition in the New Testament plays before the Passion. What has happened is that the authors have moved beyond such identifications of Christ. The soldiers are spiritually quite passé in their belated realization that it was wicked to crucify a man who is evidently the Son of God (222-5). It is the belief in the Risen Christ which is now at issue, and the authors are moving away from distinguishing believer from unbeliever, to studying the stability of the believer's faith, the points of his faith, and the significance of Christ's physical appearance. The soldiers' perception of signs is as inadequate as Satan's was - it has come too late and it does not carry with it any willed assent to the significance perceived.

As in the opening play, evil characters throughout the cycle try to offer false significances. Once God has begun to communicate with Man by sign, however, the false signification of evil men has the added force of parody. In this way, the perversion of sign by Herod is comically and didactically richer because it takes place when God is offering the Nativity star as a sign, than was Lucifer's falsification of significance at a time when God had not yet

begun to use signs. Otherwise the two characters are very similar. As Lucifer pretended to Godhead, so Herod pretends to a kingship which he describes in quasi-divine terms. (18) Both offer signs to convince others of their claims. The author accentuates the parody by marking Herod's entrance with music (VIII, 144) as God's major speeches were in play II (112f., 280f., 384f.). Herod's messenger seems to share the king's opinion of himself, for he claims that the Magi can see with their own eyes the evidence of Herod's regal authority: "Yee may well see hee wonnys here,/a pallace in to dwell" (VIII, 139-40). Herod also demands that his authority is easily visible. The emphasis on what can be seen parallels the cycle's insistence that we observe and understand good signs. Herod remarks that he is "soveraigne syre, as well is seene" (170) and, brandishing his sceptre as a sign of his office, declares:

For all men may wott and see -
 both hee and you all three -
 that I am kinge of Gallilee,
 (197-200)

Sceptre and palace are the customary signs of kingship, but instead of proving Herod's kingly right they seem to be toys compared to the miraculous sign of Christ's divine kingship - the star. Even more ludicrous is Herod's attempt to present the physical evidence of his wrath as evidence of his power. His ranting speech builds up to a final 'sign': "All for wrothe, see how I sweate!" (195). Far from proving his passionate grandeur this operates as a sign of his

(18) David Mills writes that Herod's behaviour marks him out not as a king but a man pretending to be a king. David Mills, "Some Possible Implications of Herod's Speech," Neuphilologische Mitteilungen, 74 (1973), 131-43.

earthly physicality and, hence, mortality. Octavianus had the spiritual insight to realize the significance of his earthly appearance and was rewarded for it. Herod falsely attempts to give regal significance to his mortal exudations and ends by having to watch the mortal rotting of his arms and legs (X, 422). That the whole performance with which Herod favours the Magi is implicitly a sign of Herod's stature is indicated when he presents it as evidence that they should be ruled by him:

But now you may both here and see
that I reconed up my rialtye:
I red you all be ruled by mee
and found mee for to please.
(209-12).

To this aggressive but fundamentally impotent claim the Magi have a simple answer. They meet the false signs of his kingship with a reference to the truly significant: "Vidimus stellam in oriente."

The death of Herod's son is ironically related to Herod's misunderstanding of what the true signs of kingship are. The evil events which he sets in motion turn his regal pretensions to nought by removing the heir to his earthly throne, but they do this in a way which displays as inutile those things which he would regard as signs of regality. The boy is killed along with the Innocents despite the rich trappings of gold, jewels and silk which should have marked him out as a prince. Herod can't believe that the kinds of sign upon which he has reposed his claims should have been overlooked or ignored:

Hee was right sycker in silke araye,
in gould and pyrrie that was so gaye.
They might well knowe by this daye
he was a kinges sonne.

Pival makes the valuable suggestion that the goldsmiths who had this pageant "no doubt lavished much attention" on the clothes for Herod's son. (19) The irony of this rich 'sign' being ignored during the slaughter must have been theatrically very powerful and obvious. But it would be wrong to deny Herod all insight. Though he has falsified sign in offering insignificant things as significant, he does finally appreciate the significance of his son's death: "But yt is vengeance, as drinke I wyne,/and that is now well seene" (399-400).

Herod has also shown his evil in other attitudes to sign. Like other evil characters he sets out to prove something and only proves the opposite. This is the effect of his consultation of the prophecies. Like other evil men he proceeds to reject the true significance once it has been pointed out - he despises the prophets and would destroy their books. But also, like Lucifer and Antichrist, he manages to pervert linguistic sign. We have already seen that, in context, the prophecies of play VIII function as probative signs rather than as predictions. (20) It is wholly consistent with his attempts to counterfeit other kinds of sign that Herod also offers a prophecy:

Effundam super parvulum istum furorem
meum et super consilium juvenum, disperdam
parvulos de fores, et juvenes in plateis morientur
gladio meo.

(VIII, 324f.)

(19) Paul John Pival, Jr., "Staging as Projection of Imitated Action in the Chester Cycle," Diss. Wisconsin 1973, p.23.

(20) See pp.24-5.

This quotation, from Jeremiah vi.11, is followed as the other nativity prophecies have been by a development in English of its meaning. The effect achieved is exactly that of the probative prophecies being read out and glossed by the Doctor. Herod is spuriously appropriating to himself the means by which evidence of Christ's regality has emerged. He evidently thinks that, since regality is currently being proved by prophecy, he should intimate his own authority by finding a prophetic announcement of his Massacre of the Innocents. The recitation of this text is thus an imitation of textual sign to steal its evidential force. But it is also a perversion of textual significance since it misapplies the words. In the original, they refer to the fury of the Lord which Jeremiah will pour out upon the unbelieving Jews. Here the text is quite misapplied and in this respect is most unlike the other prophecies which it is intended to mimic. They are genuinely prophetic of the events now taking place around Herod. He can see before him the Kings about whom his Doctor is reading in the Psalms, but Herod is arrogating to himself the prophecy of God's fury against the Jews.

Part of the ill treatment meted out to Christ by his captors involves the perversion of sign. When Christ is brought to Herod, the King is glad, as he hopes to see Christ "prove" his power by performing some sign. Of course, Christ does not respond to this false request and the enraged Herod has him clothed in white and sent back to Pilate. The whole action is over in under fifty lines and it is therefore hard to avoid the impression that the

punishment is intended, by the author at least, to fit the crime in an exact way. Herod mockingly signifies Christ's madness because Christ would not signify his deity for Herod's entertainment. If one compares this episode with that in York the force of Chester's brief account becomes more obvious. York is essentially interested in the comedy of evil at this point, and it therefore spends much time dramatizing the comic and futile attempts of Herod's sons to get Christ to talk. Eventually this comedy passes into comedy centred on the proposal that Christ be dressed in white. The King thinks such clothing is too attractive (XXXI, 330-1) and its significance has to be explained to him. York does not underplay the significance of the clothing, but neither does it focus upon it as a sign to the exclusion of other kinds of evil activity, and it does not tie it closely to the sign Herod wanted but never received. Chester accentuates the inadequacy of Herod's spiritual vision by having the King claim that Christ is visibly a fool:

for Jewes custome before was
to cloth men that were wood
or madd, as nowe hee him mase,
as well seemes by his face;
(XVI, 197-200) (21)

This false response to Christ's appearance and the erroneous signification of madness in him parody previous moments in which Christ's true nature has been revealed and previous acts of investiture, such as that which God carried out in

(21) If Christ's face was gilded at this point in the cycle Herod's remark would be patently evidence of his own perverted vision. Certainly in the 1550 production of the Cordwainers and Shoemakers' play, which went up to Christ's captivity, his face was gilded. Records, p.50.

play II when he gave Adam and Eve dead beasts' skins to wear as signs of their mortality.

The Jews extend Herod's mocking of Christ by giving him parodic signs of regality: the throne, crown of thorns, purple robe and sceptre. If we consider the miraculous signs contained in the preceding plays and what we have learned of signs from the story of Herod, it becomes clear that the Jews do not understand what signs of true kingship are. Like Herod, they see the external trappings of regality as its signs, whereas Christ has accustomed us to a more marvelous means of revealing his deity. But, in an even more satisfying way, the Jews' mockery is misconceived and unwittingly self-destructive for, without realizing it, their reviling of Christ is contributing to the grandeur they wish to deny him. The suffering of Christ is revealing his love and signifying the redemptive role which he has declared for himself in previous plays. These parodic signs are part of the suffering and thus contribute to a more noble signification.

We have seen that evil can express itself through a variety of false attitudes to sign and signification, and a variety of false uses of them. Evil characters can suggest that significance resides in quite insignificant things. They can claim false significances for things which genuinely possess other meanings. They can demand signs from Christ, and challenge or tempt him to give what is only provided by him as a gift of grace. They can fail to recognize true signs or reject true signs as false. Even when they recognize true sign and its meaning they can still

ignore its moral implications for them. Antichrist gives to this kind of evil its finest hour.

The extent of the eschatological material in Chester is quite unique in the English cycles. Kathleen Ashley explains this in terms of that divine power which she considers a dominant theme in the cycle:

The Chester cycle concludes uniquely with two lengthy Antichrist plays just before the Last Judgement. The Chester dramatist incorporated them, I would contend, in order to form the necessary structural counterthrust to the divine power so evident throughout the cycle; the Antichrist provided the appropriate apocalyptic challenger to God. (22)

My views and Ashley's on the function of the play are not opposed. But I would suggest that what particularly attracted the Chester author to a uniquely extensive treatment of material not common in English drama was that it offered the summation of perverted attitudes to sign. I feel that this accounts more fully for the subtle ironies in the play. It is certainly Antichrist's giving of false signs which the Bible concentrates on. Christ tells his disciples of the calamities and signs which will precede his Second Coming and he warns them of false Christs:

Surgent enim pseudochristi, et pseudoprophetae: et dabunt signa magna, et prodigia, ita ut in errorem inducantur (si fieri potest) etiam electi.
(Matthew xxiv.24)

Preparation for Antichrist's signs is given by the previous play, Antichrist's Prophets. Clopper points out that the play is called the "profettys Afore the day of dome" by, amongst other documents, the Early Banns's List of

(22) Ashley, "Divine Power in Chester Cycle," p.391.

Companies. (23) It is true that Ezechiell's and Zacharias's prophecies are about Doomsday rather than Antichrist. Both sets of Banns, however, stress the play's relationship to the Antichrist. The Early Banns refer to it as

The pagent of prophettys...
that prophecied ffull truly
off the coming of Anticrist. (24)

And the Late Banns report that it "by prophettes sheweth fourth howe Antechrist shoulde Rise." (25) The play's Expositor promises Antichrist and his signs with eagerness:

As mych as here wee and our playe,
of Antechristes signes you shall assaye.
Hee comes! Soone you shall see!
(XXII, 337-40)

The author has ensured by including the material of play XXII that we will see Antichrist himself as a sign, in such a way that his own signs are robbed of their pretended meaning. Through interpretation of Daniel's dream the Expositor shows that Antichrist's world immediately precedes Doomsday(157-64). The prophecies thus place Antichrist in a general eschatology which makes his subsequent appearance as much a portentous sign of God's imminent arrival to judge as the fifteen signs of Doomsday given en bloc in XXII.

The problem with the attempts by evil characters to imitate signification is that, not possessing control over the whole scheme of things, their claims are ad hoc, sterile and repetitive, while they themselves constantly possess an evil significance within the total divine plan. So it is that Antichrist is himself a sign of God's imminent

(23) Clopper, "History and Development," p.230.

(24) Records, p.38, lines 6-8.

(25) Records, p.246, line 17.

judgement, and hence a sign of his own imminent destruction, while the activities in which he is engaged, however extensive they are, simply remind us of the kinds of perversion of sign which we have encountered in other evil characters. (26) On the other hand, divine signs enrich the time in which they appear by promising later events or indicating the fulfilment of earlier prophecies. The divine plan is continually unfolding and ripening. As a whole, it proves God to be the omnipotent Prince (I, 22-3) and, because of its total dynamism and the inexorable spiritual logic by which it develops, each moment in it has the capacity to signify truths which embrace earlier and later events. It is not always the authors' intention to make this wider reference explicit but we have encountered many occasions on which they do so. One is also drawn to appreciate the continual fruition of God's plan through the repeated use of the same image. Such an image does not seem sterile but is enriched by the changing pattern of history the spiritual stages of which it is marking. The image of light is the most obvious example of such a repeated motif. Storrs writes: "Light...as a visual sign, grows in meaning with each new figure associated with it, and becomes one of the most richly used symbols in the Chester Cycle." (27) It is clear that this motif was favoured by the English dramatists for it seems to fulfil the same function in the

(26) Keane suggests (p.182) that Antichrist would appear on the pageant wagon previously used by Herod. Visual similarities would thus be immediately evident.

(27) Patrick Hamilton Storrs, "A Re-evaluation of the Dramatic Method of The Chester Cycle." Diss. Berkeley 1975.

Ludus Coventriae and York. (28) In Chester's Old Testament, light is treated predominantly as an aspect of God's glory. As the Nativity star, it portends the arrival of the Redeemer. In the Ministry, Christ describes himself as the Light of the World and we can see this theme operating on different levels including the physical condition of sight as opposed to blindness. The absence of light is one of the miraculous signs accompanying the Passion. Its return at the Harrowing and the Resurrection signifies the rescue of the souls and the identity of Christ as the Son of God. It is finally the brightness of the Mass wafer which confounds the dead souls apparently raised by Antichrist (XXIII, 582). The false signs of evil characters never possess the richness of this motif which even when it is not being regarded as a sign internally is still carrying significance to the onlooker. No matter how grandiose evil characters are, what they offer is always 'more of the same.'

Hence, when we compare Antichrist's signs with those in the preceding New Testament sections of the cycle, what strikes us most forcibly is how anachronistic Antichrist is. He is caught up in giving signs which will legitimize his claim to a particular identity: he is offering his own version of the theophanous signs of the Ministry. But the divine signification has moved beyond this: the soldiers at the Resurrection had made no great advance by recognizing Christ as God's Son from his signs. Such evidential signs as

(28) Coletti discusses the Ludus Coventriae use of light in her thesis, and Collier notes that effects of light and dark "are given metaphorical importance from the very opening of the cycle" in York, Poetry and Drama, pp.33-4.

Christ gives after the Passion are designed to prove his Resurrection, and the main source of significance is not now the individual miraculous act but Christ's wounded body. Antichrist has not suffered for Man so his body cannot provide the visible signs of his loving nature or his fulfilled redemptive mission.

Antichrist's imposture is at its most powerful in the first 252 lines after which the process of disproving his signs begins. All that he says and does in these opening lines can be understood within the scheme of signification, for it is all ostensibly evidence of one thing - that he is the saviour, Christ - while actually evidence of the reverse. The author creates for him more mimicry than Antichrist explicitly claims as significant. (29) His long opening speech is an attempt to imitate a major linguistic sign which Christ gave: the opening speech of play XIII. However, instead of Christ's brief Latin quotation, "Ego sum lux mundi," Antichrist characteristically overdoes things and thus reduces his eight lines of Latin to the level of Pilate's eight lines of French (XVIII, 1-8) and Herod's rant (VIII, 169-96). Like Lucifer, Antichrist is trying to make his speech function as verbal sign by borrowing the style and hence the authority of a divine speaker. The author is enforcing this structurally by placing the speech in the same position in its play as the original one. But Antichrist's style is also being made to show his true spiritual compeers and to expose the foolishness of his

(29) For other examples of this see L. H. Martin, "Comic Eschatology in the Chester Coming of Antichrist," Comparative Drama, 5 (1972), 163-76.

claims. Like Herod, Antichrist also attempts to use the Bible to provide probative textual signs. (30) He cites prophecies claiming that it was of him that the prophets spoke although this is not always the case - the citation from the Psalms clearly misapplies the text's meaning (line 40f.). He is thus engaged in the false use of linguistic signification both by misapplying the significance of biblical texts, and by appropriating the probative function of prophecy. Conversely, he wishes his actions to have great significance by their fulfilling prophecy. He hopes to provide a theophanous sign of his identity by rising from the dead, but he clearly wants to add to its revelatory force by claiming that he will do so in fulfilment of a prophecy from Zephaniah (which he misapplies):

That I shall fulfill Whollye Wrytte
you shall wotte and knowe well hitt,
for I am wall of wayle and wytt
and lord of everye land.
(113-6)

He twists meaning, borrows the divinely ordained function of prophecies as textual signs of Christ's identity, and subverts the prophetic texts to prove the evidential power of his own falsely miraculous signs. Linguistic signification suffers badly under Antichrist. Indeed, it is in the perversions of the evil characters that the Chester authors most convincingly reveal an interest in this kind of sign.

Throughout his attempt to convince the kings of his deity, Antichrist is always showing to those who have seen

(30) I will be discussing in chapter VI whether these and other prophecies and biblical allusions actually function in the way intended by the evil character.

the rest of the cycle clear evidence that he has no real divine power. He promises that he will grant "postee" (53) to men when he has come into his kingdom. But he interprets this power in material terms: "ryved ryches, land and fee." We have already seen that the power Christ grants to men who believe is a participation in the divine capacity to perform signs:

such sygnes, soothlye, the shall shewe
whersoever the tyde to goe.
In my name well shall they
devylles powers to putt awaye;
(XX, 83-6ff.)

Antichrist himself can only pretend to such a power, and what he offers to men seems futile in comparison.

When asked to give signs of his deity, Antichrist plunges into a jumble of sign vocabulary. The kings have already shown a worrying indiscriminateness in their use of such words. In the following two speeches the words "maistrye," "signe," and "wonders" are equated by them in a way which blurs the clear Johannine lines of the cycle's presentation of miracle as sign.

SECUNDUS REX

Yf thou bee Christe called messie
that from our bale shall us bye,
doe before us maistrye,
a signe that wee may see.

TERTIUS REX

Then will I leeve that yt ys soe.
Yf thou doe wonders or thou goe...
(XXIII, 65-70)

Antichrist happily concurs in this spiritually confused manner of speech, referring to "verey signe" (78 and 102), "marveyle" (83), "maistrye" (86 and 98), and using the adverb "marveylouslye" (95). This mixture of terminology is

the first thing which Helias attacks when the debate proper begins at line 402. Antichrist mentions his "myracles and marveyles" (406) but Helias distinguishes between the two: "The were no myracles but mervelles thinges" (410). The distinction which, of course, separates true and false signs lies in the power responsible for the act and the intention in performing it. Aquinas says, "True miracles...can only be performed by the power of God; and God does them for the profit of mankind." (31)

Antichrist presents his signs not as acts of grace to help men but as bargaining counters in gaining their support. This is evident in the speech where he promises signs which imitate the raising of Lazarus and Christ's Resurrection:

And bodyes that binne dead and slayne,
yf I may rayse them up agayne,
then honoures mee with might and mayne
.
Yf I may doe this marveylouslye,
I read you on me leeve.
(89-91 and 95-6. My emphases)

Antichrist also undercuts his own attempts to imitate Christ's signs by including a sign of such an anarchic nature and apocalyptic implication that we are reminded powerfully, though rather comically, of his own evil rather than seduced into recognizing a divine power:

Nowe wyl I turne, all through my might,
trees downe, the rootes upright -
that ys marveyle to your sight -
and fruyt groinge upon.
(81-4)

Like Lucifer and Herod, Antichrist needs to demand attention for his signs: "take tent to me eycheone!" (128).

(31) Summa Theologiae, 2a 2ae, 178, 2; p.143.

He also shows anxiety that the proper inferences should be immediately drawn from his signs. As soon as he "rises" from the tomb he demands: "I ryse! Nowe reverence dose to mee" (165). His tendency to say precisely what he is going to do before he does it (79-80; 121-32) appears to imitate the prior significance which Christ gave to his actions in play XIII but obviously stems from a desire to set up spiritual bargains and to gain credibility for his signs.

More than anything else, one is aware that Antichrist's signs are discrete actions without any larger spiritual fabric (of Antichrist's making) into which they can fit. His is a Resurrection without a Passion; a Pentecost without a spiritual need for it to fill. It is suitable therefore that the sacramental sign which the kings offer him (181-4) seems quite disconnected from the spiritual development which we have seen take place in the New Testament. In sacrificing a lamb to him, they are offering what is an unhappy and specious indication that he is the Agnus Dei, but which really brings to our minds the Mosaic "sygnes" and "figures" which were replaced with the sacramental reality of Christ's body.

Since Antichrist has thoroughly perverted the established means by which God communicates with Man, and has now led men into a heretical version of sacramental sign, it is not surprising that Enock enters the play declaring God's essential aloofness from Man:

the poyntes of thy privitie
any yearthlye man to see

ys impossible, as thinkes mee,
for any worldelye wight.
(257-60) (32)

Communication between God and Man has been obscenely parodied, and not least by the strident garrulity with which this false God has seen fit to converse with men. Enock wishes to show the kings that, contrary to what they might now think, the giving of signs is an act of divine grace. Furthermore, the kings have shown themselves incapable of distinguishing true from false signs, and the probative value of sign has thus been compromised. The kings therefore ask for "prooffes of disputacon" (318). For them, reason must now take over from sign and, accordingly, a dispute is embarked on. It would not be in keeping with the cycle, however, if Antichrist were to be discredited finally by argument alone. The climax of the dispute takes the form of a sign which touched the roots of popular piety, was aesthetically neat with respect to the rest of the cycle and also furthered didactic points made in the post-Resurrection plays.

The unmasking of Antichrist by means of a miracle of the Host would appear to be a Cestrian innovation in the Antichrist legend. (33) Haigh has shown that the Mass was the particular object of popular piety during the first decades of the sixteenth century in the North of England. He reports that an "insignificant charge of taking communion

(32) Christ makes a similar point to Philippus when he seeks to know more than is proper for him (XX, 57).

(33) L. U. Lucken, Antichrist and The Prophets of Antichrist in the Chester Cycle, Diss. Catholic Univ. of America (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic Univ. of America Press, 1940), pp.63-4.

without first paying church dues [i.e. improperly participating in the Mass] was enough to spark off a defamation suit at Chester." (34) The importance which the Mass has in the post-Passion plays accords with this local veneration. In Christ's Resurrection speech (XVIII, 170-85) he presents belief in the Mass as a means to salvation. That it is a miracle of the Host which finally discredits Antichrist implies that belief in the Mass is also the means by which the Christian can nullify the seductions of evil. A concentration upon the Mass will empower the Christian to distinguish between true and false signs and enable him to escape the "fooles read" which Christ intimates in the Resurrection speech will bring the sinner to death (XVIII, 184). The form which this miracle takes also fits neatly with earlier material. Enock challenges Antichrist to prove his deity by making the "resurrected" souls eat:

Yf thou bee so micle of might
to make them eate and drynke,
for verey God we will thee knowe
such a signe yf thou wylt shewe
(547-50)

Antichrist is being required to offer the same kind of sign as that which Christ vouchsafed to the disciples to prove his corporeal resurrection, with the final intention of rescuing them from the dangers of a wavering faith (XIX, 190-9; XX, 33-40). The light of the wafer, and, suitably for a section of the cycle which has stressed the visible body of Christ, the image depicted upon the wafer dazzle the sight of the dead souls. Again evil is expressed through

(34) Christopher Haigh, Reformation and Resistance in Tudor Lancashire (London: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1975), pp.63-4.

visual incapacity. This demonstration perfectly unites the physical and spiritual meanings of sight. When Enock says "Nowe you men that have donne amys,/you see well what his power ys" (585-6) it is both physical sight and understanding that he refers to and, of course, it is both the kings and the audience who have been thus illuminated.

The pattern of sign in this play is not, however, complete with the destruction of evil. It moves on to the re-establishing of good in a sign which neatly reverses Antichrist's sign but also extends the earlier theophanous sign of the raising of Lazarus and demonstrates the resurrection available to all believers. Enock and Helias are genuinely raised from the dead, suitably just after Secundus Demon's remark about the "maistries" he can perform. They are visible evidence of the power of God:

ENOCKE

I was deade and right here slayne,
but through thy might, lord, and thy mayne
thou hast me reased up agayne.
(703-5)

Their resurrection also shows the reward of belief: "All that leeuen in thee stydfastlye/thou helpes, lord, from all anoye" (711-2). One is reminded of the presence of Lazarus and Simon Leper in the "Anointing" episode of play XIV. They were living and healed - signs of God's power. But Enock and Helias have added didactically to that signification by implying that there are fideistic conditions for the exercise of divine power in Man's favour.

Although Chester may seem (as we will see in the next chapter) to lack the emotional, thematic or poetic range of the other cycles and may appear austerely formal and

obsessively concerned with a limited number of didactic and artistic matters, it nevertheless possesses considerable variety in its development of its chosen topics. An understanding of the central concern with sign and signification reveals a subtle differentiation between its spiritually good characters, and a rich understanding of evil's perversion, subversion and essential inadequacy.

CHAPTER VI

SIGN AND THE ONLOOKER

A literary critic writing on the cycle plays knows that he is engaged in an activity which medieval men did not find valuable. He is also strongly aware that the differences between his aesthetic reactions which he has, to a certain extent, learned and the direct responses of men and women brought up in the culture which has produced the drama must be massive and unbridgeable. In addition to this, the minutely particular claims which he makes for a play's didactic or emotional effects are made without any support from known audience reaction. We do have some extra-dramatic glimpses of how the mystery plays affected their medieval audiences but they are not connected to any specific plays and tell us nothing we could not have expected. For example, the Wycliffite preacher adduces as a defence of the plays the fact that "ofte sybis by sicke myraclis pleyinge men and wymmen, seyng þe passioun of Crist and of hise seyntis, ben mouyd to compassion and deuocion, wepyng bitere teris." (1) However, such extra-dramatic evidence also reminds us that a literary critic cannot make claims in the belief that he is characterizing the 'general' reaction of the audience. The Wife of Bath's attendance at miracle plays was just part of her frequent "wandringe by the weye." (2) That many attended

(1) Hudson, English Wycliffite Writings, p.100, lines 113-6.

(2) Geoffrey Chaucer, The Wife of Bath's Tale in John H. Fisher, ed., The Complete Poetry and Prose of Geoffrey Chaucer (London: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1977), p.116, line 558.

the plays in a spirit of holiday rather than devotion is proved by the Wycliffite preacher's further 'defence' of the drama as "recreacioun." (3) Moreover, the critic concentrating on theological themes, didactic techniques and affective devices is forcing the drama to inhabit a world free of the civic and commercial concerns with which it was originally surrounded. The Mayor of York had to arrange for the performance of the Creed play as would be most to the "profett and aduantage of the sayd Citie." (4) The guild records show how the mystery plays were tightly bound in with the regulation of trade. Forcing a contribution to the costs of a play was one means by which a guild could either protect its trade from unrestricted practice by other guilds or gain recompense for the loss of trade involved. (5) But, even if the kind of critical study in which we have been engaged suffers from the above inadequacies, it still makes sense in its own terms. Although we cannot say what a particular onlooker would have thought or felt at a particular point in the cycle, and cannot make any precise claims for a general audience reaction, we can still deduce from the texts what kind of dramatic experience the plays were offering, what themes they were seeking attention for, what areas of the spiritual life their didacticism was concentrating on and even how far they provided opportunities for men and women to contemplate the meaning of what they saw independent of explicit guidance from

(3) Hudson, p.100, lines 124-6.

(4) Johnston and Rogerson, Records, I, 285.

(5) See, for example, the "Saddlers' Charter" of 1472 in the Chester Records, pp.13-15.

within the play. In entitling this chapter "Sign and the Onlooker" my attention is upon what Chester appears to offer the onlooker, not upon the now irrecoverable particularities of medieval response.

Chester does not offer its onlookers much opportunity for sympathetic involvement or identification with the characters. When it seeks to create a sense of community between the audience and some of the characters, it does so in terms of their shared spiritual goals, their similar spiritual shortcomings or, more frequently, it aligns them in relation to a common source of significance. We saw this first in our analysis of the Shepherds play, (6) and we will encounter it again when we look at the post-Resurrection plays. Also, the Chester authors are not attracted to the development of any relationship between characters if that relationship will not strictly contribute to the unfolding pattern of sign and signification. This is most clear in the portrayal of Joseph and Mary in the nativity section. There is very little direct communication between the two and, when there is a moment of touching love, it seems to derive from their mutual expectation of Christ rather than from a personal relationship independent of that hope. Joseph helps Mary from the ass and says,

Come to me, my sweete dere,
the treasure of heaven withowten were.
Welcome in full meeke manere,
Him [Christ] hope I for to see.
(VI, 465-8)

The couple relate to each other through Christ rather than directly. Even in the episode of Joseph's doubt the accent

(6) See p.22.

is not on the personal hurt Joseph is offering to Mary but on the action of God in bearing witness to Mary's virginity. Joseph's complaint (VI, 123-60) is made to the audience not to his wife, and there is no response from Mary nor any interrogation of her by Joseph. This is quite unlike the treatment which the other cycles give the episode, but it is wholly in accord with Chester's emphasis upon the role of sign in creating faith. Joseph is a doubter seeing inadequately; he is converted by a "tokeninge" (which is how Joseph describes the angel's speech VII, 534). The emotional temperature of the scene is completely lowered, and its place in the scheme of sign fixed, by Mary's prior prediction of Joseph's doubt and of the divine intervention which will prove the truth. When Elizabeth urges a return home to see Joseph, Mary replies:

Elizabeth, nece, to doe so good is,
leste hee suppose one mea amyse;
but good lord that hath ordayned this
wyll witnes of my deede.
(VI, 117-20)

Once he has been converted, Joseph directs others to the means by which belief can be gained, and emphasis falls upon his aged appearance which attests the truth of what he previously doubted. He feels no penitence for his doubt and there is no need to dramatize a reconciliation between him and Mary. Instead the scene abruptly changes to the entrance of Octavianus. Even in more penitential scenes such as Mary's anointing of Christ or Peter seeking forgiveness from Christ in MS.H's development of play XVIII (App.1D) the action is developed towards the signification of meaning. Between Mary's emotional anointing and Christ's announcement

that her belief has saved her there is an extended passage of questioning and explanation of the event's significance (XIV, 57-120). When Peter asks forgiveness of Christ (XVIII, 73-9; App. 1D), the reply he receives directs his mind and that of the onlooker to Christ's prescience and to the moral value of the fall. Indeed, the fall itself, though forgiven, is seen in a much larger context than personal guilt. Peter has been allowed to fall by God to further God's plans for men:

Therefore I suffered thee to fall
that to thy subjects hereafter all
that to thee shall cry and call
then may have minninge.

(XVIII, 88-91; App. 1D)

It was Mary's faith rather than her penitence which saved her and Peter's penitence here also turns out to have only a secondary role in the teaching of the play.

Chester avoids and subordinates the penitential as part of its general reluctance to permit emotional involvement of the audience with characters. The important spiritual action in Chester is not to feel sympathy but to see with insight and, just as the characterisation is limited to present clearly a range of different responses to sign, so the dramatic style of the cycle is strictly geared to accentuate the visual for the audience's observation, contemplation and understanding. We saw in chapter III that a major difference between Chester's treatment of sign and the use made of sign in the other cycles was that the former tended to be consistent in presenting certain kinds of sign whereas the others showed themselves to be less interested in this topic by their inconsistent and various inclusion of signs with

different didactic functions. We can see the same kind of distinction in the theatrical styles of the cycles. Chester limits its dramatic range to emphasize signification. The others can use a broad range of styles either because they are not so didactically single-minded - this is true of York and Towneley - or because the didactic goal invites such a range, as is the case with Ludus Coventriae.

The Ludus seeks to create a sense of moral involvement between audience and characters. This involvement almost becomes a form of moral identification and it is not surprising that this cycle is closer than the others to morality styles. It was written and performed in that part of the country from which our extant early morality plays come. (7) It uses morality figures such as Mors in The Death of Herod or morality techniques such as the direct seductive address of an evil character to the audience, as in the opening of Passion Play I. But more importantly it uses its 'historical' characters to present repeated images of the moral life of its audience: sin, penitence, forgiveness, salvation form an often reiterated pattern of action. In addition, it offers through its Ministry an education which bears some comparison with those we find in morality plays. The audience is brought to a knowledge of death through The Death of Herod; it is then instructed in the essentials of faith in Christ and the Doctors; it is urged to repent in

(7) An East-Anglian provenance for the Ludus Coventriae was suggested by M. Eccles, who made a comparison with the nine other fifteenth-century plays in the dialects of Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire in "Ludus Coventriae Lincoln or Norfolk?" Medium Aevum, 40 (1971), 135-41. See also Jacob Bennett, "The Language and the Home of the Ludus Coventriae," Orbis, XXII (1973), 43-63.

The Baptism; it is shown how to reject sin in The Temptation; The Woman taken in Adultery then displays the penitent and humble spirit necessary if we are to receive salvation, and in The Raising of Lazarus the audience sees the general redemption typified in a representative individual. Although the cycle has been dramatizing biblical events, it has been directing them towards a representation of the moral life of the onlooker from the realisation of mortality to the attainment of salvation. There is no doubt that the Chester onlooker learns about his own need to observe with spiritual insight from the demonstration of such action by the characters on stage, but the Chester authors are not concerned to create a sense of identity between the onlooker and the characters, and are certainly not moving as close as those of the Ludus to presenting their characters as "representative" of the common man. Equally, the Chester authors do not find it necessary or suitable to create emotional involvement of the onlooker with the character. The Ludus authors use such involvement to further the moral association upon which their teaching is based. The contrasting styles of the two cycles are well represented in their accounts of the Fall, from the first recognition of sin by Adam and Eve to their expulsion.

Firstly, the relationship of the two sinners is more subtly and evocatively presented in the Ludus than in Chester. In Chester, Adam appears to be tricked: he has eaten the apple without knowing what tree it was from. His angry speech when his eyes are open emphasizes that woman's counsel has been the cause of his fall: "Now have I brooken,

through reade of thee,/my lordes commandemente" (263-4). The point of the scene appears to be that it warns us of seductive and damning counsel. At this stage in the cycle such a warning is specifically directed against the advice of women, but there are grounds for believing that the Chester authors wished to develop a pattern of such warnings. They do so by showing the attempts of evil characters to counterfeit sign and thus to draw men away from true belief. This process comes to a climax with Antichrist. But there is also a revealing parallel to Adam's complaint provided by Christ in the Resurrection speech. Where he is counselling men to partake of his body in the Mass, he appears to warn them of attempts to turn their belief away from the Real Presence:

And whosoever eateth that bread
in synne and wicked liffe,
he receaveth his owne death -
I warne both man and wiffe;
the which bread shalbe seene instead
the joye ys aye full ryffe.
When hee ys dead, through fooles read
then ys he brought to payne and stryffe.
(XVIII, 178-85)

I have quoted the whole passage, rather than simply the warning of the last two lines, to show that sin and wicked life appear to be incorrect belief rather than immoral action. What damns is not believing that the bread only is seen but the body of Christ is really present, and this faulty belief, like Adam's taking of the apple, is brought about by the counsel of sinners. Although the preceding stanza, which promises salvation through the Mass, has an equivalent in Towneley XXVI, 328-33, this stanza of warning against false belief and

seductive counsel is Chester's own. (8) My point is that Chester's dramatisation of the Fall is being directed towards the eliciting of meaning not the evocation of character or the creation of emotional effects. Adam's lament that he has been cast out from joy turns after only four lines (345-8) into a section of exposition:

Nowe all my kynde by mee ys kente
to flee womens intycemente.
Whoe trusteth them in any intente,
truely hee is disceaved.
(349-52)

His first reaction to the knowledge that he has sinned is quickly turned from emotion into discussing the signification of the name 'woman': "mans woe thou would bee witterlye;/therfore thou was soe named" (271-2). Adam's new-found sin seems to be expressed in his adoption of this new signification for Eve and, perhaps, in his erroneous claim that it was the pre-lapsarian signification. (9) Attention, in all these instances, seems to be diverted from the emotional into the significatory and overtly didactic. Ludus Coventriae, on the other hand, is highly emotional, and engages the audience's sympathy for a couple who are not rigidly separated in the nature of their guilt and who, unlike Chester couples generally, speak to each other at length. They show a range of recognizably human feelings shame, guilt, a sense of loss, self-pity, sympathy for the other, irascibility.

(8) That Chester is here involved in anti-Reformist teaching receives some support from the fact that the stanza about belief and the Mass was cancelled from the Towneley MS at some point. The Towneley Cycle: A Facsimile of MS.HM1, pp.xii and f.104v.

(9) Before the Fall, he had given her the more neutral name "virago" - "for out of man taken shee is" (151).

The author of the Ludus play also wishes to evoke the fallen condition of Man in a way that will create a sense of identity between the members of his audience and their first father and mother. Accordingly, he stresses the pathetic physical frailty of the naked pair. "I se vs nakyd be-fore and be-hynde" Adam says, and he urges that they cover their "pore preuytes" (24: 250 and 253). Although the Chester Adam and Eve also recognize their nakedness, this recognition is more formal: "Naked wee bine both forthy,/and of our shappe ashamed" (II, 267-8), and it is left to God to point up their earthly frailty, which he does in a formal, quasi-significatory way which lacks immediacy and prefers the deictic to the emotive: "earth thou arte, as well is seene" (341).

The Ludus author evokes our mortality through imaginatively forceful similes, metaphors and other figures of speech. Adam laments "A lord for synne oure flourys do ffade" (24: 275) and "I walke as werm with-outyn wede/Awey is schrowde and sho" (25: 291-2). Eve complains that they are now "boundyn in dethis las" (25: 306) and God refers to "dethis pryk"(26: 311). Chester, on the other hand, does not employ verbal imagery in this way but prefers the iconographic sign of the dead beasts' skins as a formal indication of mortality.

Chester restricts the number of topics it wishes to cover just as it restricts its emotional range. It does not develop to any great extent a discussion of the moral responsibility for the Fall, but remains brief and close to the biblical account (281-96). Chester wishes to stress the

judgement on the sinners and the cursing of the earth for it is in relation to this that the successive covenants of the Old Testament must be understood. This theme reaches a culmination in the Balaam play where the Israelites, now favoured by God, inhabit a "fayre wonning...valleyes, woodes, grass springing,/fayre yordes, and eke rivers" (MS. H, V, 265 and 267-8). The thematic structure of the Old Testament thus determines the Chester dramatist's emphasis in play II. He has no time for the hurt and very touching complaints of God in the Ludus (25: 277-84 and 293-300), nor for the idiomatic descriptions of the pre-lapsarian Adam and Eve as "mayster vndyr mone" and "gret lady," nor for the comically evil antics of the punished devil "ffor þis ffalle I gynne to qweke/with a ffart my brech I breke" (27: 354-5). All these things, in their different ways, involve the onlookers' emotions and draw them closer to the action to the point where they can feel their own moral fall. Chester seeks distance, the contemplation of what is seen, a less emotional and more closely focussed recognition of judgement and of Man's mortality. Its drama is accordingly more iconographically formal. The Ludus Coventriae obviously uses iconography richly throughout, but Chester, quite apart from making use of visual images, casts its drama in a pictorial mode. Repeatedly one is led to observe the scene as a kind of picture rather than as kinetic. This is evident in the Expulsion.

After God has driven Adam and Eve out of the Garden there follow 32 lines in which four Cherubim, presumably formally arranged around Paradise, describe their role as

guardians, re-iterate Man's banishment and display their fiery swords. (10) This drama is static, declarative rather than emotional, formalistic and iconographic. The use of music to define the beginning and end of this expulsion also emphasizes Chester's preference for a manneristic representation of the event and its significance. The Ludus, on the other hand, is kinetic, emotionally wide-ranging and linguistically vibrant. It ties the iconographic detail of the flaming sword tightly into the action: "angelus seraphicus cum gladio fflamea verberat adam et Euam extra paradisum." The Seraphim speaks directly to Adam and Eve (Chester's Cherubim speak only to God), and his one speech moves from the harshness of "ge wrecchis vnkend and ryht vnwyse" to the powerful and hopeful image of the redemption:

Tyl a chylde of a mayd be born
and vpon þe rode rent and torn
to saue all þat ge haue forlorn
ȝour welth for to restore.
(27: 374-7)

By comparison, the Chester Cherubim's promise of the future is more distantly revealed. Where the Ludus makes us feel the unnatural suffering of a child torn on the cross, Chester draws on the potent mystery of the divine attributes, which we contemplate rather than feel:

Shall none of them byde in thy sighte
tyll Wysdome, Right, Mercye, and Mighte
shall buy them and other moe.
(II, 398-400)

To sum up, each cycle's dramatic style is consistent

(10) There is no indication in the records of how Paradise was represented in the cycle - whether, for example, it was set apart by battlements as in some paintings or, as would be quite possible, was represented by the wagon itself, with other pre- and post-lapsarian actions happening outside the wagon.

with its didactic intent and the success of the two accounts makes their contrast more striking. Where the Ludus offers us a drama of emotional involvement and of moral identification, employing a variety of verbal and visual devices to draw the audience into the world of the play, Chester offers a drama of depiction, emotionally curtailed and stressing the signficatory, avoiding verbal imagery in preference for the formally iconographic, restricting its characterization in order to establish themes, and insisting on a contemplative distance between the onlooker and what the play offers to his observation.

Of the general association of art and drama, Woolf writes: "...if one postulates the following series, religious painting, tableau of the same subject, mime, play, it is unclear at what point one would want to cry halt and draw the line between a difference in degree and a difference in kind." (11) Critics of the Chester cycle have found such a line particularly hard to draw. Storrs writes: "In the Chester plays much of what is visually presented is set forth in terms which are overtly candid, ritualistic,

(11) Woolf, p.97.

iconographic, and generally pictorial." (12) The use of tableau has especially been seen as a recurrent feature of this pictorialism. For example, Pival's sense of the tableau's importance is expressed in a theory that different scenes in a play were always visible, and held motionless when not involved in the action. (13) Storrs and Pival both appreciate this style of staging as valuable in terms of what the cycle is trying to do, but Kahrl is less enthusiastic and criticizes, in particular, "the dramaturgy of the tableau vivant" in the Chester Nativity. (14) The pictorial style of Chester is best understood as a natural concomitant of the cycle's interest in signification. In dramatizing the responses of characters to signs, the authors present a number of visible things, including sections of action, as significant, and in encouraging the audience to be alert to the significance of what it sees, they adopt techniques which make the dramatic experience of the onlooker a continual sequence of moments of observation and interpretation.

Action becomes objectified and turned towards the condition of pictorial image by being described by an audience within the play. Here, the First Shepherd describes and questions the nativity scene before him:

Sym, sym, securlye
here I see Marye,

(12) Patrick Hamilton Storrs, "A Re-evaluation of the Dramatic Method of The Chester Cycle," Diss. Berkeley 1975, p.22.

(13) Paul John Pival, Jr., "Staging as Projection of Imitated Action in the Chester Cycle," Diss. Wisconsin 1973, esp. p.104.

(14) Stanley J. Kahrl, Traditions of Medieval English Drama (London: Hutchinson, 1974), p.57.

and Jesus Christ fast bye
lapped in haye

.....

Whatever this ould man that here ys?

Take heede how his head ys whore.

His beard is like a buske of bryers

with a pound of heare about his mouth and more.

(VII, 480-3 and 496-9)

By this internal observation, the author creates vignette, focussing his onlookers' attention on a scene of deep significance and, in the detail of Joseph's aged appearance, on a key sign of the Virgin Birth, though this point is not brought out by the observers. (15) Sometimes, however, the whole process of objectification of action and eliciting of significance is enacted within the play. This is the case in the Ascension, where the action is frozen: Christ "stet in medio quasi supra nubes." Angels then question him liturgically, drawing attention to his clothing and blood-stained appearance. Christ replies, identifying himself and explaining why the blood has been retained on his body. There is also an internal audience of disciples to draw significance from this and Christ's previous risen appearances. The freezing of the action, the describing and discussing of the visual image which results, and the presence of a surrogate audience within the play accentuate the pictorial effect. In dramatizing within the action the process of observation, the Chester author insists upon careful observation as the key to proper spiritual understanding by the onlooker.

Even when the action is not frozen, the presence of an

(15) Substantially the same creation of vignette through description occurs in the play of the Magi's Gifts (IX, 128-31).

internal observer can still create vignette. When Mary sees the people weeping and rejoicing before the Nativity, her description and questioning of the event coupled with its silent, mimed action focusses our attention upon it as upon an image. Later, the fall of the Egyptian Idols, though undescribed, and with its significance left unexplained, takes the same pictorial quality from having been promised by the Angel to Mary as a sight for her to observe and take pleasure from (X, 283-4). In each of these cases the author is making his action pictorial as a concomitant of making it signficatory.

The Expositor also functions to create a pictorial drama in which stress falls upon the signficatory function of what is seen. Writing of the Expositor in the H MS version of play V, David Mills notes, "he is a distancing device, talking to the audience while the action on stage is suspended." (16) To a certain extent this distancing is achieved whenever the Expositor is used. He provides one of the framing devices which Brawer notes as "characteristic" of Chester. (17) McCaffrey believes that the Expositor in the Abraham play "functions as a control over the emotional involvement of the audience". (18) Distance, interpretative perspective and control on the emotions - the Expositor is

(16) David Mills, "The Two Versions of Chester Play V: Balaam and Balak," in Beryl Rowland, ed., Chaucer and Middle English Studies in honour of Rossell Hope Robbins (London:Allen and Unwin, 1974), 366-71, p.370.

(17) R. A. Brawer, "The Form and Function of the Prophetic Procession in the Middle English Cycle Play," Annuaire Medievale, 13 (1972), 88-124, p.111.

(18) Philip McCaffrey, "The Didactic Structure of the Chester Sacrifice of Isaac," Comitatus, 2 (1971), 16-26, p.25.

part of that formal, pictorial and austere signifi-
catory style which we saw in the episode of the Fall where there
was no Expositor at work. In such expository sections
Chester looks more and more like the "quick" book mentioned
in the Wycliffite sermon. Pival suggests that the action may
have looked even more like a picture by remaining static and
visible while its meaning was elicited: "Qualified as
icon-like figures by the things which they carry, the
characters of the [Abraham] play are regularly presented in
tableau-like scenes or pictures. These pictorial moments
coincide with the appearance of the Expositor who interrupts
the play, stilling its life with his commentary." (19) This
is a most attractive and convincing suggestion and, if one
considers the likely result of such a presentation, an
analogy can be drawn between this and the expository
picture-books. A parallel with the Biblia Pauperum is
especially evident, for on each page in that work the types
and antetypes are displayed, as they are explicitly
mentioned here in the Abraham play, and with them the
prophet acting as the Expositor is also depicted, as he
would be similarly evident to the eyes of the Chester
onlooker. (20)

Because Chester insists on the spiritual importance of
a properly directed vision, and employs dramatic styles
which accentuate signification, one feels it more important
to define what a spectator of Chester actually saw than, for
example, what a spectator of the verbally and imagistically

(19) Pival, pp.72-3.

(20) Biblia Pauperum, reproduced in fascimile J. Ph.
Berjeau (London: John Russell Smith, 1859).

richer Ludus Coventriae saw. One feels that more essential matter will be lost from Chester if its visual images are not defined. The theses of Storrs and Pival cover some of this ground, and there is no space here for an appropriate analysis of this dimension of the cycle, but some indication of the problem can be gained if we consider a matter as apparently trivial as the following: what happens after God in play I announces his departure from the sight of the angels?

Here will I bide nowe in this place
to be angells comforture.
To be revisible in shorte space,
it is my will in this same houre.
(I, 122-5)

Either God is absent completely from the scene during the ensuing period of Lucifer's rebellion, and has, perhaps, gone behind a curtain, or he is visible to the audience throughout and is only understood to be invisible to the angels. The character of the scene and of the demands made on the onlooker appreciating its significance differ depending on whether God is visible or not. If God is absent from the sight of the audience, then Lucifer's attempt to dominate the vision of the angels is inevitably going to succeed as a domination of the audience's theatrical attention. He will rule the stage as Antichrist does in the early parts of his pageant. On the other hand, if God is visible to the audience, Lucifer's attempts to dominate the characters appear immediately fatuous as the onlooker still has the true focus of sight available to him. A constant intellectual recognition of the spiritual responsibility of sight is possible for the spectator able to contemplate

Lucifer's antics in the perspective provided by a silent magisterial God. On the other hand, the spectator to whom the sight of God has been denied during a time of theatrical domination by Lucifer is made aware in a much more sudden and personal way of the dangers of misdirected sight, when God returns to show up Lucifer for the sham he is. If the critic is to get close to the cycle such visual alternatives have to be at least clarified although, in this case, one can see that either choice would be in keeping with techniques adopted elsewhere in the work - sometimes evil characters are allowed free reign, sometimes their pretensions have a visible corrective.

If we attend to the visual effects of the plays, particularly in the light of their contribution to signification, it becomes easier to find appropriate criteria for evaluating the plays as drama. Professor Kahrl believes that the Nativity play in Chester is "crowded and diffuse in its effect." (21) On the face of things, this appears a reasonable criticism for a play which changes its scene in a major way four times. Kahrl is, after all, not accusing it of thematic inconsistency, but of lacking a single focus such as is enjoyed by the much shorter York play of the Nativity (153 lines to Chester's 722 lines). Clearly, the author's consistent understanding of the Nativity's implications is going to be of little value to the spectator if his attention is uncontrollably diverted by changes of subject matter. I believe, however, that the organisation of the play ensures that the spectator is

(21) Kahrl, p.56.

struck not by the diversity of the play's contents but by the single need to be spiritually perceptive in experiencing them.

Throughout play VI, the kind of dramatic experience offered to the spectator is constantly changing, but it is not changing in an unassimilable way. Verbally intensive sections roughly alternate with sections in which argument, dialogue or explication derive from visual things. Examples of the former are the Magnificat (65-110); Octavianus's opening speech (185-272); the Expositor's narrative of nativity miracles (564-643). Interspersed with these we find visually determined material such as Joseph's horror at the sight of his pregnant wife; Joseph's display of his carpentry tools; the sight Mary has of the people weeping and rejoicing, and the appearance of the star to Octavianus and Sybil. This controlled alternation has the effect of encouraging alert attention to the significance of different kinds of event: its variety permits a repeated focussing of attention on meaning, without exhaustion, and its structured nature means that the process of re-focussing is controlled. At one point, the spectator is listening and visual attention is relaxed, at the next, what he is hearing has a specific and evident visual source. In the case of Joseph's complaint, what the spectator can see, that is, Mary's appearance, is in disjunction with what he is being asked to listen to, that is, Joseph's erroneous response to Mary, and the spectator must make the spiritual judgement which links the two. We find such tension elsewhere in the cycle, as when we listen to the Jews mocking Christ robed as a King or

crucified, and measure their response against the visual image of Christ. In play VI alternation of the visual and the verbal is one device by which the author creates conditions for the spectator to become alert to significance. The play is full of signs, contemplated by characters, overtly presented to the audience (as Joseph's tools are), or narrated by the Expositor. Sometimes a sign is improperly responded to, sometimes its significance is known, sometimes its meaning is elicited by an interpreter. The play is thus thematically unified by that which also explains why it offers a varying dramatic experience to the spectator: the process of signification, dramatized in the play, and providing the central didactic imperative to the spectator.

In the first part of this chapter we have been looking at the stylistic conditions which encourage the spectator to use his spiritual intelligence in relation to sources of significance. I would like now, by means of a discussion of typology, and of allusion, to come to some conclusions about the kind of challenges which Chester makes to the spiritual acuity of the spectator, and about the opportunities it provides for contemplation of meaning independent of guidance from within the play. Our attention is now upon the taking of significance by the spectator rather than upon the stylistic conditions which facilitate that activity but, as I made clear at the beginning of the chapter, we can only establish what the plays would have permitted to an onlooker, not what onlookers actually took from the plays.

Chester is the most explicitly typological of the

extant English mystery cycles and this encourages one to think that much of the signification which it is expecting its spectator to pick up will be of a typological kind. The presence of explicit typological commentary seems to encourage an alertness to typology in places where it is not explicitly pointed out. However, I believe that this degree of explicitness in Chester needs to be put in perspective, not by comparing it to that in the other cycles, but in relation to the explicitness which typological traditions coupled with the contents of the Chester Cycle would have permitted to the Chester authors. For this purpose, the typological picture-book known as the Pictor in Carmine provides a suitable source for comparison. It is probably English and is the largest known collection of types and antetypes. (22) In addition, the Pictor, like Chester, is strong on Christ's Ministry and eschatological subjects. From the many typological parallels included, I have selected those which Chester could make explicit if it so wished because it includes both of the events. Tradition, as seen in the Pictor in Carmine, would permit the Chester authors to be explicitly typological in the areas set out below.

The ejection of the moneylenders from the temple is prefigured by the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden, and by Noah's closing the Ark after he and his family have entered it. A stage direction indicates that this latter

(22) I take this information from the article by M. R. James, "Pictor in Carmine," Archaeologia, XCIV (1951), 141-66. I have used his transcription (pp.151-66) of the Pictor's table of subjects as the basis for my comparison with Chester.

action was represented in Chester: "Then shall Noe shutt the windowe of the arke, and for a little space within the bordes he shalbe scylent" (III, 260f.). Christ writing on the ground in the episode of "The Woman taken in Adultery" is prefigured by God writing the law in stone tablets for Moses. The Last Supper is prefigured by Melchisedeck offering Abraham bread after his return from defeating the four kings. The Scourging of Christ is prefigured by Adam and Eve recognizing their nakedness and being ashamed. Christ carrying his cross is prefigured by Isaac carrying the wood for the sacrifice. The Crucifixion is prefigured by several actions: God putting flesh upon the rib out of which he makes Eve; Eve extending her hand towards the fruit on the forbidden tree; God investing Adam and Eve with skins as a sign of their mortality; Cain killing Abel, and Abraham offering Isaac as a sacrifice on the wood. The blood and water which flows from Christ's side is prefigured by the formation of Eve from a rib in the side of Adam. The Harrowing of Hell is prefigured by Abraham returning Lot to his place after he had been taken captive. The H MS version of play V might permit a parallel with the Pentecost since it stresses the light in which God appears and tradition as seen in the Pictor associated the coming of the Holy Spirit in fire and thunder with the giving of the law to Moses in similar conditions. A parallel was also seen between the crucifixion of Christ with a thief on his right and left sides and the judging of saved and damned on the right and left of Christ. No explicit reference is made to such a disposition of the souls in the Judgement play but one can

probably assume from the commonness of the idea that this was how Chester dramatized the event.

If we look at this list of possible typological links it becomes clear that Chester is a good deal less explicit than it might be about the typological associations which the contents of the cycle would permit. A glance at the types and antetypes of the Biblia Pauperum increases this impression. It authorizes a typological link between Moses breaking the tablets when he finds that the Israelites have taken to worshipping idols, and the collapse of the Egyptian idols when Christ goes into Egypt. (23) It also presents a parallel between the creation of Eve and the crucifixion of Christ, different from that in the Pictor in Carmine. (24) Here the parallel extends to Adam's sleeping while Eve is created with Christ being dead when the sacramenta flow from his side. Cornell's study of the iconography of the Nativity shows that a further typological relationship was thought to exist between the fall of the Roman temple of Peace and the fall of the Egyptian Idols. (25) These events are alluded to and dramatized, respectively, in Chester.

It would be possible for someone who was aware of the typological traditions to find a great deal of such prefiguration and fulfilment in Chester. The general encouragement to observe with insight into the meaning of what is seen, and the evidence that typological prefiguration was considered of vital importance in the

(23) Biblia Pauperum, p.26.

(24) Ibid., p.33.

(25) Henrik Cornell, The Iconography of the Nativity of Christ, Uppsala Universitets Arsskrift, 1924 (Uppsala:A-B. Lundequistka Bokhandeln, 1924), pp.49-50.

dramatization of the Abraham story would seem to insist that, wherever possible, typology should be considered as a dimension of the cycle's meaning. And yet, why is it, if so much is potentially comprehensible in these terms, that so little is treated thus explicitly? I believe that the vast majority of these events are not intended to be linked in a typological way by the spectator. It could be argued that there are some details which are clearly included for typological reasons and which are not referred to explicitly. The stress on Isaac's carrying the wood and his obedience in doing this (IV 236-48) seem intended to urge us to a typological interpretation. It was traditional that the ram caught in the thicket was a figure of Christ, his head crowned with thorns. (26) Chester is even more typological in implication since it specifies "a lambe that is both good and gaye" (434; my emphasis). Longworth notes that Isaac is naked in Chester: "This curious embellishment, which is not biblical and is not in the other versions of the episode, deliberately emphasizes the typological similarity between Isaac and Christ, who is depicted naked at the crucifixion." (27) I do not feel, however, that the presence of these inexplicit typological details within an explicitly typological play authorizes the similar interpretation of other potentially typological but inexplicitly presented details elsewhere in the cycle. Only in play IV is there an explicit invitation to us to translate the action in a

(26) Kolve, p.74.

(27) Robert M. Longworth, "Art and Exegesis in Medieval English Dramatizations of the Sacrifice of Isaac," Educational Theatre Journal, 24 (1972), 118-24, p.122.

typological way. The link between "The Temptation" and Adam's sin which the Expositor makes in XII is different in that the action upon which he is commenting is the fulfilment of the earlier event and does not require to be translated into other terms to be fully understood.

I share the reservations about typologically dominated criticism which Clopper makes in his thesis and which he summed up thus:

Given the nature of medieval exegesis, one can always find examples upon which to base an assertion of figural relationships, but unless one can find some evidence in staging or in the text, a figural interpretation remains an assertion external to the play and a result of contemplation not representations. (28)

However, I believe that the problem is perhaps more complex than this. The account I gave of some of the typological parallels set out in a couple of picture-books served to show how inexplicit Chester is in this area, but it also served to show how much potential there was for the spectator's linking different events in the cycle. Also, although the general lack of explicitness seems to discourage independent typological interpretation, it would surely not prevent the manifest similarities of theme or presentation between some of the events being clear to an alert spectator. I agree with Clopper in distrusting enthusiastic application of figural interpretation; I believe that, even in Chester with its encouragement to the spectator to take significance, we should be guided by the explicit references of the authors when using figural

(28) Lawrence M. Clopper, Jr., "The Structure of the Chester Cycle: Text Theme, and Theatre," Diss. Ohio State 1969, p.81.

interpretation. But I differ from Clopper in the following respect: I do not believe that obvious links in staging or in text, even between events traditionally understood as typologically linked, necessarily demand that we see the episodes as associated typologically or that we understand the author to be including the events as prefiguration and fulfilment. I believe that Chester is full of thematic links between different events, and between objects, and between phrases, used at different points of the cycle but that the associations thus created are only infrequently included with the intention that we recognize how things of the Old Law signify the things of the New.

It is the task of the onlooker in Chester not so much to spot typological links as to recognize these frequent thematic links between action, objects and phrases. These parallelisms will yield a range of meanings, sometimes drawing attention to the steady fulfilment of God's plan, sometimes creating ironic contrasts, sometimes deepening one's understanding of a particular theme, sometimes simply repeating a point already made and made again with no typological association in mind.

Of course, I am not claiming that all the episodes which the picture-books suggested could be linked typologically are, in fact, linked thematically. There seems little connection of any kind, for example, between the expulsions of Adam and Eve, and the moneylenders. Both episodes contribute independently to the different sections in which they appear. It is far more defensible to understand the expulsion of the moneylenders as a sign of

Christ's authority in a section closely concerned with such signs than to consider it as included to parallel the earlier episode, or even as functioning to recall it. But one does, nevertheless, often become aware of thematic links between those events to which tradition would have permitted a typological association.

There seems no evidence that the restoration of Lot is to be understood typologically at all, let alone in relation to the Harrowing of Hell. Its absence from the Expositor's commentary on the play's typology seems to suggest that its inclusion, unique in the English cycles, was not prompted by figural considerations. Yet if we think of the thematic link, upon which the prefigurative connection was presumably based, there is no doubt that a similarity exists: just as Lot is rescued from his enemies and restored to his true throne, so the souls in Hell are rescued and returned to their true heavenly seats. That it is in the thematic link rather than the figurative which an onlooker should be recognizing is suggested by the fact that other parts of the cycle hint at a recurrent interest in the idea of the restoration of people favoured by God to their true country. Antichrist, whose parodies are generally a good indication of what is thematically important for the authors, announces that he is come to take back the chosen people, the Jews, to the land from which Christ falsely excluded them:

My people of Jewes he could twynne
that there land came the never in.
Then on them nowe must I mynne
and restore them agayne.
(XXIII, 33-6)

It is the theme of restoration that links the episode of

Lot, the ascent from Hell, Antichrist's parody, and indeed the general history of the Old Testament from the expulsion of Adam and Eve and the cursing of the ground to the happy, secure, and lush country which the Children of Israel inhabit in the "Balaam and Balaack" episode.

If we look at the proposed typological association between Adam and Eve discovering their nakedness and Christ being stripped and scourged there is no explicit indication that the events are to be figuratively combined. They are, however, visually parallel, for the discovery of their nakedness is followed by Adam and Eve being invested with the dead beasts' skins, and the nakedness of Christ is covered immediately after the scourging with the mockery of "regal" robes: "Tunc posteaquam flagellaverunt eum, postea induunt eum purpurea ponentes in cathedram..." (XVI, 322f.). I do not believe that this visual parallel is intended to suggest a specific figurative association of the two episodes, or that it does have this effect on the onlooker. Both episodes are part of Chester's larger interest in the significance of clothing and bodily appearance - an interest which extends to the false claims of Herod, the dark irony of his son, killed despite regal clothing, and to the repeated concentration on the clothing and body of Christ after the Resurrection. It is their contribution to one of Chester's patterns of sign that draws these two events together not a figurative association which they would enjoy separate from all other events in the cycle.

The typological link between Adam sleeping while Eve is created and Christ dead while blood and water come from his

side can be similarly put aside in favour of a thematic explanation. The two episodes are not explicitly related in a typological way, and one cannot imagine that the Crucifixion could be staged in such a way as to recall the earlier event. But they are similar in contributing to the central theme of vision. God graciously grants vision to Adam at the time when the future source of sin is entering the world. It is a gift the nature and timing of which has salvific promise (though the contents of the vision are not exclusively salvific). Similarly God's salvation of Man is intensively represented in the individual restoration of sight to Longeus which comes about by the operation of the water which runs from Christ's side (XVIA, 387). If these were the only examples of such a gift we might claim that a typological link was being created, though on a slightly different basic motif from that in the Pictor in Carmine or Biblia Pauperum, but we have had occasion at several points in this study to note the illumination of Man which God provides and, of course, the converse blinding of the unbeliever. Revelation such as Adam receives and physical enlightenment such as Longeus receives are part of the same thematic pattern as the healing of Caecus, the significant illumination of Hell just before the Harrowing, and the disappearance of Christ from the sight of the Jews.

The typological relationship possible between Moses' breaking the tablets when he discovers the Jews' idolatry and the later falls of the Roman Temple and the Egyptian Idols becomes, in Chester, a thematic association. Idolatry is too recurrent a topic in Chester to permit discussion

here, but it extends from Balaack's invocation of his hundred gods against the Israelites' one (V, 161) to Antichrist's shocked monotheism in the face of apparent pluralistic idolatry (XXIII, 498-502); it includes the Israelites' seduction by the Midianitish women and, of course, underlies our rejection of those characters who would offer signs of their own deity. The Augustinian idea that idolatry is a servitude to useless signs would appear to make this theme a suitable concomitant of Chester's development of sign.

It may well be that typology was such an ingrained habit of mind that some spectators would have seen a specifically figural association between the pairs of episodes noted above, and would have seen this association without any explicit direction or similarity of presentation to guide them. They might well have seen such specific links as valuable parts of the larger theme to which the events contributed. Were they to respond in this way their interpretation could surely not be considered inappropriate for a cycle in which God declares that he is "Prince principall, proved/in [his] perpetuall provydence" (I, 22-3; my emphasis). The critic cannot make such assumptions, however. The evidence of the text suggests authors more concerned with the development of themes than with the construction of typological patterns; more concerned that the spectator recognize a variety of relationships between things rather than a single prefigurative one. This becomes easier to accept when we see parallels still being created where there is no possibility of typological interpretation

resulting. In the nativity section, for example, age is regarded as a sign on several occasions. Octavianus declares "age shewes him soe in mee" (VI, 328) and this sign of his mortality indicates that another man must be sought as the true earthly King. Joseph's age, on the other hand, is a sign that Christ is that King, since he has evidently not been engendered by his earthly father. Here we are dealing with a thematic parallel and contrast intended to give a focus in sign to the larger contrast of earthly and heavenly kingdoms which play VI is developing. Similarly, gold appears twice as a sign - first, as a deeply valuable sign of Christ's nature offered by the Magi, then, as a discredited and inutile sign of the regality of Herod's son. This contrast of signification is what the spectator is expected to appreciate, and there is no possibility of typological association. The withering of limbs occurs twice: in the story of Salome and at the death of Herod. This repetition is intended to emphasize the point that death results from unbelief. There is no typological relationship although there is a visual and a moral relationship between the events.

It is not always as clear as this that visual parallels are to be understood thematically rather than typologically. For example, there are three, and possibly four, occasions in the cycle when tools used in carpentry are overtly displayed to the audience and this looks like a typological scheme. The first occurs in the Noah play where Noah's family show the tools they are to use on the Ark (III, 54-80). In the Nativity play, Joseph displays the carpentry

tools with which he must earn his meagre living. Then, in the Passion play the Jews display the tools used in crucifying Christ (XVIA, 153-60 and 165-8). The fourth display is at the Judgement where the tools used at the Crucifixion are probably the "instrumentis aliis" which the angels show along with the rest of the arma christi (XXIV, 355ff.). Several points need to be made about this visual pattern in the cycle. Firstly, although the Glossa Ordinaria and other exegetical works note a variety of typological parallels between the episodes of the Ark and the Crucifixion, I have not been able to find any written source or typological picture which links the two sets of tools. (29) Secondly, one cannot claim a typological relationship between the New Testament instances, only between that in the Noah play and those later. Thirdly, unlike the kind of recognition possible in visual art where types and antetypes are in close proximity, the recognition of this pattern in the drama can only be retrospective, since the author does not make it explicit on the first occasion. Fourthly, because the recognition is retrospective, the spectator who makes it takes from it a sense of an unfolding pattern, a fulfilment of God's plan. His main interest is not the

(29) The tools are not mentioned in the Bible and therefore cannot receive attention from glossators. The relevant section of Walafriid Strabo's Glossa Ordinaria can be found in J. P. Migne et al., eds., Patrologia Latina, CXIII, col. 105. The typological picture-books tend to prefer the Abraham story as a prefiguration of the Passion, and the Speculum Humanae Salvationis, which, unlike the others, has a special section for the nailing of Christ, prefers episodes from the lives of Jubal and Tubalcain, Isaiah and the King of Moab rather than the construction of the Ark. Speculum Humanae Salvationis, a reproduction...described and prefaced by M. R. James (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1926), plate XXIII.

exegete's - he is not concerned with the interpretation of events under the Old Law. Recognition of the pattern has for him an emotional rather than an intellectual effect. For these reasons, I feel that it is more helpful to understand this visual scheme as a means of marking stages in the unfolding of God's plan, without the onlooker coming to specifically typological conclusions about the way the events relate to each other.

Chester is a cycle of parallels, and of contrasts within similarity. Its strong emphasis on a few themes and its consistent style of dramatizing these yield a rich pattern of interrelating events which it is the spectator's task to recognize, weigh and contemplate. To decide that the leading pattern of interconnection is a typological one is to allow Chester's explicitness about typology greater force than it should have, and to undervalue the opportunities it provides for an alert spectator to pick up a much larger range of subtle associations and meanings. I would like to look at some of these opportunities now.

Like the other mystery cycles, Chester is popular drama in the sense that it makes its appeal to a wide public. It was shown to the clergy as well as to the laity. (30) Yet this popular appeal need not imply that the cycle offers only such meaning as could be appreciated by the vast majority of its wide audience. The Bible itself offers a rough analogy here. Augustine writes of the more enigmatic

(30) Clopper points out that even though control of the cycle was civic rather than ecclesiastical "yet as late as 1572...the play is performed first before the clergy at the Abbey Gates," in "History and Development," p.245.

parts of scripture, "Hardly anything may be found in these obscure places which is not found plainly elsewhere." (31) God has been gracious enough to make his meaning clear, but there is still a need for the exegete to clarify those parts which God left complex in order to subdue our pride and make us value his promises. (32) Chester is similar in that it does not deny its important meanings to the less educated spectator, but still reserves some material which the more knowledgeable alone will be able to pick up. It is different only in the sense that, while the Bible clarifies nearly all its obscurities, Chester does not do so. But the cycle ensures that its more covert points are of secondary importance and, in general, only support ideas already made more clearly. As one might expect of a cycle so committed to the process of signification and didactically so emphatic about the need to understand the significance of things, Chester offers many occasions on which only the alert or knowledgeable onlooker will appreciate the full significance of what is spoken. It even makes some allusions which, it seems to me, would require subsequent consideration with an open Bible to be appreciated fully. Generally, these opportunities arise in sections dealing with evil characters: the spectator is thus given the chance to appreciate the folly and pretension of the evil figure in a more precise way. But Chester does not feel it necessary to explain all the signs it includes even in sections other than those dealing with evil. The nativity sign of the three

(31) Robertson, p.38; De Doc. Christ., p.36.

(32) De Doc. Christ., p.35.

suns (VI, 636-9) is not explained even though it is introduced in an expository speech where such explanation could have been easily given. The spectator must appreciate for himself that the suns which "wonderslye together went/and torted into one" provide a trinitarian motif which appears to express the mystery of Christ's godhead at the moment of his birth. (33)

A more extreme case can be found in the sign of the rainbow at the end of the Noah play. Chester is the only cycle to include this sign which betokens a covenant between God and Man:

GOD

My bowe betwene you and mee
in the fyrmamente shalbe,
by verey tokeninge that you may see
that such vengeance shall cease.
(III, 309-12)

that ylke bowe shalbe seene,
in tokeninge that my wrath and teene
shall never thus wroken bee
(318-20)

What is most striking about this particular sign is that its full prophetic significance is not given, although God's description of it is surprisingly specific. The audience presumably takes, as do the characters, a general implication of hope from it. Some, with Adam's earlier

(33) A recent dissertation, which I have not consulted, deals with this kind of motif: William Allen Pasch, "Trinitarian Symbolism and Medieval English Drama," Diss. Massachusetts 1977. Cornell's study of the nativity iconography notes that the miracles recounted by the Expositor were infrequently represented in visual art, and that the miracle of the three suns was rare. This may account for their presentation in narrative: the dramatists wished to use them, having found them in the Stanzaic Life of Christ, but had no model for representing them visually. Cornell, The Iconography of the Nativity of Christ, pp.47 and 49.

prophetic vision in mind, may sense its redemptive implication. But not many, surely, will understand the particular reference in the following description: "The stringe is torned towardes you/and towardes me is bente the bowe" (320-1). Professor Travis elucidates this description of the rainbow in his forthcoming book and it is sufficient to say here that he has proved it to be a sign specifically prophetic of the redemption of Man on the cross. (34) It seems likely that the author is here permitting those who are sufficiently well-informed iconographically to take a deeper significance from this dramatically unique sign, independent of guidance from the text.

The cycle also offers verbal echoes for the perceptive listener. We have already met the irony which attaches to Judas's description of his kiss as a "verey signe." Other verbal parallels appear, both to undercut evil and to suggest the controlled structure of God's divine plan. For example, the Expositor describes the imminent unmasking of Antichrist by Enock's and Helias' miracles in the following terms:

Manye signes they shall shewe
which the people shall well knowe,
and in their token truely trowe
(XXII, 229-31)

This echoes Simeon's prophecy of the signs which Christ will show in the Ministry: "Manye signes hee shall shewe/in which untrewē shall non trowe" (XI, 183-4). No specific point depends upon this echo but, if it is noticed, it serves to emphasize the divine plan as a series of signs offered to

(34) Peter W. Travis, Dramatic Design in the Chester Cycle (forthcoming from Chicago Univ. Press).

belief, and resulting in the confusion of the unbeliever. Similarly, a rhetorical echo is used in the Antichrist play to undercut evil. Antichrist's gifts of cities and castles which follow the emission of his spirit upon the Kings are a grotesque imitation of the gifts of the Holy Ghost, so lengthily described by the apostles in play XXI. But when he doles out Lombardy, Denmark, Hungary, Patmos (a nice touch in a Johannine cycle), Italy and Rome the audience may well be reminded of a previous use of this rhetorical device of listing. It occurred at the end of play XXI where the two foreigners were discussing the "wondrous case" of the disciples speaking in tongues. (XXI, 375-86). (35) It recalls, in other words, an episode in which the power to perform miraculous signs was shown to be passing to men. By such an echo the author subtly adds evidence for the fatuity of Antichrist's pretensions. As so often in Chester, one feels that the main line of the author's treatment will carry the spectator to correct conclusions, but that the depth of writing is much greater than is needed to do this.

We have already seen that evil characters in Chester frequently attempt to seduce by providing linguistic and non-linguistic signs of their own pre-eminence. It is in this area that the Chester authors most often provide opportunities for the spectator to exercise spiritual judgement and knowledge by perceiving the true force of hints and allusions put into the mouths of the evil characters. At the height of his rebellion, as he moves

(35) The countries included in the two lists are different, but I do not believe this would prevent the rhetorical device itself providing an echo.

forward to sit in God's throne, Lucifer attempts again to draw the angels' attention to the signs of his grandeur: "Behoulde my bodye, handes and head -/the mighte of God is marked in mee" (I, 188-9). J. Candido writes, "The request is a curious one and suggests that perhaps these two parts of Lucifer's body are more elaborately attired than the others, or at least somehow more prominently visible to the angels, and hence to the audience." (36) I think that we can understand the request as an authorial, covert allusion which is intended to undercut the rebel angel. The second line of the request, "the mighte of God is marked in mee," is ambiguous because of the objective genitive. The fact, however, that the line is a linguistic parody of God's lines "The might of my makeinge/is marked in mee" (I, 32-33) suggests that what Lucifer is doing is suggesting that his own might is patently divine, and that he is trying to give evidential force to his claim by using divine phraseology. But even if we read the meaning of the line as "God's [the Creator's] might is evident in me" we are still being directed by Lucifer to behold the evidence of his own authority in heaven. The words he uses, however, "my bodye, handes and head," suggest the true God to the alert spectator, that is, they bring the appearance of the

(36) J. Candido, "Language and Gesture in the Chester Sacrifice of Isaac," Comitatus, 3 (1972), 11-18, p.11.

resurrected Christ to mind. (37) One does not need to have read or watched the rest of the cycle with its concentration on Christ's wounded body to respond to Lucifer's words in this way. But it is useful to remember that play I was the last to enter the cycle and could therefore have been composed with the rest of the work in mind. It is my belief that when the author included this detail he was thinking of the statements which Christ makes after the Resurrection:

I am hee that hath you forbought
and dyed for mans good.
My feete, my handes you may see;
and knowe the soothe also may yee,
(XIX, 178-81 and compare 244)

Quite apart from bringing the true God to mind and thus showing the evil folly of Lucifer's claims to pre-eminence, these words, in reminding us of the salvation to come, make us think of the "provydence" which God has asserted at the beginning of this play as evidence of his unique authority (I, 22-3). Even at the moment where sin is entering, reclamation is planned, and our minds pass Lucifer by, briefly contemplating the true God instead.

When evil characters quote from the Bible, as they frequently do in Chester, their choice of text is not always a happy one. Sometimes, admittedly, the texts they take over do not rebound on them in any special way. Balaack's cry to his God's (V, 131ff.), for example, does not undercut him in

(37) In visual representations of the fall of Lucifer, the angel is generally shown as falling or already fallen rather than at the moment of approaching the throne. I have found no visual correlate for the interpretation I am offering, but this does not undermine my claim, based as it is on textual evidence. I am not making any claim as to the posture Lucifer adopts when referring to his body, hands and head.

any way not already being presented in the text. It is simply the author's intelligent application of the cry of the idolaters in Deut. xxxii.38. Similarly, Antichrist's first two quotations from the prophets (XXIII, 24ff. from Ezech. xxxvi.34; XXIII, 40ff. from Psalm V.8) are simply straightforward misapplications of the text, part of his theft of linguistic signs to complement his parody of miraculous signs. On occasion, however, if we follow up the reference it proves to have an extra edge which, unknown to the evil character, cuts against him.

Particularly unfortunate is Herod's comparison of his intended Massacre of the Innocents with Athaliah's killing the children of the blood royal when she saw that her own son was dead (VIII, 331-5). (38) The story appears in II Kings xi.1 and II Chron. xxii.10-12 and was included in the Biblia Pauperum as the prefiguration of the Massacre. (39) It rebounds on Herod in that while Athaliah was responding to the prior death of her son, Herod actually brings about the death of his son in the Massacre. Also, in the Old Testament story, Joash, the son of Jehosheba, escapes the slaughter and is hidden in the house of the Lord for six years. Christ similarly escapes Herod's massacre and, according to the Stanzaic Life of Christ, though Chester does not make the point, is kept in Egypt for six years

(38) Pival, pp.167-8 and Keane, p.167 also note the ironies in this reference.

(39) Biblia Pauperum, plate VII.

until Herod is dead. (40) Although the typological parallel with Athaliah may have been generally known, it seems unlikely that the dark ironies of the reference could have been picked up by the majority of Chester's audience. But that these ironies are an intended part of a full response to Herod is surely incontrovertible.

We noted in chapter V that Herod attempts to arrogate to himself the evidential significance of prophecy by quoting Jeremiah vi.11, "Effundam super parvulum, etc." (VIII, 324ff.). This quotation has its own veiled irony. Like Meed in Piers Plowman, Herod only quotes part of his text and the part he omits fundamentally undermines his point. Preceding the quoted prophecy are the words, "Idcirco furore Domini plenus sum," i.e., "Therefore I am full of the fury of the Lord." When Herod fulfills his part of the prophecy by massacring the Innocents, God fulfills the full text, making Herod's downfall a sign of the true King's power. In addition, if we view the prophecy Herod has stolen in its original context, we see that the preceding verse is directly relevant to Herod. Jeremiah has directed his anguished reproach at the Jews because "the word of the Lord is unto them a reproach; they have no delight in it." The situation in which Herod quotes the prophecy is exactly comparable: he is being confronted with the textual signs which prove the Nativity, and he is rejecting them.

(40) Stanzaic Life of Christ, 3616. The Life is inconsistent in this detail for it incorrectly reads seven years at line 3311. The Polychronicon, upon which the Life is partly based, has six years. J. R. Lumby, ed., Polychronicon Ranulphi Higden Monachi Cestrensis (London: Longman and Co., 1872), IV, 268.

Antichrist's third prophecy marks a change of technique in the author. In the first two, he allowed Antichrist simply to misapply to himself texts which properly applied to the true God. His quotation from Daniel xi.39 (not the non-existent thirteenth chapter of Daniel which the MSS specify) is in a fact a reference to the "strong king" who will arise and honour a strange god and divide the land for gain. Lucken does not believe this change of tactic to be very important: "It made no great difference what prophecies he quoted. The audience was to be impressed by his deceptive wiles, and that was all that mattered." (41) While this is undoubtedly true as a description of the general effect intended and achieved, it seems to me that the evidence of allusiveness and covert irony elsewhere in the cycle encourages us to regard this quotation as a mistake on Antichrist's part. His use of scripture will sustain his deception most of the time but here the mask slips.

Kolve believes that the cycles sometimes overtly solicit the responses of the knowledgeable:

Occasionally the attention of the learned is directed towards something included specially for them. In the Chester Last Judgement, when the demons fear that Christ's mercy may empty hell, one of them quotes in Latin the biblical text that says the saved will be separated from the damned, and prefaces it thus: 'which wordes to Clarks here present/I will rehearce, by the roode.' (42)

Chester is the only cycle which does this frequently and on a systematic basis. The fourth prophecy of Antichrist is an excellent example of such an invitation to the learned. The

(41) L. U. Lucken, Antichrist and the Prophets of Antichrist, p.53.

(42) Kolve, The Play Called Corpus Christi, p.4.

fact that Antichrist specifically invites the "clarkes" to understand the prophecy which he has misapplied is clear encouragement to look it up and enjoy the inappropriateness of it:

And as the prophett Sophonye
speakes of mee full wytterlye
I shall rehearse here readelye
that clarkes shall understand.
(XXIII, 117-20)

As one might have expected, the quotation from Sophonias (Zephaniah) iii.8 is partial. Antichrist quotes "Expecta me in die resurrectionis meae in futurum quia iudicium ut congregem gentes et colligam regna." The full verse reads as follows:

Quapropter expecta me, dicit Dominus, in die resurrectionis meae in futurum, quia iudicium meum ut congregem Gentes, et colligam regna: et effundam super eos indignationem meam, omnem iram furoris mei: in igne enim zeli mei devorabitur omnis terra.

I have underlined those parts which Antichrist omits. He has naturally avoided the ascription of the speech to God but, in seeking a prophecy which will add weight to his intended "resurrection," he has chosen a verse which actually prophesies the Judgement. Antichrist is gathering the people to false belief but, in the Bible, God is gathering them to pour out his indignation upon them and to consume the earth in the fire of his jealousy. Any "clarke" who read the rest of the verse would appreciate the trick which the author has played on his character, and would realize that the verse announces the imminent arrival of God to judge and to damn sinners.

It could be argued that the allusions and ironies noted above were never anything but sources of private pleasure

for the authors, that the main points of the speeches are never dependent upon the searching out of the text to which allusion is made and that such searching out could only be done after the drama. On the other hand, I would propose that, precisely because the point of the speeches is always obvious, the allusiveness of the writing becomes a matter for study. Why should the authors do more than they needed to do to make their point clear? In addition, whether or not these rather *recherché* jokes gave private pleasure to the authors, the fact remains that they appear in a cycle which is constantly urging that the spectator understand the significance of what he experiences. Thirdly, one cannot know how many clergy would have required to consult the Bible to realize how the evil characters were perverting its text, but, were they to do so, they would surely not be responding inappropriately to the drama or engaging in a spiritually useless exercise.

Chester may permit the knowledgeable to appreciate more precisely and with satisfying humour the points which it offers in a less subtle way to its main audience, but it never leaves that audience to flounder. Its didactic structure is so arranged as to lead the spectator through a series of different spiritual experiences which sometimes draw him into a sense of community with characters, sometimes distance him from the work to guide his judgement, and sometimes insist that he uses his judgement independent of guidance from within the play.

We have already seen examples of the alignment of the audience with the Shepherds in play VII. A similar alignment

associates the audience with the disciples in the Ministry. When Christ opens play XIII with a great speech about his being and purpose, the audiences within and outside the world of the play are united in receiving this linguistic sign from him. Christ says to his disciples: "printe these sayinges in your mynd and harte;/recorde them and keepe them in memorye" (29-30). This admonition may be immediately directed at the disciples but it is equally relevant to the spectator who is to be spiritually alert in the ensuing plays, who will be able to understand the miraculous signs more fully by relating them to this self-revelatory speech by Christ, and who will later have to exercise his judgement, independent of any guidance of Christ, when the evil characters dominate the plays of the Trial and Passion with their false mocking signs.

In the plays after the Passion too the audience finds itself aligned with the disciples. Both groups share a central focus upon Christ whose body is repeatedly evident to all and makes the same demands of all. Both those who see him in the drama and those who watch the drama derive instruction in the faith, in Christ's significance for them, from the frequent questioning and exposition which is centred on Christ's body in these later plays. We feel strongly that the strength of spiritual witness which is required of men after the Passion is greater. Recognition of a living Christ is not now enough as it was in the pre-Passion plays. It is firm belief in a Christ who was dead and is now risen that is required of both disciples and audience. The drama has, in a sense, caught up with the

spiritual demands customarily made of its medieval Christian audience. The disciples and the spectators thus form a single community of belief. Though the disciples' wavering faith is rebuked as inadequate, the audience cannot feel spiritually distanced from them, for it finds support for its own beliefs in the signs Christ vouchsafes to strengthen the disciples. And although Christ's first Resurrection appearance is to the audience, the onlookers can feel no sense of superiority over those followers who have not yet seen him, for Christ reminds the spectators of their own inadequacy: "Earthlye man that I have wrought,/awake out of thy sleepe" (XVIII, 154-5). The identity of spiritual demand, spiritual condition and of required spiritual concentration on Christ leads to an identity between the disciples and the audience in their formal points of faith. The dramatizing of the Creed in Chester is the result. The Chester author is not interested solely in the historical foundation of the Creed, nor solely in reminding the audience of the terms of its own belief. What he is doing is to foster the community of belief which began to develop in the early ministry plays.

Only in these spiritual terms does the spectator become "involved" in Chester. He exercises his judgement upon what he sees and hears, and is thus involved by an active spiritual response, and he is aligned with an internal audience engaged in the same activity. The result is that he can feel part of a spiritual community which cuts across the aesthetic boundaries between play world and real world, but only if he co-operates with the drama on its own terms.

Finally, however, the cycle has to dramatize the Last Judgement and here the author is not interested in creating a sense of spiritual community between audience and characters but in presenting the alternative communities of saved and damned, choice between which still lies with the individual spectator. This has interesting effects on the treatment of sign and significance in the play.

Firstly, the author ties the play into the larger theme of sign: just as the events which we have witnessed throughout the cycle have been signs of God's nature, so is the judgement. Deus, at the opening of the play, makes this statement:

I God, greatest of degree,
in whom begynninge non may bee,
that I am pearles of postee,
nowe appertly that shalbe preeved.
(XXIV, 1-4)

The play as a whole will prove God's omnipotence whatever particular meanings arise from its action. When we look at the action, however, we notice that the characters are no longer taking significance from things as they have done throughout the cycle. There is much of significance to which they could respond. Uniquely among the extant cycles, Chester explicitly mentions and overtly displays the arma christi (17-19 and 356ff.) Christ draws attention to his clothing (21-2) and later focuses the attention of all upon his wounded side, and upon the blood retained on his body (398-412). But there is a marked lack of response to these specific signs although, obviously, the souls respond to Christ and their situation in very powerful terms. The significance of the signs is being given by Christ but, for

once in Chester, the other half of the process of signification, i.e., the reaction, is not receiving attention. The reason for this is that, as before the Creation, we are in a world where signs have no value. Before the Creation there was no one to respond to signs; now at the Judgement it is too late for any of the characters to respond in any spiritually fruitful way to what they see. When Man fell, God tested him, improved him, and gave hope to him through signs. The saved and damned souls, however, cannot change in any way through responding to signs; they are facing the ultimate realities. For characters within the play, history has moved beyond the signifiatory possibilities held out to them when they were alive.

The spectator, however, regards the Judgement with a different eye. The spiritual options of the spectator are not yet closed, for the event lies in the future. (43) Accordingly, the significance of the action in the Judgement is different for the onlooker from that which the souls appreciate. This event can be used to make didactic points and offer moral challenges just as any other episode in the cycle. It is this which the Chester author exploits by presenting, in a way reminiscent of the Dance of Death, representatives of different social classes facing judgement. The extreme moralistic emphasis of the play is unusual for Chester but not inappropriate for the extreme

(43) Kolve recognized a distinction between "drama time" and "audience time" for this play, and recognized the double value which speeches in it could have. Kolve, p.103.

situation being presented. (44) The spectator does comprehend signs in this drama. The arma christi, Christ's clothing, and his blood are powerful signs which, by displaying the redemptive sacrifice, declare to us the need to recognize our spiritual responsibilities. They thus extend the pattern of signification found in the post-Passion plays. Christ's blood will not show the unnaturalness of the Jews (397-401) and that Christ is "God in full powere" and not just a man. His wounded body now can take on a specifically moral significance for us: it is torn "with othes false alwayes fervent" (418). Seen in this highly significatory context, as I believe the spectator does see it, the fresh bleeding of Christ's side is the most intensely dramatic sign in the cycle. With it, the pattern of signification comes to a climax:

JESUS

Behould nowe, all men! Looke on mee
and see my blood freshe owt flee
that I bleede on roode-tree
for your salvatyon.

(425-8)

The audience sees, in a last great act of intensely focussed vision, how Christ's blood streams anew, and when it considers the meaning of that blood, the sacrifice it represents, sins of disbelief and evil behaviour become unthinkable. The Judgement play, therefore, shifts the responsibility of responding properly to sign firmly onto

(44) David J. Leigh suggests close connections between the cycle Judgement plays and moralities in "The Doomsday Mystery Play: An Eschatological Morality," Modern Philology, LXVII (1970), rpt. in Jerome Taylor and Alan H. Nelson, eds., Medieval English Drama: Essays Critical and Contextual, Patterns of Literary Criticism, II (London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1972), 260-78.

the shoulders of the audience, and warns the onlooker to accept that responsibility now, because the time is coming when, not just prefigurative signs, but all signs will be done. This chapter has shown that the Chester authors assist the spectator to recognize this spiritual need and to begin to fulfil it. They do so by their preference for the signficatory over the emotive; their consistent use of a pictorial style; their inclusion of a range of thematic and visual parallels for the spectator to recognize and understand; their provision of significance both to the general audience and to the more knowledgeable; and by their intelligent presentation of sections where the onlooker can feel aligned with 'internal' perceivers of signs as well as sections where independent judgement is called for.

APPENDIX I

OCCURRENCES OF VOCABULARY BASED ON 'SIGN' or
'TOKEN' IN THE CHESTER MSS.

Section 1: exact correspondences between all MSS. The lines cited are from MS Hm, which Lumiansky and Mills choose for their text.

1. IV, 91 for much good it may signifye
2. IV, 113 Lordinges, what may this signifye
3. IV, 118 signifieth the newe testamente
4. IV, 131 in signification - as leeve you mee -
5. IV, 194 what betokens this commandement:
6. IV, 460 Lordinges, this significatyon
7. VI, 354 by signe thow would me certyfye
8. VI, 358 his signes when I see verelye;
9. VI, 429 A, lord, what may this signifye
10. VI, 438 the tokeninge I shall thee lere.
11. VI, 608 And when they see this tokeninge,
12. VII, 534 And when I hard that tokeninge,
13. VIII, 5 send some tokeninge, lord, to mee,
14. VIII, 52 and by some signe us shewe.
15. VIII, 80 and verye tokeninge.
16. VIII, 88 more sygnes he will us shewe.
17. IX, 17 That is a signe wee be neare,
18. IX, 96 Gould love alsoe may signifye,
19. IX, 100 and incense tokeneth, leeve I
20. IX, 115 as Gould maye signifie.
21. IX, 164 in tokninge of thy dignitie
22. XI, 145 in tokeninge shee hase lived oo
23. XI, 183 Manye signes hee shall shewe
24. XIV, 246 what evidence or tokeninge

25. XIV, 411 Noe. A verey signe I shall you showe.
 26. XVIA, 471 that so great sygnes can shewe.
 27. XVII, 5 This ys a signe thou wilt succour
 28. XVII, 269 Then he betaught me this tokeninge,
 29. XX, 34 for any signe that I shewe maye
 30. XX, 37 Moe signes therfore yee shall see.
 31. XX, 83 such signes, soothlye, the shall shewe
 32. XXI, 51 shewe us here by some tokeninge
 33. XXII, 27 what the doe signifie I will shewe
 34. XXII, 85 Which hilles signifie maye
 35. XXII, 107 for redd maye well betoken aye
 36. XXII, 114 by them maye well signifie
 37. XXII, 229 Manye signes they shall shewe
 38. XXII, 231 and in theire token truely trowe
 39. XXII, 261 Nowe xv signes, while I have space,
 40. XXII, 334 the tokens to come before doomesdaye.
 41. XXII, 339 of Antechristes signes you shall assaye.
 42. XXIII, 68 a signe that wee may see.
 43. XXIII, 273 tyll we hard tokeninge
 44. XXIII, 550 such a signe yf thou wylt shewe,

Section 2: cases where the MSS all agree in the use of sign vocabulary and in the basic word chosen but differ either in number or in using a related form of the word.

1. III, 311 by verey tokeninge that you may see [token ARB, tokens H]
 2. III, 319 in tokeninge that my wrath and teene [token ARB]
 3. VI, 602 in tokeninge that there were readye [token B]
 4. VI, 678 his tokeninge this can shewe. [token AR]
 5. VI, 700 by verey sygne knowe yee maye; [signes B]
 6. VIII, 11 A starre should ryse tokninge of blys [betokeninge ARH]

7. XIII, 476 By verey signe nowe men maye see [signes ARBH]
8. XIV, 249 What signes nowe shewest thou here [signe AR]
9. XVII, 67 a lambe in tokeninge of thy lycrnesse, [token B]
10. XIX, 191 more sygnes you shall se [sign H]
11. XX, 173 For knowe we mone by sygne vereye [signes H]
12. XXIII, 78 by verey signe soone shall you see,
[signes ARBH Peniarth]
13. XXIII, 102 by verey signe you shall see. [signes AR]

In the following line, only the error of metathesis separates the B reading from the others and it can be classified with these examples of correspondence between the MSS. It is of a different nature from the scribal errors of my final section in that they are more than purely orthographic.

- XI, 143 A signe I offer here alsoe [singe B]

Section 3: divergences between MS.H and the Group MSS as a group.

1. MS.H III, 6 it is a signe, soth to sayne, [OM. in Group]
2. MS.H III, 22 This betokeneth God has done us some grace,
[OM. in Group]
3. MS.H III, 23 and is a signe of peace [OM. in Group]
4. MS.H V, 353 Lordinges, what this may signifie [OM. in Group]
5. MS.H V, 389 This signes non other, in good faye, [OM. in Group]
6. MS.H XVI, 172 Some signe nowe fayne would I see [vertue Group and C]
7. Group IV, 143 This signifyeth, the sooth to saye, [OM.H]
8. Group V, 31 to lerne this tokenn trulye. [OM.H]
9. Group V, 39 Therefore this token looke doe yee, [OM.H]
10. Group XV, 70 that sygnes and shadowes be all donne. [figures H]

Section 4: divergence within the Group.

1. HmB XXIII, 226 token your people what I saye - [OM. AR with lines 225-36]

Section 5: manuscripts having or lacking sign vocabulary in error.

1. XII, 193 Alsoe Christe in these sinnes three [signes A]
2. XVII, 261 When I see synnys full verey [signes ARH, sines B]
3. XXII, 109 they white hee sayth token there waye [betokeneth A, tokeneth R]
4. XXIV, 158 for purged synnes that were in mee. [signes H]

In number 2 above, MS.Hm lacks an instance of sign vocabulary which the other MSS properly have.

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