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## Accommodation and Coping in Medieval Catholic England: A Historical Dramaturgy Casebook for The Chester Mystery Cycle's Play 14: Christ at the House of Simon the Leper, Christ and the Moneylenders, and Judas' Plot

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**Accommodation and Coping in Medieval Catholic England: A Historical Dramaturgy**  
**Casebook for *The Chester Mystery Cycle's* Play 14: *Christ at the House of Simon the Leper,***  
***Christ and the Moneylenders, and Judas' Plot***

Senior Project Submitted to  
The Divisions of Arts and Social Studies  
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by  
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## **Dedication**

My culminating Bachelor's thesis in Theater and Medieval Studies is for my mother, Julie, and my sister, Elizabeth, who have shown me endless patience, support, and encouragement, and my father, Richard, who continually supports me from above. I am forever indebted to you for the help and guidance that you have given me not only throughout this process, but throughout my whole life. You've always encouraged me to find my interests and pursue them heart and soul. I have so greatly appreciated your willingness to learn and grow with me as I've researched and written this project, valued your suggestions and criticisms (Mom is always right), and I can only begin to repay you by dedicating the work put into this endeavor and this final product to you, my family and my closest unit.



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## Medieval Manuscript Reference Key

**MS- Manuscript**

**fol.- Folio (page)**

**r.- Recto (front side of folio)**

**v.- Verso (back side of folio)**





**The Cestrian Cordwainers Guild Crest**  
[\(https://chesterfreemenandguilds.org.uk/about/\)](https://chesterfreemenandguilds.org.uk/about/)



## 1) Introduction and History of Mystery Cycle Plays

I was first introduced to medieval Catholic cycle plays in Professor Miriam Felton-Dansky's Theater History course--now called Perspectives on World Theater Traditions--during my second year at Bard College. I found myself captured by them, like other theater historians, not only for their sheer theatrical power and continual ability to "move, amuse, and instruct" a modern audience, but also for their surprising elements of raunchiness, humor, and customarily unholy content and performance.<sup>1</sup> We studied the *York Mystery Plays*, the earliest known collection of Catholic cycle plays, which were first compiled and referenced in 1376, and subsequently banned by the "militant agencies" of the Protestant Elizabethan court in the 16th century for their flashy nature, "cross-dressing" all male casts, Catholic content,<sup>2</sup> and, as I will argue, curious development to include the laypeople's humanized understandings of lived devotion.<sup>3</sup>

Though first recorded in 1376, it is likely that York's plays have an earlier terminus post quem, and that a comprehensive program was finally collected, bound, and formalized at this later date. The 14th-century *York Cycle* includes 48 plays recounting biblical stories from the Old and New Testaments, which were performed on the Feast of Corpus Christi by the city's guildspeople--vocational workers--on mobile, decorated pageant wagon stages throughout York, England. I found myself instantly captivated by the sheer theatrical challenge that performing 48 large-cast plays in one daylong festival presented and the attention-commanding mobile nature of the performance, and I became thoroughly enraptured by the *York Cycle* as I dove deeper into its form, complex history, and reception and meaning in the church's clerical and lay

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<sup>1</sup> Beadle, Richard, and Pamela M. King. *York Mystery Plays: A Selection in Modern Spelling*. Oxford, Oxfordshire, New York: Clarendon Press Oxford University Press, 1984. Preface.

<sup>2</sup> Mills, David. *The Chester Mystery Cycle: A New Edition With Modernised Spelling*. East Lansing, Mich: Colleagues Press, 1992. xxi.

<sup>3</sup> Beadle and King. *York Mystery Plays*. Preface.

communities. Those perceived meanings were informed by the sometimes surprisingly sacrilegious and socially commentative implications made by the play's actions and language as public and extra-institutional displays of devotion and reverence-- most medieval Catholic theater was initially created to be performed in the church, but then frequently became secular as it evolved and grew in popularity. Through this growth, the plays emerged as grounded reflections of worldly understanding, displayed truly human takes on the world and living, and transcended the idealism, morals, and catechisms presented in the Bible. The plays maintained an acute awareness that the world in which we live is *not* like the ideal world typified in scripture, strayed from the Bible's guidance, and became the staple spectacle of one of Catholicism's holiest holidays. For audiences and players, alike, the plays offered, and continue to offer answers to the age-old dilemma: how does one grapple with living--actually existing in a social world--as a Catholic (or follower of any religion, for that matter) when religious ideals are impractical, if not impossible to embody?

As we learned in class, *The York Cycle*, while probably the most studied of the cycle plays, was the progenitor of multiple diaspora mystery cycles throughout the entirety of the European Catholic world, and especially England. While I began with the *York Cycle*, I became interested in studying all of the known and archived Catholic mystery plays and the festival environments in which they were performed not only as prolific theatrical spectacles, but primarily as socio-historical phenomena. While the comprehensive collection of all known English mystery cycles will always be present in my life's academic work, this project focuses on Play 14 in *The Chester Mystery Cycle* of Chester, England: *Christ at the House of Simon the Leper, Christ and the Moneylenders, and Judas' Plot*, performed by Chester's Cordwainers (or Shoemakers, though the Cordwainers also produced other leather goods) guild, and how it might

have been presented in its final year, 1575. I felt drawn to Play 14 because it was one of the few plays from the cycle on which I struggled to find substantial and comprehensive scholarship. Moreover, I was captivated by the entirety of Chester's cycle, since it came after the York Cycle and offered the opportunity to compare and track the development of Lay-Catholic theater. Chester's cycle is equally as surprising and enjoyable as York's, with stories that, as written by Ben Johnson of Historic U.K. "deliver their powerful messages in a dramatic manner, yet studded with humour, music and magic."<sup>4</sup> Though, according to Kathleen M. Ashley in her essay "Divine Power in Chester Cycle and Late Medieval Thought," the *Chester Cycle* is widely regarded to be more "tame" than other cycles, with content consisting of the holiest of the Bible's stories made doubly important by their traditional performance on such a holy feast day, I found the language, tone, atmosphere, and style of the plays to be surprising, at times shocking, and above all else, *fun*.<sup>5</sup> As Matthew Sergi writes in his book *Practical Cues and Social Spectacle in the Chester Plays*, the plays offered audiences a "massively participatory, impressively athletic, and fetively carnal sharing of food, spectacle, sentiment, and humor, sometimes only nominally tethered to the biblical stories that occasion[ed] [them]."<sup>6</sup> Building from analyses and theories stemming from studies of both *The York Cycle* and the *Chester Mystery Cycle* concluding that cycle plays had the "spiritual purpose" of glorifying God, the "didactic intention to instruct the unlettered in the historical basis of their faith," and the social intention to "reflect the wealth and prestige of the city, particularly the economic pride and self-confidence of the merchants and master-craftsmen who financed the performances

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<sup>4</sup> Johnson, Ben. "Chester Mystery Plays." *Historic UK*, <https://www.historic-uk.com/CultureUK/The-Chester-Mystery-Plays/>.

<sup>5</sup> Ashley, Kathleen M. "Divine Power in Chester Cycle and Late Medieval Thought." In *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 39, no. 3, 387–404, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1978, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2709384>.

<sup>6</sup> Sergi, Matthew. *Practical Cues and Social Spectacle in the Chester Plays*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020, 10.

annually,” I also posit that the plays served another more subtle purpose as a means of coping--coping with the inherent moral and spiritual dilemma that emerge when living as a Catholic in a modern, and continually modernizing world.<sup>7</sup> By incorporating several theatrical and rhetorical devices to catalyze audience and performer contemplation, yield catharsis and accomodation, and appeal to widespread social sentiment, as well as incorporating the vernacular language, geography, location, and biblical knowledge, Play 14 is exemplary of the Cycle’s overarching goals. Central to this casebook is the concept of contemplation, which Eleanor Johnson in her book *Staging Contemplation: Participatory Theology in Middle English Prose, Verse, and Drama* defines as “the highest form of devotional prayer or attention that an individual person can address toward God.”<sup>8</sup> Though often in unexpected ways, the plays demonstrated a practically-lived religion expressed in “less orderly and theologically rigorous terms, but not necessarily less pious terms,” and also resonated deeply with medieval Cestrians by speaking on their own society, civic relations, worldly happenings, and general human nature.<sup>9</sup> Effectively, using the theory presented by Sara Novacich in her book *Shaping the Archive in Late Medieval England: History, Poetry, and Performance*, the *Chester Mystery Plays* can be understood as a “quasi-relic” that represents a living archive of how Chester’s history and biblical narratives were understood and adapted by their creators, performers, and audiences to suit their needs and remain relevant.<sup>10</sup> By maintaining this relevance and incorporating these colloquial understandings into devotional works, every message and moment became all the more contemplative.

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<sup>7</sup> Beadle and King, *York Mystery Plays*, ix.

<sup>8</sup> Johnson, Eleanor. *Staging Contemplation: Participatory Theology in Middle English Prose, Verse, and Drama*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2018, 1.

<sup>9</sup> Sergi, *Practical Cues*, 10.

<sup>10</sup> Novacich, Sarah Elliott. *Shaping the Archive in Late Medieval England: History, Poetry, and Performance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017, 8.

### 1.1) *The York Cycle and The Feast of Corpus Christi*

Before zooming into Chester and Play 14, it is essential to understand the origins of Catholic theater, Corpus Christi festival plays, and mystery cycles more broadly. Since the first recorded cycles occurred at York in 1376, it is useful to examine *The York Mystery Cycle's* origins to best ascertain the genesis and development of medieval English cycle plays, at large. What are now most frequently called “Mystery Plays” have also been called “Pageant plays,” “Corpus Christi plays,” and simply “cycle plays” throughout their dynamic history. These names were naturally derived from the plays’ form, content, context, and function. The plays were performed publicly, often outdoors in highly trafficked and well-known areas of their host cities, and, as beacons of accessibility, were recited in the vernacular English as opposed to the Latin in which the Catholic Mass was held. Many of Europe’s common folk at the time were illiterate in the modern sense, even in the vernacular, so hearing and viewing performances enriched their understanding of and relationships to religion. Pageant and cycle plays served as “highly visual form of religious education for the mostly illiterate citizens, much in the same way as the depictions of scenes from the bible in murals and carvings within the church itself did.”<sup>11</sup> Illiteracy clearly did not impact one’s ability to think critically, complexly, and deeply about religion. The plays were performed roughly sequentially according to the Bible’s Old and New Testaments, and were epically centered around the theme of the Fall and Redemption of Humanity.<sup>12</sup> Though a collection of multiple plays, they centered around this one theme and effectively recounted one work in its near entirety: the Bible. The collection of plays was also performed on one day, and therefore the entire *York Cycle* began to be referred to in the singular

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<sup>11</sup> Newman, Paul B. *Daily Life in the Middle Ages*. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2001, 185.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, Preface.

as the *York Corpus Christi Play*.<sup>13</sup> Chester's cycle also came to be regarded by audiences as a singular play rather than a collection of many, though the Chester Plays developed to be performed over the course of several days. According to E. Martin Browne, the substance and order of all English Catholic cycles parallel the structure of York's, beginning with God alone creating the universe, following biblical sequence, and then ending with the resurrection of man.<sup>14</sup>

While referring to the plays as "Mystery plays" encapsulates one of the true goals of the works-- "making theological reference to the 'mysteries' or hidden truths of religion--" the title of "Mystery plays" first appeared in the Oxford English Dictionary in 1744, centuries after their conception.<sup>15</sup> In the Middle Ages, dramas of this nature were most often referred to as "Corpus Christi plays," after the feast of Corpus Christi on which they were performed.<sup>16</sup> The Feast of Corpus Christi is held on the Thursday after Trinity Sunday, which is the Sunday following Pentecost. Pentecost is the fiftieth day after Easter. Since Easter is not a fixed date, the Feast of Corpus Christi falls within a range of dates between May 23rd and June 24th. The Feast day was first instituted by Pope Clement V in 1311 to venerate the decrees of the 1215 Lateran Council. Most notably, the Lateran Council decreed that the transubstantiation resulting from the consecration of the holy Eucharist and wine was to be taken as the literal transformation of host bread and wine into the body and blood of Jesus in the Catholic church.<sup>17</sup>

According to theater historian David Mills, the Feast of Corpus Christi, regardless of geographic location, featured a parade-like procession in which the Eucharist, or Host, was escorted through the host city's streets by the clergy and the city's vocational guilds while

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, x.

<sup>14</sup> Browne, E Martin. *Religious Drama: Twenty-One Medieval Mystery and Morality Plays*. Meridian Books, 1958, 11.

<sup>15</sup> Mills, *The Chester Mystery Cycle*, xxi.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, xxi.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, xii.

displayed prominently on a mobile fixture.<sup>18</sup> The route of this procession was developed and dictated by the parochial community in cooperation with the local clergy and with awareness of location in reference to the city's cathedral and churches. The ecclesiastical procession preceded the beginning of the performance of the play cycle. Though understood as a deeply religious spectacle, the procession and festival were coordinated almost entirely by the parochial community and city fathers--essentially representative government officials--as opposed to the clergy, despite their religious nature. All activity within the confines of the city was regulated by the city council, though Catholicism and guidelines from the clergy tended to permeate public and festival practices. Though the festivities were the responsibilities of the laypeople, "laymen could not exercise the liturgical function" of the procession or carry the host.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, since the festival was regulated by the institutional church and produced by the laypeople, the clergy were folded into the festivities by necessity. The feast publicly reaffirmed reverence to God, as well as the clergy's role as holy figures with the ability to effect transubstantiation in the Mass. As widespread displays of religious veneration, it is theorized that the production of the feast's ceremonies came to be seen as dutiful civic obligation, and their productions demanded the concern and attention of any host city's Catholic citizens.

As representative bodies of the populace and integral components of society's economic and quotidienne functioning, the guilds--groups of workers from Chester's various professions and trades--accepted responsibility as contributors to the feast's spectacle. Not only were the guildspeople vital in producing the ecclesiastical procession, but, as previously stated, they actually created and performed the plays that followed--plays devised by the common layperson

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid, xxi.

<sup>19</sup> Cowling, Douglas. "The Liturgical Celebration of Corpus Christi in Medieval York." In *Records of Early English Drama*, vol. 1, no. 2, [Early Theatre: A Journal Associated with the Records of Early English Drama, Becker Associates], 1976, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43505169>, 7.

and performed for the common layperson. The guilds were allocated the plays most suitable to them and their professions with, for example, the Shipwrights performing the play of Noah's Ark, the Play of the Three Kings being given to the Goldsmiths, and so on.<sup>20</sup> A 1531-1532 account from York's town clerk, William Newhall, captures the unifying spirit of the festival by stating that its production was:

not only for the Augmentacion and increas <of the holy and Catholick>  
faith o<f our S>auior Jesu Crist and to exort the myndes of the  
common people> to good deuotion and holesome> doctryne th<ero>f  
but also for the commonwelth and prosperite of this cite.<sup>21</sup>

In fact, David Mills posits that the very word "mystery" came to be associated by 19th-century scholars with not only the mysteries of faith, but actually etymologically mutated to refer to "'popular' or 'folk' movement" inextricably connected to "service" or "occupation." The word "mystery" was also derived from and sounds like the French word "mystère," which roughly translates to our concept of the guilds.<sup>22</sup> Mystery plays were codified to include their production by guildspeople in their very definition.

Through his research for his essay "The Liturgical Celebration of Corpus Christi in Medieval York," Douglas Cowling uncovered that York's celebration began around 3:00 p.m. on the Wednesday before the feast day with song and prayer, and continued at dawn on Thursday with the singing of Matins and Lauds. Masses lasted until roughly 9:00 a.m., and culminated with a capitular Mass of Corpus Christi around noon. Preceding the capitular Mass was the aforementioned procession of the Eucharist through the host city's streets and past its cathedrals and places of worship.<sup>23</sup> At the holy holiday's beginning, the plays followed these Masses and consumed the rest of the day.

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<sup>20</sup> Browne, *Religious Drama*, 10.

<sup>21</sup> Mills, David, *The Chester Mystery Cycle*, xii

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, xi

<sup>23</sup> Cowling, "The Liturgical Celebration of Corpus Christi in Medieval York," 5.

In form, cycle plays have distinct characteristics that define them in locution and separate them from other dramatic spectacles. Composed of multiple plays, cycles are ambitious and necessarily large and dynamic feats of theater. *The York Cycle*, for example, calls for “over 300 speaking parts alone.”<sup>24</sup> Given their size and scope, the performance of cycle plays requires multiple stages and multiple staging areas if confined to a certain window of performance time. To solve this problem, as mentioned before, the plays were performed throughout the streets of the host city using supplies that were readily available or relatively easy to construct. For stages, the guilds used what were referred to as “pageant wagons.” Pageant wagons were movable open-top carts maintained by the guilds that, when decorated, were used as all or part of a stage. Depending on the time or location of a given performance, pageant wagons either “trundled through the streets to ‘stations’ where the audience gathered,” or connected to larger sedentary scaffold stages placed in strategically intentional locations used to create larger and more elaborate sets.<sup>25</sup> Scholars emphasize the plural importance of pageant wagons’ ambulatory nature, which made it easier to store or transform wagons when not in use, as well as allowed for the plays to be performed as mobile spectacles in site-specific areas. The form and use of pageant wagons varies and is dependent on both time and location, and most information cannot be regarded as conclusive. Accounts of pageant wagons are few and far between, and their changes of form and function are recorded in sources produced across many years with noteworthy gaps in time. Protestant erasure of Catholic practices and histories is largely to blame for this. Many of these examples are derived from contractors agreements, receipts, and few artistic depictions. However, their use is certainly characteristic of the genre, and pageant wagons were used in both York and Chester.

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<sup>24</sup> Beadle and King, *York Mystery Plays*, ix.

<sup>25</sup> Johnson, Ben. “Chester Mystery Plays.”

It is worth noting that, since the plays became the responsibility of the guildspeople-- again, the citizens responsible for a city's economic and commercial revenue and upkeep--hierarchical display and veneration of order and wealth emerged as unavoidable themes. According to art historian Peter Fisher, whose ideas were written in summation by Joan Branham, any two performances or pieces of art, including theatrical productions, are inherently compared to each other when presented concurrently or in succession.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, the guilds undoubtedly felt a sense of competition to produce the most successful and well received play. The successful reception of their plays was undeniably reliant in part upon the decoration of their wagon. As is true to this day, though not applicable in all cases, money and access to resources were key components to theatrical production, so it is certain, as evidenced by surviving receipts and plans for productions, that the economic factors of guild production could not be avoided. In fact, as recounted to me by Professor Felton-Dansky, guilds often engaged in friendly competitions or bets on which play was the best, most grand, and most well received. Paul B. Newman, in his book *Daily Life in the Middle Ages*, corroborates this information by likening the guilds to "school groups preparing homecoming floats," who competed to load wagons with the most complex sets and costumes, and even incorporated special effects like trap doors for dynamic and captivating movement.<sup>27</sup> Not only was the religious extended into the realm of civic pageantry, but religious practice also became tied with the economy and the routines of everyday life.

As for the incorporation of plays into Corpus Christi's program, scholars tend to debate the turn towards their emergence and popularity. Though it is known that "until at least the mid-fifteenth century, the city of York mounted a lavish ecclesiastical procession followed by a

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<sup>26</sup> Branham, Joan. "Sacrality and Aura in the Museum: Mute Objects and Articulate Space," *The Journal of the Walters Art Gallery* 52/53 (1994/1995), 1994, 33-47.

<sup>27</sup> Newman, *Daily Life in the Middle Ages*, 185.

procession of plays on the feast of Corpus Christi,” it is not known exactly how these plays came to be.<sup>28</sup> Given the stronghold of early scholarship performed on the topic, it is most pervasively believed that the plays diffused directly from the festival’s procession. However, the scholarship behind these claims is largely speculative since it does not venture to posit exactly why or how these plays came to be and in what ways, other than by its cyclical and mobile nature, they were influenced by the ecclesiastical procession. Richard Beadle and Pamela King, in the preface for their edition of the *York Mystery Plays*, posit that “the attraction of a great summer festival, which included an outdoor symbolic procession--” the ecclesiastical procession of the host-- “was sufficient to stimulate the imagination of dramatists who had already brooded upon an established cycle of interrelated biblical and apocryphal subjects, common in medieval art and narrative long before the Corpus Christi cycles came into being.”<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, it is known that the Church had incorporated dramatic forms into its worship programs for many years prior to the emergence of the festival. For example, stories such as Mary’s visit to Jesus’ empty sepulcher after he had risen from the dead on Easter are recorded to have been dramatized during the actual Mass in Latin.<sup>30</sup> It is most likely that, though churchgoers of the time possessed an impressive wealth of biblical knowledge, they longed to relate to biblical stories on a vernacular level, and therefore recreated these dramatic spectacles in their spoken language through the plays.

Scholars note that the calendric range of dates in which the Feast of Corpus Christi fell was already strongly associated with folk celebration and festivals culminating in the pagan holiday of Midsummer on June 23rd and 24th, possibly as early as the 21st.<sup>31</sup> Though pagan in nature, the Midsummer festival was inextricably tied to the change of seasons, farming lifeways,

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<sup>28</sup> Cowling, “The Liturgical Celebration of Corpus Christi in Medieval York,” 6.

<sup>29</sup> Beadle and King, *York Mystery Plays*, xi.

<sup>30</sup> Browne, *Religious Drama*, Pg. 9.

<sup>31</sup> Beadle and King, *York Mystery Plays*, Pg. 5

and general practice, and actually served to brighten the mood brought by traditionally dour, pensive, and serious Easter rituals. Some posit that English Cycle plays were certainly influenced by the dramatic festivities present in the holiday of Midsummer,<sup>32</sup> and Joseph and Frances Gies, in their book *Life in a Medieval City*, expound that remnants of paganism could be observed throughout most facets of medieval society.<sup>33</sup> It is suggested that the Church capitalized on the public's cheery mood to shift the day's focus to Catholicism. Since Midsummer falls during the sun's "weakest point," many pagan societies revered the sun's "crisis" during the holiday and contemplated their own vulnerability, mutability, and reliance on their Sun God.<sup>34</sup> Knowing this, the Church took the opportunity to explain this vulnerability by saying that all things not governed by God were subject to falls and failures. As Sandra Billington writes in her essay "The Midsummer Solstice As It Was, Or Was Not, Observed in Pagan Germany, Scandinavia and Anglo-Saxon England," pagan traditions (often dynamic, ritualistic, and theatrical ones) then evolved to adopt Catholic meanings. For example, one ceremony involving the swinging or rolling of burning discs that once represented the sun's crisis, took on the allegorical representation of John the Baptist's life. The fire arcing through the sky or tumbling down a hill represented a "great cosmic fall" parallel to the life of John the Baptist, who "provided the greatest example of a rise and fall in fortune: the promise of fame at a celestial level, only to be followed by death and dependence on Christ for salvation."<sup>35</sup> The shape of the burning wheel was likely also significant, as it may have represented the volatility and arbitrariness of the *fortuna rotae*, or wheel of fortune. According to Billington, "in mediaeval [sic] times, the falling arc of a burning wheel in the sky or one rolled down a hillside played out this allegory,

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid, Pg. 5

<sup>33</sup>Gies, Joseph, and Frances Gies. *Life in a Medieval City*. New York: Harper & Row, 1981, 183.

<sup>34</sup>Billington, Sandra. "The Midsummer Solstice As It Was, Or Was Not, Observed in Pagan Germany, Scandinavia and Anglo-Saxon England." In *Folklore*, vol. 119, no. 1, 41–57, Folklore Enterprises, Ltd., Taylor & Francis, Ltd., 2008, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30035459>, 51.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 51-52.

with the reminder that the same was true for all mankind.”<sup>36</sup> Scholars believe that allegorical and performative ceremonies like this could have been direct inspiration for pageant plays.

The precise catalyst of theatrical devotion on Corpus Christi day may remain lost to time and up to speculation, but it is pertinent nonetheless to note that Catholic devotional theater can be traced back to the early 10th century. Devotional theater was not an entirely new idea, and therefore its incorporation into the Corpus Christi festival could have been longer premeditated or inspired by various stimuli and in different ways. The nature of religious devotion is inherently theatrical given its reliance on symbolism, imagery, story telling, call and response dialogue, ritual performance and movement, and mimetic action, so it is not difficult to draw connections between the performance of the Mass and theatrical spectacle.

Interestingly, scholars have more recently begun to agree that the play’s inclusion in the festival program was not dependent on or derived from the feast’s ecclesiastical processional spectacle at all. Douglas Cowling proposes that “the proximity of these two processions has tended to blur the difference in function and constitution which separated them,” and that the genesis of the plays should be regarded as entirely separate.<sup>37</sup> The majority of this argument relies on the varying routes that each procession took, the similarity of the Corpus Christi procession to the Palm Sunday Procession, and the eventual separation of York’s festivities into two days with the plays occurring Thursday and the liturgical procession occurring on Friday--the higher holy day. Both scholars Douglas Cowling and James Hoy state that “if the plays did evolve from the procession at York, then logically the route followed by the plays must have been one and the same with that followed by the procession.”<sup>38</sup> I fail to see how or why this

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 52.

<sup>37</sup> Beadle and King, *York Mystery Plays*, 5.

<sup>38</sup> Hoy, James F. “On the Relationship of the Corpus Christi Plays to the Corpus Christi Procession at York.” In *Modern Philology*, vol. 71, no. 2, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/436216>, 166.

premise would be fundamentally true, or how geographic location is necessarily tied with the origin of thought and idea, but, since information on the routes survives, I will elaborate on their layouts. Regardless of the unsubstantiated nature of their claims, both Hoy and Cowling offer a wealth of historical knowledge on the York Cycle and the feast of Corpus Christi in York.

Though the ecclesiastical procession and the pageant cycle began from the same location in York, the pageants turned to the right at York's Minster Gates and embarked on an essentially separate and distinct route. As Hoy summarizes:

Consider first the pageant wagon route, since it is the easier to trace. It begins at the gates of Holy Trinity Priory, travels northeast across Ouse Bridge to the junction of Coneystreet and Castle Gate, where it turns left, following Coneystreet to the Guild Hall, then turns right along Stonegate to the junction of High Petergate and Low Petergate at the Minster Gates, where it again turns right and proceeds on to the traditional final station, the Pavement. The procession route is, of course, not so well defined as the pageant route, but one of two alternatives, with some possible variations, seems the probable path of the Corpus Christi procession. The procession route begins at the same place as the pageant route, Holy Trinity Priory, and follows the same path across the Ouse River to the junction of Coneystreet and Castle Gate. At that point (alternative one) it could continue following the pageant route in turning left on Coneystreet to the Guild Hall, then turning right on Stonegate to the Minster Gates. Once there, however, the procession would go through the gates to the Minster rather than turning right down Low Petergate as the pageant route does. Or (alternative two), at the junction of Coneystreet and Castle Gate, the procession route could proceed straight ahead through the Pavement, turning left on Colliergate, then right on Goodramgate, and finally left into the Minster yard. By whichever alternative, once the Minster was reached, the procession would then go northwest on High Petergate, turning left to St. Leonard's Hospital, the final stop where the Host was deposited. No matter which route was taken by the procession, however, once it reached the Minster Gates it distinctly differed from the pageant route, for the procession went all the way to the Minster, then on to St. Leonard's Hospital, rather than stopping at the Minster Gates, then proceeding to the Pavement as the pageant wagons did.<sup>39</sup>

Furthermore, Hoy claims that since the procession did not make stops along its route and would have moved more swiftly through the streets of York, the plays must not have spawned from the procession. I fail to see how this one detail would pertain to the other, at all. The speeds of the two processions certainly can be mutually exclusive, especially considering their differing goals and that the plays began after the Masses and were not constricted by time of day or between

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 167-168.

ceremonies. The speeds are furthermore unrelated given the festival's eventual split into two days. Therefore, is it not feasible that the deviation in routes or their separate curation could be explained in very practical ways?

In contrast to Hoy, I suggest that deviation from the ecclesiastical procession's route could be potentially explained in very practical and formatic ways. As performances meant to be seen, heard, and consumed by audiences, location must necessarily accommodate for these audiences and provide adequate viewing and acoustic opportunity. Therefore, the route might have developed to make stops at areas optimal for viewership. For example, many viewers of these medieval spectacles elected to watch from personal balconies or elevated surfaces. Some citizens even paid property owners to reserve seats in the best areas for viewership.<sup>40</sup> The route could have turned through more residential areas of the city to appeal to these balcony viewers. More generally, the plays could have made stops differing from the ecclesiastical procession in areas where people tended to gather more frequently or in larger numbers. Similarly, the pageant wagons could have stopped in areas with optimal acoustic properties. Overall, citizens jockeyed for positioning and laid claim to the best places for viewership available, and certain areas of the city were probably better suited as performance spaces than others. Routes could have also been curated to appeal to the vernacularity of place and location in the performance of plays, and their physical referencing and inclusion would have been all the more palpably powerful. Furthermore, since the plays emerged as ways for the common folk to practice their religion and developed largely extra-institutionally, it is certainly feasible that the routes would differ. The plays came to embrace their civic and traditional nature almost more than their initial religious ethos', and continued in York and throughout Europe even after the protestant regime banned the Feast of Corpus Christi in 1548. It is also endlessly interesting to consider the potential symbolic

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<sup>40</sup> Personal communication: Miriam Felton-Dansky, 2022.

significance of when the routes did coincide. It is intriguing to ponder what it might have meant to reclaim the spaces used in formal religious ceremony for what evolved to be a largely lay-facilitated production.

Ultimately, given the rise of Protestantism, many iterations of the plays of York and other host cities have been lost to time, and few recountings of pageant wagon design and event function remain. Only through the dedicated work of medievalists studying miscellaneous civic records like receipts, ledgers, and order paperwork, do we have a decent idea of what York's plays may have looked like.

### **1.2) The History of the *Chester Mystery Cycle***

Though we do not know the precise year in which the *Chester Mystery Cycle* was first performed, the first reference to it as Chester's *Play of Corpus Christi* dates from 1422 in a recorded dispute regarding the allocation of plays to guilds.<sup>41</sup> The cycle consists of 24 plays from the Old and New Testaments and, like other cycle plays of its era, follows the biblical story arc. Chester's cycle was first conceived and performed by the monks at the abbey of St. Werburgh, who sought to bring the Bible's stories from Latin into the English vernacular, but the plays quickly grew in popularity and needed to relocate outside the abbey. At this time, the guilds adopted the plays as their civic responsibility and began to rework their scripts.<sup>42</sup> The Chester guilds followed the example set in York, as they funded and produced a procession through Chester's streets carrying a light to honor St. Mary and the Corpus Christi Eucharist prior to the plays.<sup>43</sup> The procession definitely existed before the guilds took on the plays, but the guilds began contributing to it when the plays moved out of St. Werburgh. Mills recounts that the

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<sup>41</sup> Mills, David, *The Chester Mystery Cycle*, xiii.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, xiii.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, xiii.

Eucharist procession went from Chester's "church of St. Mary on the Hill, past the town hall, to the church of St. John outside the city walls," and that, in its early days, the entire cycle was probably performed outside of St. John's on a fixed scaffold set to which individual guild wagons were attached.<sup>44</sup> Later, in 1521, probably given the size of the collection and sheer feat of producing it, the plays were moved to span the three days of Whitsuntide--the festival on the seventh Sunday after Easter.<sup>45</sup> After all, according to Sergi's calculations in his Doctoral dissertation accepted by the University of California, Berkeley:

A performance based on the extant texts of the Chester cycle requires, even by the most conservative reasonable estimate, 353 participants to push a pageant wagon or to perform on one. Actual performances probably involved many more participants. Chester's population in the 1520s was around 3,500: at the height of cycle performance, then, at least ten percent of all Cestrians were involved closely enough with performances to have direct physical contact with a wagon.<sup>46</sup>

The move to Whitsuntide is strongly evidenced by a written "agreement between the Vintners, Goldsmiths and Masons, and Dyers to share a pageant wagon-- an arrangement only possible if the three companies (composed of four guilds) performed on separate days."<sup>47</sup>

The nature of the plays also called for an astronomical amount of roles to be cast. For example, Chester's cycle requires eleven different actors to play Jesus in plays 12 to 24. Again, like in York, Chester's plays probably featured all-male casts. While posing a logistical and economic challenge to producers, Mills posits that having multiple players cast in the same role also served a unifying and ideological purpose. Doing so involved a larger portion of the community, and also curbed hubristic and idolatrous association of any one person with the

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid, xiii.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, xiii; Johnson, "Chester Mystery Plays."

<sup>46</sup> Sergi, Matthew J. "Play Texts and Public Practice in the Chester Cycle, 1422-1607." Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2011.  
[https://escholarship.org/content/qt3d1457v9/qt3d1457v9\\_noSplash\\_382809b4ad9b125fa06012643db77b19.pdf](https://escholarship.org/content/qt3d1457v9/qt3d1457v9_noSplash_382809b4ad9b125fa06012643db77b19.pdf), 13.

<sup>47</sup> Christie, Sheila. "Speculum Urbis: The Chester Cycle as a Tool of Social Cohesion and Transformation." In *The Yearbook of English Studies*, vol. 43, Modern Humanities Research Association, 2013, <https://doi.org/10.5699/yearengstud.43.2013.0140>, 143.

divine.<sup>48</sup> As a result, it was also readily emphasized that perhaps the divine exists in all believers. The plays may have also been moved to expand their prominence and the possibilities and scope of production, and not as the result of a simple time constraint. Having been separated from the festivities of Corpus Christi, the plays came to be known as the *Whitsun Plays*, and developed their own unique style of performance and location different from the route of the Corpus Christi festival. Chester's plays became mobile and included individual pageant wagons upon their moving to Whitsuntide, and here is where images of wagons moving to various playing-place stations ring true.<sup>49</sup> Mills writes that the route:

Began outside the gate of St. Werburgh's Abbey, later the cathedral, the ecclesiastical centre of the city, in Chester's Northgate Street, Each play in turn moved on to the High Cross in front of the St. Peter's Church, at the junction of Chester's four Roman streets, where the mayor and aldermen watched the play from the 'Pentice' or Town hall, an arcaded annex next to the church. Each play then moved on down Chester's Watergate Street to an unspecified playing place, and then cut through the side lanes to join the Bridge Street where the final station was located.<sup>50</sup>

Sheila Christie, in her essay "Speculum Urbis: The Chester Cycle as a Tool of Social Cohesion and Transformation," also concludes that the shift in route to the city's major streets "more firmly connected the plays to the city, emphasizing them as a reflection of civic identity."<sup>51</sup> She also notes that "the city's elevation to county status in 1506 may have inspired more lavish civic ceremonies," and prompted the alteration of the extant performance route.<sup>52</sup>

Again, though, as a result of Protestant imposition, the *Chester Mystery Cycle* and all Catholic plays came under fire in the 1570s.<sup>53</sup> However, firmly cemented as a tradition in Chester, many people petitioned for the plays to continue. As a result, Protestant officials sought

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<sup>48</sup> Mills, *The Chester Mystery Cycle*, xv.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, xiv.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, xiv.

<sup>51</sup> Christie, "Speculum Urbis," 143.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, 142.

<sup>53</sup> Johnson, "Chester Mystery Plays."

ways to make the plays more appropriate, and ultimately decided to move the plays once again from Whitsuntide to Midsummer--again, a traditionally pagan holiday that was celebrated both widely and in Chester. Midsummer proved to be a fitting time for the production as, according to Mills, Chester's Midsummer festival included a spectacular civic-run carnival into which the cycle's theatrics blended perfectly.<sup>54</sup> Apparently, as Mills synthesizes, the shift seemed to stress the secular and traditional aspects of the cycle, but it is certain that performers and viewers still viewed the plays as devotional in their own ways. Given that, the cycle's performance was entirely squashed in 1575 shortly after moving to Midsummer until its revival in 1951. Examining that a Protestant church and government would have allowed pagan ceremonies to thrive, but systematically exterminated all Catholic traditions (and most records of their existence) offers an insightful look at the protestant worldview.

Today's collections of the *Chester Mystery Cycle* were compiled not from one cohesive original collection, but rather from eight separate partial and complete manuscripts featuring different plays. Some manuscripts date to before the cycle's final 1575 performance, and some were produced well after. What this suggests is that the cycle, though out of public protestant fashion and performance, maintained its importance in society for reasons likely traditional, symbolic, and still devotional. The "regynall," or "official" Manuscript REED 28 suggests that the *Chester Mystery Cycle* may have been first written by Sir Henry Frances, a monk first recorded in a 1377 census.<sup>55</sup> However, it is known that the plays were living and breathing documents that were reviewed, adapted, and changed with each performance. Somewhere along in this development, after the plays came to be produced by the lay-people, the plays evolved into the humorous and provocative works that we know now. It also seems that, even as they

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<sup>54</sup> Mills, *The Chester Mystery Cycle*, xvi.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, xvii.

were being written and performed, medieval contemporaries were well aware of the plays' edgy and raunchy content. Medieval banns explicitly cite several instances in the plays that should be understood as comedic relief, or taken "in sporte," and not necessarily as theological fact.<sup>56</sup>

These moments are what bring the plays such humanity and approachability, even as they display how people may have employed various strategies to cope or choose to understand heavy and difficult topics. Today, we still use humor, exaggeration, hyperbole, and self-effacing rhetoric to help us reflexively understand and cope with ourselves, our world, and our positionality in it. As manifest in the cycle, many of these rhetorical devices concern testy topics of the time like sickness, death, and religious conflict and animosity. Biblical stories concerning conversion, plagues, and murder could have been easily related to and transmuted to discuss contemporary themes prevalent in European and Cestrian life.

Few sources exist that detail what the cycle may have looked like in form, but Archdeacon Rogers, a cestrian contemporary of the festival, recorded that Chester's pageant wagons were: "a highe place made like a howse with 2 rowmes beinge open on the tope the lower rowme theie apparrelled and dressed them selues and the higher rowme, theie played."<sup>57</sup> Archdeacon Rogers describes that the wagons were multileveled, and the bottom level served as a dressing and prop room. While Rogers does not offer many more details, recent estimates posit that the wagons were probably twelve feet in length, about twelve feet high, and almost six feet wide. Some wagons could have been significantly larger, upwards of 23 feet long and 14 feet wide.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid, xvi.

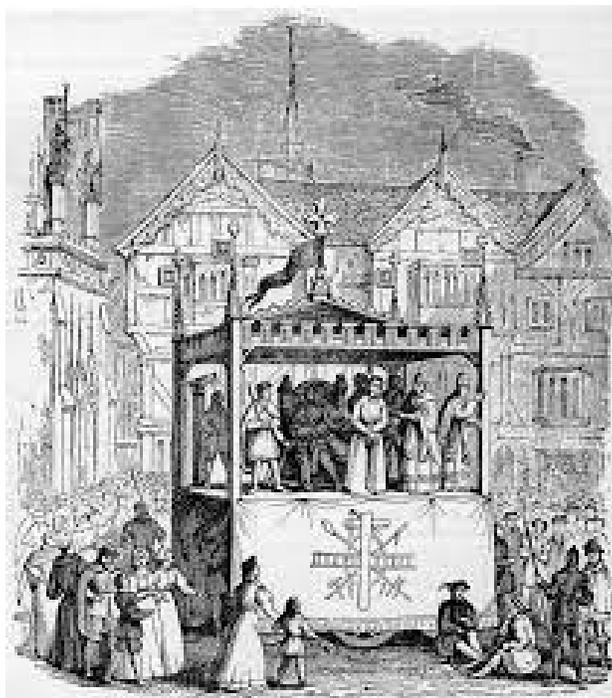
<sup>57</sup> REED, 239 from Mills, *The Chester Mystery Cycle*, xxv.

<sup>58</sup> Morrissey, L. J. "English Pageant-Wagons." In *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 9, no. 3, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies (ASECS), 1976, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2737515>, 361.

**Figure 1.1) An Engraving of a Chester Pageant Wagon by Robert Chambers from the 1864 *Chambers Book of Days***

<https://www.historic-uk.com/CultureUK/The-Chester-Mystery-Plays/>.

Accessed 17 January 2022



The playing stage often extended beyond the confines of the wagon itself, and stretched onto street level. With action, movement, and music mixing with the crowd, the playing area became far more intimate and interactive than a traditional stage, but also provided the opportunity to make distinctions between different areas or places in the play. Acting in the street allowed for characters to enter the scene from other locations, or the street could have represented a different area, entirely. Acting at crowd level and amongst the audience also yielded, as will be further explained, easier and more meaningful contemplation, and appealed heavily to the vernacularity of Chester's location. According to Mills, many of the plays featured musical accompaniment, indicated by the mention of choirs and minstrels in the script's cast and dialogue.<sup>59</sup> The general delivery of the plays was also necessarily loud, upbeat, and commanding

<sup>59</sup> Mills, *The Chester Mystery Cycle*, xxvii.

of attention, which accommodated rowdy, often inebriated crowds and the noise that they produced. Upon the festivities' removal from the immediately institutionally religious sphere, rowdy crowds were commonplace and rowdiness was actually encouraged. Again, capitalizing on the mirth of the season and shifting the traditionally deeply pensive and serious tone of religious holidays, pageant plays emerged as cathartic beacons of release both socially and religiously. Many medieval social festivals actually appointed "Lords of Misrule" who embodied a "symbolic and comic reversal of social order" and traditional devotional practice.<sup>60</sup> Joseph and Francis Gies even note that, in some smaller holiday festivals like the long defunct Feast of the Circumcision, minor clergy even subverted order by taking on the roles of major clergy.<sup>61</sup>

Wagons were also decorated and sets created in accordance with the necessities of each play, and therefore there was no uniform wagon design. With that variation came the opportunity for the various guilds to express themselves and their identities through their set design. Oftentimes, this took the form of displaying guild products and scenic or prop features easily identifiable with each guild. For example, as recorded in Chester's Early Banns, the Mercers decorated their wagon for the *Magi's Presentation* with a range of their most luxurious cloths and tapestries, and the bakers used their performance of *The Last Supper* to toss free samples of their breads into the crowd.<sup>62</sup>

As such dynamic and captivating performances, it is incredibly interesting to ascertain just how the plays developed from their deeply traditional forms into spectacular, exciting, and sometimes surprising final productions. It is easy to see why they became so immensely popular for medieval audiences, and would definitely still be exciting, today. Though the plays eventually strayed away from the seriously traditional, I posit that they did not become any less pious, but

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<sup>60</sup> Newman, *Daily Life in the Middle Ages*, 184.

<sup>61</sup> Gies and Gies, *Life in a Medieval City*, 184.

<sup>62</sup> Mills, *The Chester Mystery Cycle*, xxvi.

rather developed in such a way that they came to portray how religion could be understood and practiced by everyday people in an everyday world.

2) **Contemplation, Subversion, Vernacularity, and Anachronism: Devices and Appeals in the Chester Mystery Cycle and Current Scholarship on the Plays**

Many of my forthcoming annotations and analyses of Play 14's script are reliant upon theory presented by scholars Eleanor Johnson, Matthew Sergi, Sheila Christie, V. A. Kolve, and David Mills. Johnson, in her book *Staging Contemplation: Participatory Theology in Middle English Prose, Verse, and Drama*, presents invaluable and foundational work on the concepts of contemplation and audience participation (both physical and cognitive), which are central to my argument, and expounds on the many ways in which contemporaries of the plays would have understood their significance. Only through contemplation and participation, which are enabled by certain rhetorical and formatic tactics, could audience reflexivity have been so powerful and contributed to the underlying ethos of the cycle and festival. Sergi, in *Practical Cues and Social Spectacle in the Chester Plays*, discusses the ways in which text constructed the physical appearance of the plays, how they functioned, and how they were perceived through embedded stage and context cues. Christie, in her essay "Speculum Urbis: The Chester Cycle as a Tool of Social Cohesion and Transformation," draws on extant work from Mills and Kolve to further discuss the Chester plays as spectacle and the embedded devices that enable them as socially agentive and effective works.

Eleanor Johnson's theory was produced through the analysis of a multitude of medieval religious theater festivals and pieces, and centrally references *The Cloud of Unknowing*, *A Revelation of Love*, *Piers Plowman*, the *N-Town Mary Plays*, *Wisdom*, and *Mankind*. Johnson

also draws heavily on the writing in Nicholas Love's *The Mirrour of the Blessed Lyf of Jesu Christ* as an example representative of her analyses. While Johnson only tangentially references *The Chester Mystery Cycle* in her work, it is doubtless that styles and influences from other cycles and written works bled into the writing and performance of the Chester Plays. Therefore, it is valid to look for the embodiment of Johnson's linguistic and contemplative theory in the Chester Plays. To begin, Johnson offers the aforementioned definition of the concept of contemplation: "Contemplation, as a primary lifework, is typically understood as the highest form of devotional prayer or attention that an individual person can address toward God."<sup>63</sup> To understand the concept of contemplation, it is perhaps helpful to turn to other art forms. Though tangentially related, in Bard Professor Katherine Boivin's art history course on medieval altarpieces, our class created a working barometer for gauging the public effectiveness of art pieces. We determined that communicative art yields accessible information in sensory or phenomenological ways, promotes and inspires relational contemplation and introspection that anyone can feel through reference to fact and tactful embellishment, and catalyzes active and meaningful viewership and interaction through the incorporation of symbols, vernacular knowledge, and iconographic imagery that appeals to sentiments of religiosity. In summation, "the fundamental work of contemplation is to cultivate one's awareness of the likeness between the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of earth" by making one feel a relationship with the religious, provided by certain devices and appeals.<sup>64</sup> For Johnson, contemplation is extenuated by vernacularity, or "kyndliness."<sup>65</sup> As she writes, Middle English religious dramas and other works employ understandings of the vernacular in language, form, casting, and location to yield greater contemplation, relationality, reflection, and potential cathartic release, as well as to make for

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<sup>63</sup> Johnson, *Staging Contemplation*, 1.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, 113.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*, 113.

more captivating spectacle; “Likeness, that is, is the key to contemplation; it motivates the sensory, participatory forms of the play.”<sup>66</sup>

It is essential to remember that medieval pageant plays were created, in part, to bring biblical stories into the vernacular language as opposed to the Latin spoken in Mass. Pageant plays also emerged as accessible oral and visual recountings of stories to those who were not literate, and could therefore not read the scripture. Not only does Johnson delve into the meaning and result of presenting work in the vernacular Middle English, but she also expounds upon how Middle English as a language lends itself particularly well to rhetorical appeals and intentions as a “resource for creating participatory contemplation for an audience.”<sup>67</sup> The English vernacular is a keystone in the foundation for building and promoting contemplation itself. Most obviously, writing and performing in English makes for a more understandable transmission of ideas-- “English makes the mysteries of God ‘visible’ to contemplatives--” meaning any and all whom the writing or play may reach.<sup>68</sup> Inherently, hearing one’s own language promotes understanding and creates the capacity to reflect and analyze more deeply. However, Johnson also concludes, using Nicholas Love’s *The Mirroure of the Blessed Lyf of Jesu Christ* as her primary evidence and example of stylistic innovation, that many works used particularly rudimentary and common English to target even the most quotidienne and “Latin-illiterate ‘Simple’ readership.”<sup>69</sup> Love refers to this language as “kyndley,” and offers that works are most widely effective when written in a “linguistic modality that is familiar and natural, rather than one that is alien and difficult, so as to bring the kingdom of heaven into familiar--that is, ‘kyndley’-- territory.”<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 142.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 109.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, 114.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, 114.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, 113.

Love's work is an example of "why the vernacular is not just a possible language for embodying contemplative truth but indeed a preferable language for it."<sup>71</sup>

As summarized by Johnson, Love explains in his work that "'Kyndley' language is a better vehicle for meditations on the life of Christ simply by virtue of its sensation, its feeling of familiarity, of knownness," and that familiar language that is more accessible than Latin and makes people feel implicated in the life of the important religious figures being portrayed in front of them.<sup>72</sup> Love was very aware of the consequential effects that writing his works in English yielded, as he expressly told his readers that texts were written more clearly in English than they were in Latin, and that this clarity helps people have greater access to the teachings of the Bible: 'Wherefore at the instaunce and the prayer of somme deuoute soules to edificacioun of suche men or women is this drawynge out of the foreside book of cristes lyf written in english.'<sup>73</sup> Love effectively broadened the scope and audience of his text by providing his "simple" audience with Latinate readings and teachings in a new, more palatable way. For Love, the likening between earthly and heavenly things seems indeed to be coterminous with the creation of a feeling of 'kyndliness,' or familiarity and naturalness, and he achieved his mission by allowing the common people to finally participate in extralitururgical and accessible religion in their spoken language. Johnson definitively concludes that "English's very familiarity conduces a familiar understanding of Christ."<sup>74</sup>

The vernacular and spoken English also provided the opportunity to adapt or change the aura from the original's language into something more contemporary and familiar for audiences and readers--something to which they could more easily relate and could more readily ponder.

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 112.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 114.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, 112.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, 132-133.

As essentially the products of translation and adaptation, Love occasionally embellished his source Latin to appeal to “certeyn parties” and “dyuerse auctoritees...of symple vnderstandynge.”<sup>75</sup> Love’s tactics certainly hold true in the writing and compilation of Chester’s Mystery Cycle. Regardless of prior religious experience or exposure, most individuals would agree that the Bible’s heightened and formal language and religiously charged nature yield staunch and rigid perceptions. Perhaps one pictures a quiet and serious church congregation, or conjures images of quiet, pensive, penitent, and dour ceremony. In order to get to the lively, fun, and comical scripts that we see in Chester’s plays from their biblical source text, it is certain that some creative liberties were taken to aggrandize or embellish biblical text, and that information was intentionally curated from each of the disparate Gospel accounts.

Johnson also notes that the vernacular Middle English also has a built in “availability for puns...monosyllable... modal verbs...etymologies, and...openness, or clarity.”<sup>76</sup> She notes that the very structure of the language provides ample opportunity for exciting and attention commanding alliteration, rhyming, and a notable cadence of delivery. By writing plays in the spoken common English, “Vernacularity creeps onstage with...modes that include slang, colloquialism, intervernacular code-switching, and the calling out of local place-names and proper names.”<sup>77</sup> Vernacularity and the curation of story-retelling also open the opportunity for humor and comedy to enter the realm of what is traditionally serious and sacred. Humor can be seen as a coping mechanism, or a means for making the daunting task of reflecting on religion and one’s own place in a religious world more friendly. “Kyndley” language allows for “participatory power in humor and comedy, a power that inheres primarily in comedy’s ability to get an audience member to engage with and ultimately overcome his or her own doubtful

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid, 112.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, 115.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 140.

resistance to divine contemplation.”<sup>78</sup> Works feature physical and spoken jokes and innuendos, crude gestures, and explicit language and actions that are definitely not approved by the church or pulled from the Bible, but are authentically rooted in what real life is like.

Johnson also notes that Love, as well as other medieval writers, layer this compositionally ornate language with ordinary speech, which allows the reader or viewer to perceive a marked difference in tone and style. Johnson writes that Love employs this tactic of building language up to be occasionally hyper ornate, which causes the reader to slow down and attend fully to the meaning of what he expresses. Love builds into his writing a sensory experience by cycling between simpler passages and intricate, more unfamiliar or “unkyndley” ones. A similar experience certainly translates to the theater where differences in spoken word, inflection, volume, or length of speech are more easily perceptible.

Johnson also discusses the forces at hand when staging storied and historical plays in the present. Performances gave the illusion of a conflation of time by presenting the biblical world in the lived present. Through this conflation, people were “readily able to contemplate how God can be both eternal and, in the incarnated Jesus, temporal,” and understand the continuity of God’s presence and the Bible’s canon in society.<sup>79</sup> Johnson also explains that the “‘kyndeliness’ of these plays inheres not only in their being performed in the vernacular but also in their being performed by one’s friends and neighbors, for one’s friends and neighbors, year after year. Their ‘kyndeliness’ inheres in their being about divinity but by and for mankind as a group, collectively.”<sup>80</sup> Johnson addresses the profound phenomenological experience of witnessing one’s own neighbor--someone just like them--act as the divine.

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid, 135.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, 117.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 123.

Drawing on her studies of the *N-town Mary Plays*, Johnson explains that “Viewers of the play would experience the shiver of recognition that their friends, neighbors, and local tradespeople are able, through their being cast in dramatic roles, to embody the historical figures from the life of Christ,” and that this recognition expressly yielded more thorough contemplation.<sup>81</sup> Someone of the same class, place, and origin, portraying a holy figure would have been far more sympathizable and accessible to an average medieval audience member than simply hearing stories recounted by the clergy or leaving stories unstaged. Evidently, the *Mary Plays* welcomed female actors, which more adequately represented the populus on stage. Experiencing this would have made the divine “sensorily available as [cornerstones] of contemplation, and specifically as a means of recognizing how a mortal human being might hold God within herself, how a mortal human being, although bound by time, might be able to bear the eternal Word in her heart, mind, and imagination.”<sup>82</sup> Furthermore, as an example from the *Mary Plays*, “Watching one’s neighbor impersonate the pregnant Mary reminds a viewer that all people can host the mystery of Christ’s incarnation within themselves at all times” (though this necessitated care to avoid hubris), and watching guildswomen perform as Mary would have reminded viewers that “Any human being, any woman, any child, could create in herself a likeness to Mary, could model in herself and for the good of her townspeople the ongoing mystery of the divine incarnation, conceived as the ability to hold the Word inside oneself.”<sup>83</sup> Overall, though many of the biblical themes would have been familiar to audiences and resonated with them, the vernacular language and presentation of content by their own neighbors would have forged a mutual transmutability between Latin and English and allowed for deeper

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 122.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, 110.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, 122, 125.

consideration of meaning, as well as left them with the inspiring message that the divine is continually here and now and present within us all.

Sergi's work focuses on the physical form of the Chester Plays and their mechanical and stage directive aspects, and touches on textual and storytelling elements that display subversion and reveal human understandings of lived religion and society. Sergi's greatest contribution probably comes in his analysis and textual excavation of embedded practical and stage cues-- "that is, the manuscripts' verbal prompts for extra-verbal action, whether in explicit state directions or implicit...in the dialogue--" that would have directed stage movement, enriched spectacle with deeply layered meaning, qualified allusions and references, and provided insight to a given stage moment's *mise-en-scène*.<sup>84</sup> Since we do not have the luxury of being able to view the Chester Plays as they were originally performed as lived experiences, these embedded cues primarily constitute our understanding of costumes, stage blocking and positioning, sets and sceneries, and additional or special effects. The original plays' lack of explicit stage directions might be a reflection of the habitus and habitual understandings of the playwrights and audience members of the time--they took for granted the wide knowledge of the stories as well as how the spectacles unfolded since they were recurring events. Embedded cues may have been a product of this habitual experience and wide knowledge since people already knew what the plays were supposed to look like, but modern readers of the original texts must do more interpretive work to accurately understand the plays.

Sergi analyzes the ways in which the Chester plays are grounded in lived reality, as "The Chester Plays' *mise-en-scene* frequently breaks from the narrative logic that a reader might expect from a literary adaptation of scripture" through the use of these cues, and instead "adheres with remarkable consistency to *practical logic*: that is, to the requirements of a real space as real

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<sup>84</sup> Sergi, *Practical Cues*, 2.

time unfolds continuously, in which actions are limited by what is physically possible and what is culturally conceivable by participants.”<sup>85</sup> As a result, the plays were a manifestation of “local playmakers’ coherent, consistent, practical imaginings of live performance--” as well as lived religion in an authentic world.<sup>86</sup>

Sergi concludes that indicators (“that,” “this,” “yonder,” “here,” “now” etc.), verbs, direct references to people and places, and commands were the backbone for performance function and allusion to the vernacular, as well as the strategic positioning of actors to “[get] performers’ bodies into the right place at the right time in order to pull off a comic, athletic stunt.”<sup>87</sup> Cues also positioned actors in ways that revealed power dynamics through the use of levels, and sometimes deeply subversive displays could have proposed power dynamics placing “women over men, commoners over authority figures, street over raised throne.”<sup>88</sup> Doing so would have promoted loftier contemplation regarding social order by including economic and labor rhetorics. For example, a moment in Play 14 discusses royalty and their potential abuse or flexing of power as a merchant compares Jesus to a king in the Cleansing of the Temple. In this moment, strategically leveled placement of actors could emphasize either Jesus’ power over the merchant, or the merchant’s subversive and economic power over Jesus. Furthermore, cues may have directed actors towards the street for interaction with the audience, or indicated direct audience address (“lordinges, “gentlemen all”). As Johnson explained, these gestures would have certainly increased relatability and a sense of vernacularity, and catalyzed contemplation.

Sergi also writes on subversion and the unexpected in the Chester Plays. He notes that, often, situations and figures may have been caricatured to reveal public or contemporary

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, 12.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, 19.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, 31.

sentiment. The plays employed “Ridiculous comedy or grandiose melodrama” as ironic means of processing and understanding material in a modern world, and offered viewers “either a reason to laugh in the midst of despair,” or a more accurate means of understanding lofty biblical content from their worldly position.<sup>89</sup> Often, the humor in the plays comes off as self-effacing and incredibly reflexive. Comedy can serve as a direct means of coping or making light, and is only enabled by the use of the vernacular. One way in which this emerges is through what Sergi calls over-the-top “camp” displays.<sup>90</sup> According to the New York Times article “What Is Camp? The Met Gala 2019 Theme, Explained,”<sup>91</sup> which summarizes Susan Sontag’s canonical book, *Notes on Camp*, Sontag defined camp as: “an aesthetic ‘sensibility’ that is plain to see but hard for most of us to explain: an intentional over-the-top-ness, a slightly (or extremely) ‘off’ quality, and bad taste as a vehicle for good art.”<sup>92</sup> For example, Sergi notes that in the Goldsmith’s *Murder of the Innocents*, the script indicates that bloodied and mangled baby dolls be literally thrown around the stage and the crowd in a fit of violent absurdity. In this moment, language, dialogue, and action can pointedly juxtapose the gravity of the biblical text. In this way, “Horrific material both as a flippant rejection of narrative solemnity and as an amplification of emotional power, at once accommodating the lowest, darkest humor that may find its way into an unconstrained public space and opening up the potential for raw emotional expressions.”<sup>93</sup> The plays effectively separated the charged history of the bible into lived religion in ways that both reflected and constituted worldview.

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid, 31.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid, 31.

<sup>91</sup> Wertheim, Bonnie. “What Is Camp? The Met Gala 2019 Theme, Explained.” The New York Times. The New York Times, May 4, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/04/style/met-gala-what-is-camp.html>.

<sup>92</sup> Sontag, Susan. *Notes on Camp*. London: Penguin Classics, 2018.

<sup>93</sup> Sergi, *Practical Cues*, 31.

As the thesis for her essay “Speculum Urbis: The Chester Cycle as a Tool of Social Cohesion and Transformation,” Sheila Christie writes: “Seeing the plays as *speculum*, I argue that the play served a transformative function, one which primarily reflected the interests of the civic elite but which nonetheless spoke to the majority of citizens who repeatedly chose to produce and watch the play.”<sup>94</sup> *Speculum* (literally translating to “mirror”), according to Christie, “was a common medieval metaphor of instructive self-reflection, intended to ‘show the world what it is and what it should become.’”<sup>95</sup> Christie draws on the extant works of David Mills and V. A. Kolve to bolster her analyses.

First, Christie writes on how the manuscripts of Chester’s cycle that are available to us today likely came to be. She explains, as Mills did, that the plays were living, breathing documents subject to review, revision, expansion, reframing, and change with each performance. She notes instances of revision in “changes from the standard eight-line ‘Chester stanza,’ with its ‘aaabaaab’ or ‘aaabcccb’ rhyme scheme,” that can signal where material has been altered or removed.<sup>96</sup> Most pertinent to this casebook, though, are her analyses of direct address, anachronism, and civic symbolism.

Christie discusses examples of direct addresses very similar to those recounted by Sergi, but also delves into the recurring character of the Expositor. The Expositor appears on stage in dynamic and plural fashion to speak directly to the audience and effectively break the fourth wall. Breaking the fourth wall subverts basic theater tradition and expectations, and also informalizes the delivery of charged biblical knowledge. She writes:

The Expositor, a character unique to the Chester cycle who acts as both stage manager and textual interpreter, provides a good example. In some cases, the Expositor appears to have been inserted as a means of directing the audience’s interpretation and emphasizing interpretive distance, stressing what the action of

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<sup>94</sup> Christie, “Speculum Urbis,” 141.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid*, 151.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid*, 145.

a scene signifies rather than allowing the audience simply to enjoy the entertainment. The Expositor may have also been added for practical purpose. For example, in several manuscript variations he directs the audience to return 'tomorrowe next'<sup>97</sup>

While Play 14 does not feature the Expositor, there are certainly appeals made in the text that echo his role and direct the audience's attention and thought while emphasizing some moments as more grand than others.

Furthermore, Christie writes on civic symbolism, or as I like to colloquially understand it, product placement. The concept of civic symbolism has already been discussed in this paper in the Mercers' and Bakers' productions. Christie explains the ways in which guild identity manifests in the staging of the show, and explains that guilds were offered the opportunity to advertise their goods when agreeing to take on pageant responsibility.<sup>98</sup> Certain textual moments offer the opportunity for guildspeople to reference their own products, display them as props or stage features, or share them with the crowd. The Chester Banns confirm that trade symbolism was a regular and accepted part of these productions.<sup>99</sup>

Finally, and perhaps most interestingly and compellingly for the production of Play 14, Christie writes on anachronism not as an oversight or a mistake, but as a tactical method for promoting relatability and contemplative thought. Summarizing Kolve, anachronism in the plays actually serves to relate the past to the present and hold a mirror to contemporary life "while simultaneously situating the audience's own present within the scale of biblical history."<sup>100</sup> Employing anachronism would have served to "construct extra-scriptural, locally situated narratives which would have been coherent to contemporary audiences."<sup>101</sup> Kolve suggested that, "anachronism in the plays made the 'moral lessons from history...immediately and directly

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid, 144.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid, 144.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid, 153.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid, 147.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid, 141.

relevant to English medieval life,” which would have made them more palatable, relatable, and easy to ponder.<sup>102</sup> Doing so would have enriched the audience experience of biblical material and helped to draw the audience “into the plays as participants” by allowing for more thorough and personal contemplation of the material at hand.<sup>103</sup> For example, in the *Slaughter of the Innocents*, “one of the soldiers boasts that he would not hesitate to kill the children even if the ‘king of Scottes and all his hoste / were here,’ and he adds that he had previously slain ‘ten thousand...kempes...’-- both boasts allude to the Cestrian involvement in the 1513 battle of Flodden Field.”<sup>104</sup> Referencing occurrences relevant to Cestrians and transposing contemporary thinking onto biblical characters would have contextualized the Bible and biblical characters’ in more understandable ways and allowed for the reflection of thinking back on the city, itself. Reflections were made about the civic environment and other local narratives to help people cope with the hardships of living and existing as Catholic as well as to make biblical content more immediately relevant and translatable to lived circumstances.

The phenomenon of anachronism does not apply only to textual work, but also to the world of, for instance, Catholic altarpieces, which participate in a type of visual vernacularity. Altarpieces also incorporate geographic conflation or fallacy to communicate to viewers in a very similar way. Turning to altarpieces for reference is fruitful since they are visually consumed, loaded with symbolism, and often convey strong messages. Altarpieces also tend to offer their own *mise-en-scène* for some events and stories, since many depict biblical stories and their actors, and serve as valuable frames of reference for creating stage pictures. In fact, altarpiece depictions of biblical events might not have looked too different from renditions in medieval devotional drama. Some altarpieces, like the carved wooden works of German sculptor Tilman

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid, 147.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid, 148.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid, 145.

Riemenschneider even included dynamic moving parts on pulleys or weighted lift systems to bring altarpiece scenes to life.<sup>105</sup> In a similar manner that I reference altarpieces throughout this casebook, Helen Barr, in her book *Transporting Chaucer*, expounds on the ways that church stained glass windows informed choices and iconography in medieval literature.<sup>106</sup> Many altarpieces sat at the front of churches as the focus of ritual service and would have been on full display behind the clergy performing a Mass (though some larger cathedrals featured more than just one central altarpiece and dedicated other altarpieces to various saints, events, and church patrons.)<sup>107</sup> Often, altarpieces offered a sort of program of worship, and featured saints or other biblical icons, and religious iconography. As pieces of art, altarpieces also “imprinted on the eyes of the heart,” and similarly inspired people to reflect, feel, and think in contemplative ways.<sup>108</sup> Like the Chester Plays and other medieval written works, altarpieces feature several visually-rhetorical devices to direct or influence viewership to think or reflect in certain ways and upon certain things. Similarly to the plays, several altarpieces exist that depict biblical histories in anachronistic times or geographical locations. For consumers of these pieces, similar contemplative thoughts would have occurred, and they might have felt more implicated in their religious devotion or prayer by viewing altarpieces staging biblical events in their immediate setting.

Two examples of geographic fallacy and anachronism come in the Merode Altarpiece and the St. Columba Altarpiece, which follow below:

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<sup>105</sup> Personal Communication: Katherine Boivin, 2021.

<sup>106</sup> Barr, Helen. “Introduction: Transporting Chaucer.” In *Transporting Chaucer*, 1–24. Manchester University Press, 2014. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt18mvkzn.6>.

<sup>107</sup> Personal Communication: Katherine Boivin, 2021.

<sup>108</sup> Sadler, Dr. Donna L. “The Medieval and Renaissance Altarpiece,” in *Smarthistory*, January 27, 2020, <https://smarthistory.org/altarpiece-medieval-renaissance/>.

**Figure 2.1) The Merode Altarpiece**

(<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/470304>)

Accessed 23 February, 2022



The Merode Altarpiece was painted by 15th-century Flemish artist Robert Campin. The central panel of his work displays the Annunciation, or when the Angel Gabriel informs the Virgin Mary of her pregnancy with Jesus. The left panel features the two patrons who commissioned his work, and the right panel displays Joseph in his carpentry shop with very contemporary tools. The biblical story would have taken place in Nazareth before the birth of Christ, but one can easily see distinctly Flemish architecture contemporary to Campin's life inside Mary's house and out the windows. The altarpiece rewrites the Annunciation into Campin's own time and place. The piece also pokes fun at Joseph's advanced age, and even hints at his impotence by symbolizing certain tools and his drilling of holes into a plank.<sup>109</sup> Joking in this way would have, again, made religion more human, worldly, relatable, and palatable.

<sup>109</sup> Personal communication: Katherine Boivin, 2022.

**Figure 2.2) The St. Columba Altarpiece**

([https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rogier\\_van\\_der\\_Weyden\\_-\\_St\\_Columba\\_Altarpiece\\_\(central\\_panel\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rogier_van_der_Weyden_-_St_Columba_Altarpiece_(central_panel).jpg))

Accessed 23 February, 2022



The St. Columba altarpiece was painted in 1455 by the Early Netherlandish painter Rogier van der Weyden. His work depicts the Adoration of the Magi, which would have taken place in Bethlehem. Instead of in Bethlehem, however, the altarpiece's rendition of the story unfolds in a sort of nebulous place, likely influenced by modern Dutch architecture. Furthermore, upon a closer look, one can see people from all races and walks of life lining up to see Jesus, which definitely blurs the lines between biblical Bethlehem and the rest of the world. Additionally, the piece is anachronistic because it features a crucifix in the middle of the central structure, which would not have emerged as iconography until after Jesus' crucifixion.

Overall, summarizing Mills and Kolve and incorporating some of her own analyses, Christie writes that "direct address, trade symbolism, references to social issues, and other moments of contemporary allusion serve to blend 'the specific historical context with the performing context,'" and that "contemporary events and practices (such as outbreaks of the plague, corporal punishment, and gaming prohibitions) resonate with the content of the play, and

at times are referenced or discussed directly on stage.”<sup>110</sup> Christie concludes that “this recognition of contemporary details as content, not just technique, urges a consideration of their significance beyond the biblical narrative.”<sup>111</sup> The work done by all of these scholars provides the grounds on which my textual analyses and annotations can stand.

### **3) Contextualizing and Summarizing Play 14**

The Cordwainers’ *Christ at the House of Simon the Leper, Christ and the Moneylenders, and Judas’ Plot*, is situated between Play 13, *The Healing of the Blind Man, and the Raising of Lazarus* performed by the Glovers, and Play 15 *The Last Supper, and the Betrayal of Christ*, performed by the Bakers. It is important to acknowledge the play’s position in the grand biblical scheme because, in Play 13, Jesus gains incredible renown and amasses a greater following after performing several miracles--notably healing Bartimaeus, a blind and leprous beggar, and raising Lazarus from the dead. Jesus inextricably carries this renown with him into Play 14, and more of the general masses follow him or are aware of his power and holy identity. Fewer and fewer people continue to question his identity as the son of God. Set near the end of Jesus’ life, Play 14 recounts the journey of Jesus, along with two of his disciples, Peter and Philip, to Jerusalem to celebrate the feast of Passover. Along the way, the play introduces the rest of the 25 roles called for in the script.

Before arriving in Jerusalem, Jesus stops in Bethany, a smaller city outside of Jerusalem, to visit Lazarus, Martha, and Mary Magdalene at the house of Simon the Leper. Simon, Lazarus, and Martha all welcome Jesus generously and thank him for his miraculous intervention, but Mary Magdalene separates herself as a champion of faith. There is no notable variation between

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<sup>110</sup> Christie, “Speculum Urbis,” 148.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid, 148.

the four Gospels' recounting of the story and Play 14, to this point. I use the Vulgate Bible to reference the scripture, which was the most widely circulated edition of the Bible in medieval Western Christianity. A composite look at the four gospels reveals what information would likely have been available to the guildspeople while writing their scripts, and can display where writers took creative liberty or filled in gaps of the story with dialogue and action. Play 14's collective tale appears at different chronological points in each of the Gospels, which also offer differing accounts as recalled by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and is occasionally spliced with fragments of other stories. Therefore, it is certain that the cordwainers had to take some creative liberties in coalescing the play, ordering it coherently from the Gospels' jumbled and patchwork contributions, and making up unwritten space. When Magdalene sees Jesus, the story of the anointing unfolds and Jesus lauds Mary Magdalene for her growth, unfailing belief, and reverence for his holiness. Magdalene, though never explicitly biographed in the Bible, is explained to have come from a troubling and unholy past. Actually, the Gospels never confirm the sinful woman who anoints Jesus in Bethany as Mary Magdalene, or expound on the nature of her sinful past, and the Book of Luke, Chapter 7, simply refers to an unnamed woman as a general sinner. However, in the 6th-century, Pope Gregory The Great claimed that the woman was Mary Magdalene, that she lived as a sex-worker before discovering her faith, and that she was widely outcast by society.<sup>112</sup> With Gregory's word as law, the public came to understand Mary Magdalene in this way. In both scripture and Play 14, Magdalene goes above and beyond and rubs Jesus with expensive ointment (lotion or oil), and washes his feet with her tears and hair. She acknowledges her unholy past, and declares her love for Jesus anyway. Simon takes

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<sup>112</sup> Bolinger, Hope. "Who Was Mary Magdalene? And Why Do People Think She Was a Prostitute?" Christianity.com, July 11, 2019. <https://www.christianity.com/wiki/people/who-was-mary-magdalene-and-why-do-people-think-she-was-a-prostitute.html>.

offense to their interaction because he fears the corruption of Jesus' purity by associating with Magdalene, and Judas bemoans her use of the ointment because he could have sold it at market for a substantial price. The Gospels also reveal here, in their patchwork way, Judas' thieving tendencies. Later in the play and in the scripture, it is revealed that for nearly as long as he acted as a disciple of Jesus, he pocketed donations made to Jesus for himself. The Gospels corroborate Judas and Simon's reactions to Mary Magdalene and Jesus' interaction to varying degrees of anger. Jesus then makes an example of Simon and Judas' folly by absolving Magdalene's sins and acclaiming her extreme hospitality and kindness.

In the Gospels, Jesus reportedly then drives out "seven Devils" from Mary Magdalene, which Gregory the Great chose to understand as the seven deadly sins and bodily vices, and therefore labeled her as a sex-worker.<sup>113</sup> Matthew 26 explains that Jesus actually sought to memorialize her at this moment as a pillar of faith. In doing so, Christ establishes that all sins can be forgiven through faith and continual goodness. Following these exchanges, Jesus prepares to enter Jerusalem and sends Peter and Phillip to retrieve an ass upon which he can ride into the city. The Gospels indicate that, at this point, Jesus knew of his forthcoming betrayal and execution at the hands of Judas, however the play does not explicitly corroborate this. Matthew 21, Mark 14, Luke 7, and John 12 tell that Jesus explicitly thanked Magdalene for anointing him in preparation for death and burial, but in Play 14 Jesus thanks Magdalene for her hospitality, in general. The Cordwainers could have eliminated this detail of Jesus' knowledge to add drama to the whole cycle and not reveal the plots of the plays to follow, though Cestrians almost definitely knew the story, anyway.

Jesus' procession into the city is met with a great public spectacle of song, dance, veneration, proclamation, and the waving of palm branches performed by Jerusalem's citizens,

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

but the city's Jewish officials and high priests ultimately fail to acknowledge him as the son of God. The procession is actually not included in the Gospels, and its inclusion in Play 14 offers an interesting look at how the Shoemakers included theatrical elements and embellished their play. Given this, Jesus laments the state of the city and predicts its demise. In The Book of Luke, Chapter 19, Jesus weeps over the city and foretells its downfall and slaughter at the hands of hordes of enemies.

Jesus further instigates conflict with Jerusalem's jewry when he reaches the steps of the city's central temple. What follows is an oft overlooked, or perhaps intentionally banalized, segment of the Gospels in which Jesus expresses truly raw human emotion and acts in anger and violence. Even upon my own review of both the Gospels and Play 14, I was surprised to encounter Jesus in this state and felt it to be an entire subversion of common expectation. It is a safe venture to posit that many would tend to picture Jesus as perfect and devoid of undesirable human tendencies, perhaps because of the ways in which they were exposed to Jesus' story. It is commonly supposed that Jesus would never fall victim to the reactionary vices of anger. However, when Jesus finds the temple occupied by merchants selling wares and animals, he feels it is a desecration of his father's holy home. In turn, he yells at the merchants, accuses them of thievery, and drives them from their storefronts. While Matthew, Luke, and Mark offer that Jesus simply overthrew their booths and drove them from the temple, The Book of John, Chapter 2 recalls that Jesus actually threatened the merchants with a "scourge of small cords," or a whip.<sup>114</sup> Play 14's stage directions also present Jesus with a whip. Aside from assaulting them, Jesus destroys the merchants' livelihoods and means of economic subsistence. In the play, Jesus also threatens to raze and rebuild the temple in only three days with his father's might.

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<sup>114</sup> "Vulgate Bible Online," [www.vulgate.org](http://www.vulgate.org), John 2:12.

After what is known in the Catechism as the “Cleansing of the Temple,” Jerusalem’s Jewish Pharisee leaders resolve to eliminate Jesus and conspire on how to do so. By eliminating Jesus, the Pharisees suspected there would be no further challenge to Judaism, ostensibly no further amassing of Jesus’ followers, and a satisfying enactment of revenge. Not only do the Pharisees want to eliminate Jesus, but they also want to eliminate Lazarus, who is living proof of Jesus’ miracle working. The Pharisees find such an opportunity when Judas, having caught word of their discontent and plan, comes forward to betray Jesus. He provides the Pharisees with information and effectively sells Jesus to them for a mere thirty pennies (a far cry from the three hundred which he claims Mary Magdalene’s ointment to be worth). The Gospel entirely corroborates Play 14’s recounting of Judas’ betrayal, and the play sets the scene for one of Christianity’s most iconic events, The Last Supper and Jesus’ crucifixion.

#### **4) Play 14’s Annotated Script**

What follows is Play 14’s script from David Mills’ edition of the *Chester Mystery Cycle* with my annotations.<sup>115</sup> While I utilize this edition of the play for its script, I also draw on the R.M. Lumiansky and David Mills edition of the cycle in Middle English, as well as that edition’s second volume of notes, for its dramaturgical and vocabulary contributions. The play’s text is in the left column, and superscript annotations correspond numerically to the notes in the right column. Stage directions (probably derived by Mills using theory similar to that laid out in *Practical Cues*, or from creative directorial liberty) are in italics in the left column as they appear in the source text. Words that require a gloss are in bold with their definition, as it appears in Mills’ edition, in the right column, and I define all words referenced as key aspects of

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<sup>115</sup> Mills, *The Chester Mystery Cycle*, 237-252.

annotations with the use of the University of Michigan's Middle English Compendium Dictionary.

**Play 14: Christ at the House of Simon the Leper, Christ and the Moneylenders, and Judas'****Plot**

Performed by the Shoemakers

*Cast:* Jesus, Peter, Philip, Simon, Lazarus, Martha, Mary Magdalen, Judas, Janitor, First Citizen, Second Citizen, Third Citizen, Fourth Citizen, Fifth Citizen, Sixth Citizen, First Boy, Second Boy, First Merchant, Second Merchant, Caiaphas, Annas, First Pharisee, Second Pharisee

**Jesus**

Brethren, go we to Bethany <sup>1</sup>  
 To Lazar, Martha, and Mary;  
 For I love much that company.  
 Thither now will I **wend**.  
 Simon the Leper <sup>2</sup> hath prayed me  
 In his house to take charity. <sup>3</sup>  
 With them now it liketh me  
 A while for to lend.

**Peter**

Lord, all ready shall we be  
 In life and death to go with thee. <sup>4</sup>  
 Great joy they may have to see  
 Thy coming into their place.

- 1.) Bethany is a small town outside of Jerusalem and the home of Mary Magdalene, Martha, and Lazarus. The town's Arabic name, Al-‘Ayzariyyah, is derived from Lazarus' name.

**Wend- Go**

- 2.) A Leper is someone infected with leprosy. Lepers, also referred to in the Middle Ages as “Lazar” or “measel,” were often segregated from society given the virulent nature of their condition and disfigurement. For that reason, many lepers were forced to resort to begging.<sup>116</sup>
- 3.) By definition and according to David Mills, “charity” here equates to “receiving hospitality.” However, when considering Judas’ habit of stealing all that Jesus receives in donations, charity can also be understood as the reception of goods.
- 4.) The line “in life and death” can appeal to the audience’s extant biblical knowledge that Jesus is soon to die.

<sup>116</sup> Schreyer, Kurt. “Christ and the Leper from the Chester Cycle (ca. 1531–75).” In *Medieval Disability Sourcebook: Western Europe*, edited by Cameron Hunt McNabb. Punctum Books, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv11hptcd.39>, 428.

**Philip**

Lazar thou raised through thy pity,  
 And Simon also--measel<sup>5</sup> was he--  
 Thou cleansed, Lord, that wotten we,  
 And help them through thy grace.

*Then they shall go towards the house of  
 Simon the Leper.<sup>6</sup>*

**Simon**

Welcome, Jesu, full of grace,  
 That me that foul and measel was  
 All whole, Lord, thou healed has,  
 Over all to show.  
 Well is me that I may see thy face  
 Here in my house, this poor place.  
 Thou comforts me in many a case  
 And that I full well know.

**Lazarus**

Welcome, Lord, sweet Jesu.  
 Blessed be the time that I thee knew.  
 From death to life through thy virtue  
 Though raised me not yore.<sup>7</sup>  
 Four days in earth when I had lain  
 Thou grantedst me life, Lord, again.  
 Thee I honour with all my main  
 Now and evermore.

**Martha**

Welcome, my lovely Lord and lere!  
 Welcome, my dearworth darling dear!  
 Fain may thy friends be in fere  
 To see thy freely face.  
 Sit down, if your will were,  
 And I shall help to serve you here  
 As I was wont in good manner  
 Before in other place.

*Then Jesus shall sit, and all the rest with him;  
 and Mary Magdalen shall come with a box of  
 ointment and shall speak in sorrowing  
 fashion.*

- 5.) Again, “measel” refers to someone with leprosy. According to Kurt Schreyer, who wrote on Play 14 in the *Medieval Disability Sourcebook*, “measel” was “commonly used from the fourteenth to the seventeenth century to describe persons afflicted with various disfiguring skin diseases, such as leucoderma, psoriasis, vitiligo, etc. The term carried moral implications as well, being applied to ‘lowly wretched’ people or ‘sinners,’ or even of ‘diseased or infected’ swine. Leprosy took on a societal semiotic meaning.<sup>117</sup>
- 6.) Calling for movement and change of location, the stage direction would have provided the opportunity for use of different levels of performance. Perhaps the actors traveled on street level, aspects of the set were changed to indicate location, or movement was specifically curated to demonstrate a journey.
- 7.) “Not yore” translates to “not long ago.” Hearing this spoken during a performance (obviously taking place long after the biblical story) yields a temporal conflation that prompts contemplation by appealing to the vernacular of time current to the audience and making them feel complicit with and present for the unfolding of history.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid, 428.

**Magdalen**

Welcome, my lovely Lord of **leal!**  
 Welcome, my heart! Welcome, my heal!  
 Welcome, all my world's **weal**,  
 My boot,<sup>8</sup> and all my bliss!  
 From thee, Lord, may I not conceal  
 My filth and my fault-es fele.  
 Forgive me that my flesh so frail  
 To thee hath done amiss,

Ointment I have here ready  
 To anoint thy sweet body.  
 Though I be wretched and unworthy,  
 Waive me not from thy **wone**.  
 Full of sin and sorrow am I,  
 Nut therefore, Lord, I am sorry.  
 Amend me through thy great mercy  
 That makes to thee my moan.

*Then she shall open the box, and shall give an  
 indiction of anointing; and she shall wet  
 Jesus' feet with tears and shall dry them with  
 her hair.<sup>9</sup>*

**Simon**

Ah, Judas, why doth Jesus so?  
 Methink that he should let her go,  
 This woman full of sin and woe,  
 For fear of world's shame.  
 And if he very prophet were,  
 He should know her life here  
 And suffer her not to come him near,<sup>10</sup>  
 For pairing of his fame.

**Leal- Truth****Weal- Prosperity**

8.) Mills translates the word "boot" as "remedy," but its inclusion can also be understood as an embedded joke and reference to the Shoemaker's identity. Speaking the word "boot" may literally be accompanied by displaying or showcasing a real boot--the Shoemakers' product.

**Wone- Dwelling**

9.) Mary's process of anointing Jesus focuses a lot on his feet and incorporates an ointment. To appeal to the Shoemakers' identity, might Jesus be wearing shoes made by the cordwainers guild? The idea is especially compelling given its following of the use of the word "boot." Might Mary Magdalene not clean Jesus' shoes with the "ointment--"but perhaps a leather care product sold by the shoemakers? All of these actions would prominently display the fruits of the guild's labors and goods for them to sell.

10.) According to Schreyer, Judas insinuates that Magdalene would have been treated much like lepers in society--as an outcast.<sup>118</sup> Simon's treatment of Magdalene might also prompt reflection from the audience on how they treat certain members of society. Magdalene displays exemplary care and conduct, but is condemned for her alleged identity. Reflecting upon this, Cestrians may have been prompted to realize that judgment should be on the basis of character.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid, 429.

**Judas**

Nay, Simon, brother, sooth to say,  
 It is nothing but my pay.  
 This ointment goeth too fast away  
 That is so much of price.  
 This **ilk boist** might have been sold  
 For three hundred pennies <sup>11</sup> told  
 And dealt to poor men, whosoever would,  
 And whosoever had been wise.

**Jesus**

Simon, take good heed to me.  
 I have an errand to say to thee.

**Simon**

Master, what your will may be  
 Say on, I you beseech.

**Jesus**

By an example I shall thee show,  
 And to this company on a row. <sup>12</sup>  
 Whereby I say, thou may know  
 To answer to my speech.

Two debtors sometime there were  
 Oughten money to a usurer.  
 The one was in his danger  
 Five hundred pennies told;  
 The other fifty, as I say here.  
 For they were poor, at their prayer  
 He forgave them both in fere,  
 And nought take of them he would.

Whether of these two, read if thou can,  
 Was more beholden to that man?

**Simon**

Lord, as much as I can thereon  
 shall I say or pass.  
 Five hundred is more than fifty.  
 Therefore methink skilfully <sup>13</sup>  
 That he that he forgave the more party  
 More holden to him he was.

**Ilk boist- Same box (ointment bottle)**

- 11.) While the price of the ointment is included to demonstrate Judas' greed and bereavement of his potential ill-gotten gains, it might also have been an opportunity for the guild to brag about the quality of their goods.
- 12.) "This company on a row" might be an intentional breaking of the theatrical "fourth wall" by referring to the layout and appearance of the festival. Many pageant wagons are essentially set up in a "row," the "row" may also refer to the street upon which the plays were performed, and the "company" can simultaneously refer to the audience and the guilds acting as a theater troupe or "company," themselves.
- 13.) Simon's response is comical, perhaps sarcastic, since it does not require much "skill" to answer Jesus' very simple question.

**Jesus**

Simon, thou deems soothly, iwiss.<sup>14</sup>  
 Sees thou this woman that here is?  
 Sicker, she hath not done amiss  
 To work on this manner.  
 Into thy house here thou me get;  
 No water thou gave me to my feet.  
 She washed them with her tears wet  
 And wiped them with her hair.

Kiss sith I came thou gave none,  
 But sith she came into this wone  
 She hath kissed my feet eachone;  
 Of weeping she never ceased.  
 With oil thou has not me anoint,  
 But she hath done, both foot and joint.  
 Therefore I tell the one point,  
 Much sin is her released.

*To Judas Iscariot.*

And Judas, also to thee I say;  
 Whereto wouldest thou thee mispay<sup>15</sup>  
 With this woman by any way  
 That eased me thus has?  
 A good deed she hath done today,  
 For poor men you have with you ay,  
 And me ye may not have, in fay,  
 But a little space.

*To Mary Magdalen:*

Therefore, woman, **witterly**,  
 For thou hast loved so tenderly,  
 All thy sins now forgive I;<sup>16</sup>  
 Belief hath saved thee.  
 And all that preach the **Evangelly**  
 Through the world by and by  
 Of thy deed shall make memory  
 That thou has done to me.

14.) Jesus' response is probably equally as sarcastic and comical since the inclusion of "iwiss" as an intensifier meaning "surely" reads as condescending.

15.) Jesus alludes to Judas' frequent thievery and greed by using the word "mispay." Expressly, Jesus means to say that Magdalene does not deserve Judas' criticisms, but the word becomes interesting, foreshadowing, and complicated when taking into account Judas' misdeeds. It is important to remember that the audience would have likely had this knowledge and understood the word as a sort of clue or element of foreshadowing. Allusions like this also reveal to the audience that Jesus is continually aware of Judas' thievery.

**Witterly- Truly**

16.) The act of forgiving sins is performed by priests during the sacrament of confession. The moment of forgiveness between Jesus and Mary Magdalene could be staged to look like the performance of the sacrament, especially considering that Magdalene is already kneeling as if in prayer. The actor playing Jesus would have also been given the opportunity to subvert hierarchy and fulfill the role of a priest in addition to playing Jesus, himself.

**Evangelly- Word of God**

**Magdalen**

My Christ, my comfort and my king,  
 I worship thee in all thing,  
 For now my heart is in liking,  
 And I at mine above.  
 Seven devils<sup>17</sup> now, as I well see,  
 Thou hast driven now out of me,  
 And from foul life unto great lee  
 Relieved me, Lord, for love.

*Then Jesus shall stand up, and as he stands,  
 he shall speak as follows:*

**Jesus**

Peter and Philip, my brethren free,  
 Before you a castle<sup>18</sup> you may see.  
 Go you thither, and fetch anon to me  
 An ass and foal also.<sup>19</sup>  
 Loose them, bring them here anon.  
 If any man grudge you as ye gone,  
 And you say that I will ride thereon,  
 Soon will they let them go.

17.) Here, Mary Magdalene refers to the “Seven Devils” that from her Jesus excised. As described above, Gregory the Great took this as a representation of the major seven vices and sins and used this as justification for labeling Magdalene as a sex-worker.

18.) The castle to which Jesus refers is likely an appeal to Chester’s vernacular location and architecture--a blurring of geographic location and the rewriting of biblical history onto Chester’s land. As described above, doing so can be instrumental in increasing contemplation. Jesus likely references Chester Castle, built in 1070 by William the Conqueror. Not only was Chester castle Chester’s early administrative hub, but it also served as a fort in the conquest of Wales. The first floor of the castle was also the church of St. Mary de Castro, and therefore had religious importance. As written by English Heritage, “by leaving the tower and climbing the stairs onto the walls, you can appreciate the location of the castle within the city. Below, to your left, is the Old Dee Bridge, the traditional route into north Wales, and around to your right is the Roodee, the silted-up port area of Chester.” The Old Dee Bridge is in very close proximity to Chester’s original Roman Streets through which the festival and plays are recorded to have processed. Chester Castle’s structure and iconic flag tower can be seen towering above the city’s walls, making it iconic and emblematic of the city. Chester Castle is a keystone of Cestrian identity.<sup>119</sup>

<sup>119</sup> “History of Chester Castle.” *English Heritage*,  
<https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/chester-castle-agricola-tower-and-castle-walls/history/>.

19.) There is no reason to believe that the Shoemakers would not have used a real ass and foal in their performance. Doing so would have added an exciting and dynamic element to the performance. Jesus entering Jerusalem on the back of an ass is accurate to the Bible, but is also evocative of the ecclesiastic procession that takes place on Corpus Christi. Jesus riding through Chester's streets on a donkey adds meaning to the procession of the host, as Jesus is the living embodiment of the host, and is reminiscent of the holiday's ecclesiastical festivities. Placing saddles on the animals also would have provided the cordwainers with another opportunity to showcase their leather goods.

**Peter**

Master, we shall do your bidding  
 And bring them soon for anything.  
 Philip, brother, be we going  
 And fetch those beasts two.

**Philip**

Brother, I am **ready boun**.  
 Hie that we were at the town.  
 Great joy in heart have we mon  
 On this errand for to go.

*Then they shall go into the city, and Peter shall speak to the Janitor (i.e. keeper of the city gate)<sup>20</sup>*

**Peter**

How, how! I must have this ass.<sup>21</sup>

**Ready Boun- All ready**

20.) Since the “Janitor” character is the keeper of the city gate and Peter and Philip must speak to him, Peter and Philip should appear to enter Jerusalem through a gate. Here is another appeal to Chester’s vernacular geography and architecture because several of the streets upon which the plays were known to be performed (Watergate, Northgate, and Bridge) actually have major entrances to Chester in their sections of the medieval city walls.

21.) While expressly referring to the animal, “ass” can also be an opportunity for a raunchy joke and for Sergi’s campy tendencies to appear. According to the University of Michigan’s Middle English Compendium Dictionary, the word “arse” was first recorded in 1387, and “ass” soon was derived from “arse” in speech. Effectively, Peter could be looking at the “ass” of the Janitor and exclaiming accordingly. Perhaps the Janitor’s “ass” was physically exaggerated as a comedic and campy gesture. Also note how Peter does not inquire about a foal and only speaks about the “ass.” Perhaps he is so distracted by the Janitor’s backside that he loses track of his mission.

**Janitor**

Here thou gettest neither more nore lass<sup>22</sup>  
 But thou tell me or thou pass  
 Whither they shall gone.

**Philip**

My master Jesu, lieve thou me,  
 Thinks to come to this city<sup>23</sup>  
 And bade both brought to him should be,  
 Himself to ride upon.

**Janitor**

All ready, good men, in good fay!  
 And sith he will come today,  
 All this city I will say<sup>24</sup>  
 And warn of his coming.  
 Take ass and foal and go your way,  
 For each man of him marvel may  
 Lazar, that four days dead lay,  
 He raised at his calling.

*Then the Janitor shall go to the citizens.*

Tidings, good men every one!<sup>25</sup>  
 The prophet Jesus comes anon.  
 Of his disciples yonder gone<sup>26</sup>  
**Twain** that were now here.<sup>27</sup>

For his marvels lieve ay upon  
 That he is very God's son  
 Although he in this world won,  
 For else it wonder where.

22.) The idea of campy exaggeration and sexualization is supported by the Janitor's speech. While "lass" situationally means "less," it can also double as meaning "girl" or "young woman." Perhaps the janitor is cross dressing and referring to themselves as a "lass" that Peter can never attain. The Middle English Compendium first notes "las," "lasse" and "laas" in 1390.

23.) Philip's speech can be taken as an announcement to the Cestrian audience that Jesus is coming to their city. "This" city can be taken to mean Chester, itself. Perhaps Philip spoke up in this moment as if playing the role of a Bard and elicited excitement and cheering from the crowd.

24.) The Janitor echoes Philip's announcement and further blurs temporal and geographic lines. Jesus is coming today to Chester, and the Janitor calls the citizens to revere him.

25.) The Janitor's direct address to the crowd is an opportunity to break the 4th wall and initiate communication directly with the audience. Doing so directly yields better contemplation, as it makes the audience feel that they are being spoken to directly by biblical figures.

26.) "Yonder gone" is an embedded stage cue indicating that Peter and Philip have exited the scene and gone "yonder."

**Twain- two**

27.) The Janitor's announcement continues, and he explains that Peter and Philip, notable biblical figures, are also "here" in Chester. "Here" may also be strengthened by playing off of "yonder," which references not only where Peter and Philip go when they exit, but also the broader "yonder" that is where the story unfolds in its biblical setting.

**1st Citizen**

Ah, Lord, blessed most thou be!  
Him will I go now and see;  
And so I read, that all we  
Thitherward take the way.<sup>28</sup>

**2nd Citizen**

Fellows, I lieve that Christ is he,  
Comen from God in majesty;  
Else such marvels, as thinks me,  
He ne did day for day.

**3rd Citizen**

Lazar he raised, as God me save,  
That four days he had been in grave.  
Therefore devotion now I have  
to welcome him to this town.<sup>29</sup>

**4th Citizen**

Branches of the palm-tree  
Eachone in hand take we,  
And welcome him to this city  
With fair procession.<sup>30</sup>

**5th Citizen**

With all the worship that I may  
I welcome him will today,  
And spread my clothes<sup>31</sup> in the way  
As soon as I him see.

**6th Citizen**

These miracles **preven apertly**  
That from the Father Almighty  
He is comen, Mankind to buy;<sup>32</sup>  
It may none other be.

**1st Boy**

Fellows, I heard my father say  
Jesus the prophet will come today.  
Thither<sup>33</sup> I read we rake the way  
With branches in our hand.

28.) “Thitherward take the way” is an embedded stage cue indicating movement. The cue moves the citizens into Jerusalem, or Chester.

29.) “This town” can be a direct reference to Chester. Again, the Bible is superimposed onto Chester’s land.

30.) It is likely that the procession welcoming Jesus into the city looked similar to medieval Palm Sunday processions and parades in which figureheads of Jesus were carried through town and palm leaves were waved. Citizens also exclaimed “hosanna,” which appears later in this scene.

31.) While the 4th citizen means to say that they will lay down their garments in the street for Jesus to walk upon, this is also an opportunity for a raunchy joke. Perhaps this suggests that Jesus was so revered that people were willing or desired to remove their clothes for him. If not a joke, it is at least an opportunity for dynamic street-level action.

**Preven apertly- Clearly prove**

32.) The use of the word “buy” is glossed by Mills to mean “redeem,” but it still evokes thoughts of commerce. However, the citizen refers to Jesus, not Judas, which is trivial. Perhaps this suggests that the citizens initially expected Jesus to visit the city and engage in commerce with no issue.

33.) “Thither” is another embedded stage cue.

**2nd Boy**

Make we mirth all that we may  
 Pleasant to that Lord's pay.  
 "Hosanna!" I read, by my fay,  
 To sing that we fand.

*Then the boys shall go towards Jerusalem singing "Hosanna!" with branches of palm-trees in their hands. And the citizens shall lay out their garments in his path: "Hosanna, filio David! Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini! Hosanna in excelsis!"*<sup>34</sup>

*Then Jesus, sitting upon the ass, seeing the city, shall weep and shall say:*

**Jesus**

Ah, Jerusalem, holy city!  
 Unknown today it is to thee  
 That peace thou hast--thou canst not see--  
 But bale thou shalt abide,  
 Much must though **dreigh** yet some day  
 When woe shall fall on every way,  
 And thou beguiled, sooth to say,  
 with sorrow on all side--<sup>35</sup>

Destroyed, dolefully driven down.  
 No stone with other in all this town  
 Shall stand, for that they be unlieven  
 To keep Christ's come  
 And God's own visitation,  
 Done for Mankind's salvation;  
 For they have no devotion,  
 Ne dreaden not his doom.

*Then Jesus shall ride towards the city and all the citizens shall lay down their garments in the way. And when he comes to the temple, he shall say to the merchants as he descends from the ass with a whip:*<sup>36</sup>

34.) The spoken text in this stage direction matches the traditional speech from Palm Sunday masses and processions. The stage picture and movement may have also looked familiar to a Cestrian audience that had experienced Palm Sunday processions before.

**Dreigh- Suffer**

35.) Jesus' immediate exclamation that he no longer recognizes Jerusalem is humorous because he *isn't* in Jerusalem. He is clearly in Chester. Furthermore, Jesus' declaration offers some self-effacing comedy for the citizens of Chester who are being told that their city is unholy, unclean, and doomed. Here, one can see an acknowledgement that living as Catholics is challenging and really impossible, and that the citizens of Chester are acutely aware that they are not living in the blueprint that the Bible suggests and grappling with that reality through cathartic humor.

36.) Here is an often forgotten expression of Jesus' violence. To modern audiences, at least, this is likely a surprising turn of events. Reflecting back on my own 10-year catechism education, I was never once taught this story with details of violence included. However, medieval audiences may have been more aware of the story's intricacies than I.

Do away, and use not this thing,  
 For it is not my liking.  
 You make my Father's winning  
 A place of merchandise.<sup>37</sup>

37.) Jesus' declaration that using the temple as a place of merchandise is a sin likely provoked a lot of introspection for the citizens of Chester. As written by James McGrath, Jewish temples were often bustling with vendors, animal merchants, and money changers-- "an ancient temple was not supposed to be like a quiet cathedral." Money changing was crucial and upheld by Jewish law, since visitors to the city bearing different currencies had to pay an annual tax to the temple. Money changers converted the foreign money into a standard coinage, the Tyrian shekel. However, money changers are long associated with greed and thievery, and those associations build the basis for many antisemitic rhetorics. Animals were also important, since the temple was the main place for Jewish animal sacrifice. The animal merchants may have been particularly bothersome to Jesus, since the animals they sold produced waste that covered the temple floor and defiled its sanctity.<sup>120</sup>

In Chester and medieval Europe, according to Joseph and Frances Gies, the functioning of cities almost universally centered around the church. Churches were regularly the largest commercial buildings in town, and often did have vendors occupying them.<sup>121</sup> Cestrians likely reflected on their commercial conduct as a result of hearing this story.

<sup>120</sup> McGrath, James F. "Jesus and the Money Changers (John 2:13-16)." <https://www.bibleodyssey.org:443/passages/main-articles/jesus-and-the-moneychangers>.

<sup>121</sup> Gies and Gies, *Life in a Medieval City*, 120.

**1st Merchant**

What freke is this that makes this fare  
 And casteth down all our ware?<sup>38</sup>  
 Came no man hither full yare  
 That did us such annoys.

**2nd Merchant**

Out, out, woe is me!  
 My table with my money  
 Is spread abroad,<sup>39</sup> well I see,  
 And nought dare I say,  
 Now it seems well that he  
 Would attain royalty;<sup>40</sup>  
 Else thus bold durst he not be  
 To make such array.

38.) The 1st Merchant's reaction to Jesus' coming is profound. Consider the implications and ramifications for calling Jesus a "freak." Most would dare not even say this jokingly, and doing so is very clearly a sin. However, this moment also reveals the merchants' anger at Jesus' destruction of their goods, and suggests that they might not be aware that the man before them is actually Jesus. The merchant's reaction might also inspire introspection for the audience about their own values and commercial practices. Knowing that cathedrals were often centers of commercial and civic life, what was the condition of their sacred spaces? How might they have reacted had Jesus disrupted their business in the name of God? Perhaps quite a bit like the Merchants in Play 14. Even still, it is unlikely that the audience would have been rhetorically moved to dislike Jesus. Additionally, it is possible that the wares being sold in Play 14's temple were goods produced by other guilds. "Destroying" these goods may have been a friendly, or not so friendly slight by the Cordwainers.

39.) The Merchant's immediate concern with his money emphasizes antisemitic stereotypes. The exploitation of these stereotypes could have rhetorically appealed to Cestrians and easily allowed them to vilify the Jews. Aware of stereotypes, the citizens of Chester would have understood Jesus' actions as morally right, and the Jews' as wrong.

40.) The Merchant's mentioning of royalty likely reflects common sentiment on the actual English royal party. Perhaps citizens were frustrated with the hierarchical disparities apparent in society, or felt their rulers to be greedy, bold, and power hungry and likened Jesus to royalty in this moment. The Merchants explain that only royalty could be so bold as to act in this way. While it is of course human nature to write one's true thoughts, to ground this annotation, it is pertinent to reference James M. Dean's essay, "Literature of Richard II's Reign and the Peasants' Revolt," from the 1996 collection *Medieval English Political Writings*. Dean offers examples of medieval works that expressed contemporary sentiments on Richard II's reign and the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 that it inspired. These works were produced for many years following the event, but referenced them as if they were contemporary. Dean views these works as chronicles archiving public sentiment, and Chester's plays hold this same power.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Dean, James M. "Literature of Richard II's Reign and the Peasants' Revolt: Introduction." In *Medieval English Political Writings*. Medieval Institute Publications, 1996, <https://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/dean-medieval-english-political-writings-literature-of-richard-iis-reign-and-the-peasants-revolt-introduction>.

**1st Merchant**

It seems well he would be king  
That casteth down thus our thing<sup>41</sup>  
And says his father's winning  
In this temple is.

Say, Jesus, with thy jangling  
What evidence or tokening  
Showest thou of thy reigning,  
That thou darest do this?

**2nd Merchant**

What signs now showest thou here  
That preves such power  
To **shend** our ware in such manner  
Masterly, through thy main?

**Jesus**

This temple here I may destroy  
And through my might and my mastery  
In days three it edify  
And build it up again.<sup>42</sup>

**1st Merchant**

Aha, Jesus! Wilt thou so?  
This word, as ever mot I go,  
Shall be rehearsed before moe.  
Caiaphas I shall tell.

*Then Jesus shall eject the buyers and sellers  
with his whip.*<sup>43</sup>

**Jesus**

Hie you fast this temple fro,  
For merchandise shall be here no moe.  
In this place, be you never so throw,  
Shall you no longer dwell.

41.) In remarking that a king would “casteth down” the citizens’ goods, perhaps the play pokes fun at the fact that the plays were banned and “casteth down” by church officials before becoming an outwardly secular event.

**Shend- Destroy**

42.) At this point, the play has already employed significant antisemitic rhetoric and portrayed Jews as stereotypical and sinners. As might follow, Jesus threatening to destroy their temple and taking actions to do so might have been exciting for the crowd. Rhetoric to this point makes the appeal that the Jews might deserve this punishment. Though Jesus himself is Jewish, Cestrians would have primarily identified him as the figurehead of Catholicism.

43.) Explosively, Jesus’ violence culminates in physical assault. Jesus’ shedding of his peaceful demeanor, though recorded in the Bible, might have still been understood as subversive and surprising.

**Judas**

By dear God in majesty  
 I am as wroth as I may be,  
 And some way I will wreak me  
 As soon as ever I may.  
 My master Jesu, as men might see,  
 Was rubbed head, foot and knee  
 With ointment of more dainty  
 Than I see many a day.

To that I have great envy  
 That he suffered to destroy  
 More than all his good thrie--  
 And his dame's too!  
 Had I of it had mastery,  
 I would have sold it soon on hie  
 And put it up in treasury  
 As I was wont to do.

Whatsoever was given to Jesu  
 I have kept since I him knew;  
 For he hopes I be true,  
 His purse I alway bear. <sup>44</sup>  
 Him had been better, in good fay,  
 Had spared ointment that day,  
 For **wroken** I will be some way  
 Of waste that was done there.

Three hundred pennies-worth it was  
 That he let spill in that place.  
 Therefore God give me hard grace  
 But himself shall be sold  
 To the Jews, <sup>45</sup> or that I sit,  
 And for the tenth penny of it;  
 And thus my master shall be quit  
 My grief an hundredfold.

Sir Caiaphas and his company  
 conspiren Jesu to annoy.  
 Their speech anon I will espy,  
 With falsehood to foul him.  
 And if they gladly will do why,  
 I shall teach them to him in hie,  
 For of his counsel well know I.  
 I may best beguile him.

44.) Judas displays extreme greed and lust for money, and explains that he has pocketed all of the alms given to Jesus. Judas, effectively, is likened to the Jewish merchants and depicted to be equally as greedy and sinful. Judas' confession also appeals to the audience's knowledge that he is a thief.

**Wroken- Revenged**

45.) Judas indicates his intent to betray Jesus and sell him to the Jews. Not only is Judas firmly cemented as evil, but the Jews are also complicit in this pseudo human trafficking. The antisemitic and anti-Judas rhetoric mounts to a fever pitch--something certainly palpable for an audience, and even something to rally behind.

*Then Judas shall for a time go away, and Caiaphas shall speak.*

**Caiaphas**

Lordings,<sup>46</sup> lookers of the law,  
Harkens hither to my saw.  
To Jesu all men can draw  
And liking in him has.  
If we letten him long gone,  
All men will lieve him upon;  
So shall the Romans come anon  
And prive us of our place.

Therefore it is fully my read  
We cast how he best were dead;  
For if he long on life be led  
Our Law goeth all to nought.  
Therefore, say eachone his counsel,  
What manner of way will best avail  
This ilk shrew for to assail--  
Some sleight there must be sought.

**Annas**

Sir, you say right skillfully;  
But needsly men must espy  
By him we catch no villainy  
To fond, and foul to fail.  
For you know as well as I,  
Oft have we fonded to do him annoy;  
But ever he hath the victory--  
That no way may avail.<sup>47</sup>

**1st Pharisee**

Yea, sir, in temple he hath been,  
And troubles us with much teen,  
And when we wended and did ween  
Of him to have had all our will,  
Or ever we wist, he was away.  
This maketh the people, in good fay,  
To lieve that he is Christ verray,  
And our Law for to spill.

46.) Caiaphas may be directly addressing the crowd as a villain here.

47.) Here Annas makes a declaration of his evil, but also proclaims Jesus' might.

**2nd Pharisee**

Yea, lords, one point may do gain;  
 That lourden Lazar should be slain <sup>48</sup>  
 For he raised him up again  
 That four days had been dead.  
 For that miracle much of main,  
 To honour him eachone is fain;  
 And Lazar, that dead was, will not lain  
 And he on life be led.

**Caiaphas**

No more, forsooth, will many moe  
 that he has made to speak and go;  
 And blind that have their sight also  
 Loven him steadfastly  
 And followen him both far and near,  
 Preaching to the people his power.  
 Therefore my wit is in a were,  
 To ordain remedy.

**Annas**

And remedy must ordained be  
 Before this great solemnity,  
 Or else may other as well as we  
 Truss and take our way.  
 For when he came to this city,  
 All the world, as you might see,  
 Honoured him upon their knee  
 As God had comen that day.

**1st Pharisee**

Also, lordings, you saw there  
 How that he fared with chaffer--  
 Cast it down, God give him care,  
 That was of so great price!  
 And also, loudly he can lie--  
 Called the temple apertly  
 His Father's house, full falsely,  
 Right as it had been his! <sup>49</sup>

48.) It certainly reads as excessive for the Pharisees to kill both Jesus and Lazarus. Expressing the desire to kill Lazarus labels the Jewish Pharisees as exceedingly evil and further cements antisemitic sentiment.

49.) In the 1st Pharisee's speech, he clearly concerns himself most with money and material goods, and expressly denies Jesus' identity. He expresses antisemitic stereotyping. The audience would have certainly seen this as a sin and been rhetorically moved to dislike his character.

**2nd Pharisee**

Lordings, there is no more to say--  
 But lost is our Law, I dare lay,  
 And he come on our Sabbath day  
 That now approacheth nigh.  
 Heal he any, less or more,  
 All men will lieve on his lore.  
 Therefore it is good to slay him before,  
 If that we will by sly. <sup>50</sup>

**Caiaphas**

Among out wits let us see  
 To take him with some subtlety.  
 He shall have silver, gold and fee,  
 This thing that would fulfill.

**Judas**

Lords, what will you give me  
 And I shall soon help that he  
 Slyly betrayed be  
 Right at your own will?

**Caiaphas**

Welcome, fellow! As have I row,  
 That bargain fain would I go to.

**Judas**

Let see what ye will do--  
 And lay down silver here! <sup>51</sup>  
 For the Devil swap off my swire  
 And I do it without hire,  
 Other for sovereign or for sire.  
 It is not my manner.

**Caiaphas**

Say on. What shall we give thee  
 To help that he taken be?  
 And here is ready thy money  
 To pay thee or thou pass.

**Judas**

As ever more I thrive or thee,  
 And I show my subtlety,  
 Thirty pennies ye shall give me  
 And not a farthing lass. <sup>52</sup>

50.) The 2nd Pharisee's speech is trivial. He acknowledges that Jesus' acts "heal" people-- a good thing-- but explains that he must be stopped before acquiring any more followers. The 2nd Pharisee essentially acknowledges Jesus' good, but still expresses desire to stop it.

51.) Again, Judas' obsession with money is plain to see. His greed equates him with the Jews, especially when on display immediately next to them.

52.) Judas does not ask for a lot of money in exchange for betraying Jesus. In comparison, Judas remarks that Mary Magdalene's ointment would have sold for 300 pennies. Judas entirely devalues Jesus' life and expresses immense greed and a will to be complicit in murder to make a small sum. More significantly, Judas refers to the vernacular Elizabethan coinage in his exchange.

**1st Pharisee**

Yea, but thy troth thou must plight  
 For to serve us aright  
 To betray thy master through thy might,  
 And have here thy money!

**Judas**

Have here my troth, as I have tight.  
 Or Friday that it be night  
 I shall bring you to his sight  
 And tell which is he.

**1st Pharisee**

Ye been brethren on a row.  
 Which is he I cannot know.

**Judas**

No? A very sign I shall you show.  
 Espies who I kiss,  
 And that is he sooth to say.  
 Takes him manly as you may,  
 And lead him slyly away  
 Whither your liking is.

**Caiaphas**

Now look thou serve us truly,  
 Thy master's coming to espy.

**Judas**

Trust well thereto and sickerly  
 That he shall not eschew.  
 And would God Almighty  
 The France might so afie  
 In this realm and barony  
 That they were all so true!<sup>53</sup>

On Friday in the morning  
 Espies all on my coming,  
 For where that he is walking  
 I will go and espy.  
 With him I think to eat and drink;  
 And after, tidings to you bring  
 Where he shapes his dwelling,  
 And come and tell you in hie.<sup>54</sup>

THE END

53.) Judas swears by God and the King of France that he will be true to the Pharisees. Mentioning the King of France is a textbook example of anachronism and the recontextualization of biblical stories into Chester's contemporary medieval times. Again, doing so increases the capacity for contemplative thought. France was not yet established in biblical times, but was obviously a major world entity in the Middle Ages. Swearing by the King of France evokes a sense of nationalism by pitting England against France, and implicates the French in Judas' betrayal. Judas also invokes the name of God, which is incredibly ironic since he quite literally works for Jesus (God) without acknowledging it.

54.) Judas describes the iconic Last Supper, which would have been commonly known and present in iconography. He effectively sets up the transition to Play 15 and keeps the audience's interest piqued by discussing something about which they know.

### **5) Coping: Play 14's Devices, Appeals, and Implications**

Theater is a direct reflection of life, and offers an invaluable picture of the pathology of its creators within their contextualized world. Play 14's script, as I have annotated it, utilizes rhetorical devices and appeals to knowledge, the vernacular, and to the individual psyche to prompt reflection. Play 14 also incorporates comedic relief to display how medieval Cestrians understood biblical content and how it related to them, as well as how they understood themselves, their worldly positioning, and their ecology. Cestrians constructed an understanding of their tumultuous world, as well as an understanding of their religion, in order to accommodate for and cope with the reality that living as devout Catholics adhering to the scripture was increasingly difficult in the lived world. The construction of this understanding is the most authentically human form of contemplation, as Cestrians reflected and acted in the ways most practical to them while growing closer to God in lived, not idealized, ways. Understanding Play 14 as an exercise in catharsis and coping is revelatory of the challenges and conflicts that medieval Cestrians faced in their everyday lives, as well as of particular sources of pride and identity.

To lay the foundation necessary for substantial contemplation to occur, Play 14 appeals to multiple "vernacularities"—time period, language, and geography—to recontextualize the Bible in a world familiar to a medieval Cestrian audience. Analyzing the Cestrian experience of witnessing the conflation of their own space and time with the biblical imaginary provides a representative look at societal sentiment and phenomena. By referencing the biblical past as happening not long ago ("not yore--" see script annotation 7) one feels complicit in the unfolding of history and feels a deeper and more immediately relevant connection to it. Play 14 also conflates time and space in more nuanced ways through the use of curated anachronisms. The

most striking example of anachronism in Play 14 comes towards its end when Judas swears his vengeful allegiance to Caiaphas by the King of France (see annotation 55). While serving a nationalistic purpose by implicating France in Jesus' crucifixion, this line also transports the biblical timeline over 1,000 years into the future. As mentioned in its annotation, France as medieval Cestrians would have known it was not yet established in 0 A.D. (C.E), when Play 14's story allegedly unfolded. However, candidly mentioning France as an entity within the biblical story yields the effect that Judas and his conspirators are actually living in the audience's contemporary time. Play 14 also advances the bible into the era of kings and royals when the 1st Merchant remarks that Jesus was acting like a king when cleansing the temple (see annotation 41). Referencing kings not only conflates time, but also makes a political commentary that expresses common discontent with the actions of the ruling class. Through these examples of conflation, Play 14's lessons and story are proven continually relevant and timeless.

Similarly, embedded stage cues referencing directions and movement work to place biblical stories in Chester itself. For example, when the Janitor delivers the line "The prophet Jesus comes anon./Of his disciples yonder gone/Twain that were now here" (see annotations 25-27), the audience is immediately told that two of Jesus' disciples, Peter and Philip, were just "here," in Chester, and that they went "yonder," perhaps quite literally just around the corner. Inherently, even if acutely aware that the Peter and Philip in the play are not the same Peter and Philip in the Bible, one cannot help but picture them in Chester and ponder what it might mean for them to be there. While Peter and Philip go to enter Jerusalem in the play, setting the play in Chester allows audience members to imagine and literally view them walking through their own city streets. The use of "thither" (see annotation 33) when the 1st Boy begins a procession through the streets to welcome Jesus also has a similar effect. The procession that occurred in

Jerusalem was staged to play out in Chester, and, doubly significant, resembled other ecclesiastical events like the Palm Sunday Procession that would have been customary in Chester. A thread of continuity inherently emerges when considering how biblical figures might have been perceived in the modern world.

Furthermore, Play 14 makes reference to iconic Cestrian landmarks that help to situate the presented stories in Chester's contemporary world. References such as these are made possible by the mechanical directions provided by embedded cues. When Jesus directs Peter and Philip to go to the city and fetch an ass and foal, he mentions that they will encounter a castle (see annotation 18). Not present in the Gospels, this detail emerges as a Cestrian addition to the narrative. In effect, Jesus references Chester Castle, a great source of Cestrian identity and pride, and a staple of Chester's skyline. Doing so once again transposes the biblical imaginary onto the tangible vernacular, and gives the allusion that the story actually unfolded in Chester. It allows for the audience to picture and view biblical figures in their own ecological surroundings, and therefore makes stories more immediately relatable.

Play 14 also appeals to the vernacular in material culture by incorporating opportunities for the guilds to display aspects of their identity through the use of props. On several occasions, the script opens the possibility for the cordwainers to display their goods as a sort of product placement or endorsement which, as we know, was a staple of the Corpus Christi festival. Doing so would have served to ground the biblical in modern reality in very tangible and easily identifiable ways, while also displaying guild pride. For example, Play 14 makes subtle reference to footwear, the cordwainers' product. Mary Magdalene refers to Jesus as her "boot," which translates to "remedy," but also might have made reference to boots that one wears on their feet (see annotation 8). That moment is made further interesting, considering its close proximity to

Mary Magdalene's anointing of Jesus' feet. In that moment, it is possible that Jesus could have removed and prominently displayed a boot made by the cordwainers' guild, or that instead of washing Jesus' feet, Mary Magdalene could have shined Jesus' shoes. The possibility of this moment to offer product placement or endorsement is supported by Mary Magdalene's brandishing of a box and bottle of "ointment" (see annotation 9), that could have been shoe cleaner or polish, or perhaps another guild's product. It is very likely that, in moments drawing attention to Jesus' feet, the cordwainers capitalized to draw attention to their products.

Play 14 also adopts a palpably sarcastic and self-effacing tone that embraces and weaponizes irony and hypocrisy as forces for cathartic and reflective community commiseration. Many times, these moments of reflection come off as rather comedic. At other times, the play inspires more serious introspection and exposes Cestrian failures to adhere to the biblical blueprint. As I have read and reread the play, it has been helpful for me to examine myself and my own strategies for coping with my own stressors. Reflexively, I believe that many people would agree that, often, there is a paradoxical comfort in self-critical humor and self-effacement, as well as in acknowledging one's own shortcomings and hypocritical tendencies. Coming to identify this has made Play 14 infinitely more relevant to my own life and times, and displays that humans, regardless of the time period in which they lived, have always shared tendencies and emotional proclivities. Play 14 tackles the problems of living as a Catholic head on, and, by emphasizing shortcomings, helps to cultivate a comforting and cathartic sense of shared culpability for failure to adhere to the Bible. For example, the most obvious and obviously comedic example of self-effacement comes when Jesus enters Jerusalem. He immediately remarks that the city looks nothing like it did when he left it, and that, because it is plagued with unholiness, it will soon fall. Jesus' exclamation is comedic because, practically speaking, when

the actor playing Jesus enters “Jerusalem,” he is really entering Chester (see annotation 35). Chester *doesn't* look anything like Jerusalem. While stating the obvious is comedic in this sense, Jesus' statement also prompts viewers to think about just how unholy Chester really might be, and what Jesus' reaction to entering their own city might be. Similarly, with cathedrals often being the center of civic and commercial activity in medieval cities, Jesus' remarks on the temple's desecrated condition (see annotation 37) would have resonated with medieval Cestrians. Jesus was unhappy that the temple in Jerusalem was made into an unholy place, and Chester's holy spaces were likely similarly treated. Through this acknowledgement, Cestrians may have experienced the ownership of shared culpability, reflected on their religion in a changing world, and pondered how their lifeways changed to accommodate or ignore certain biblical tenets.

Play 14 displays comedy in more lighthearted ways, as well, juxtaposed to the play's other serious themes. When Peter and Philip encounter the Janitor, immediately the script opens the opportunity for camp, gender-bending, and sexual humor. On a mission from Jesus to acquire an ass and foal, Peter remarks that he “must have this ass!,” immediately upon seeing the Janitor (see annotation 21). As Sergi notes examples of camp in the *Chester Mystery Cycle's* other plays, it is certainly feasible that the Janitor had an exaggerated ass, or rear end. The Janitor then follows Peter's plea by saying that he will have “neither more nor lass,” which corroborates the idea of gender-bending (assuming that, like in other plays, the cast was entirely male). The Janitor may very well be comedically referring to himself as a lass.

As a more serious commentary, Play 14 is not subtle about its attitude towards Jews and its incorporation of expressly antisemitic themes. As would follow, Play 14 reveals Cestrian attitudes towards Europe's Jewry. While ultimately vilifying Judas as the pinnacle of evil, Play 14 universally portrays Jews as nearly as evil as Judas, or perhaps portrays Judas as the most

stereotypically Jewish. Though likely every role represented in Play 14 was Jewish at the time of the Bible, the play markedly differentiates between Jews who follow Jesus (soon to be Catholics) and those who do not through description, stereotyping, and making rhetorical appeals to the viewer.

### **5.1) A Brief Interlude on Antisemitism**

Antisemitism, a perplexing reality in both the Middle Ages and today, emerges as a central theme in Play 14. Through stereotyping, insinuation, and rhetorical appeals, Play 14 makes no mistake in labeling the Jew as not only “Other,” but as sinful, corrupt, murderous, greedy, and evil. Given Play 14’s unmistakable display of antisemitism, it is necessary to offer a brief contextualization of anti-Jewish sentiment in Medieval Europe and England. I want to note that since this dramaturgy casebook ventures to present Play 14 as it would have appeared to a medieval audience, some of dramaturgical offerings are inherently rooted in antisemitism. This antisemitism, however, is founded in history and in the historical representation of Jews in the Middle Ages, and is therefore not my own. In no way do I attempt to offer a comprehensive sourcebook on the topic--doing so would necessitate the writing of several books and warrant its own, more focused research--but, rather a brief overview of antisemitism in the medieval world. First, I discuss social codes and governmental and papal legislation pertaining to Jews living in European countries united under Christendom, and then synthesize a few events representative of the systematic attacks on England’s Jewry. Perhaps this casebook provides a foundation from which future scholars, playwrights, and adapters can work to modernize this play and bring justice to its Jewish characters. That, however, is a formidable task, since Play 14 recounts alleged historical fact and is not simply a story that can be freely changed.

As Anthony Bale records in his book *The Jew in the Medieval Book: Antisemitisms, 1350-1500*, the Jewish diaspora probably reached England after members of the Spanish and French Jewish cohorts emigrated in the 11th century. Only in the 12th century did a substantial Jewish population appear in the major towns of Southern and Eastern England.<sup>123</sup> Bale notes that Jews, who settled in both urban and rural areas, were often polyglot, held many roles in society such as lawyers, doctors, and musicians, and were not regarded as “freakishly exotic,” at first.<sup>124</sup> However, Catholic conversion and Othering agenda changed this narrative in the centuries to come, and Christianity and Catholicism emerged as dominating entities.

In an era marked indelibly by Crusades, pogroms, anti-Jewish legislation in government, and forced conversion, medieval Jews were subject to constant persecution and danger. As little more than a tolerated minority, Jews were condemned by long-standing laws enacted by the Christianized Roman empire. European Jews saw further persecution and Othering during the papal reign of Pope Innocent III (1198-1216), which fell during the height of the Church’s ecclesiastical and political power. Innocent enacted legislation that tended to “segregate the Jew socially even more than he had been in the past,” and to prevent Jews from gaining power and influence in society.<sup>125</sup> At the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, Innocent drafted and instituted laws to do so.

Aside from bigotry rooted in the failure to accept difference, many Catholics, including high-ranking church officials, were reliant upon Jews for loans and money changing and developed negative sentiment, accordingly. While, again, Jews occupied many societal roles, many Jews also handled society’s money. Catholics were forbidden by canonical law to engage

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<sup>123</sup> Bale, Anthony. *The Jew in the Medieval Book : English Antisemitisms, 1350-1500*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, 14.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid*, 15.

<sup>125</sup> Marcus, Jacob R., and Marc Saperstein. *The Jew in the Medieval World: A Source Book, 315-1791*. Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1999, 153.

in money lending with interest, which left only the Jews to occupy this vital societal role.<sup>126</sup> With the exchange of money comes interest and conversion rates, and interest naturally mounts if left unpaid. Given this reality, negative sentiment towards Jews who handled money similarly mounted, and Jews were often accused of usury and foul play. Innocent III addressed these so called unfair interest rates, essentially ventured to absolve Catholic debts to Jews, and encouraged the abstaining from dealing business with Jewish money lenders and changers if interest rates did not lower.<sup>127</sup> Innocent III effectively froze Jewish commerce and imposed economic sanctions upon the Jews, but also perpetuated and enforced a narrative that Jews frequently committed usury and economic foul play. Coming from the pope, a substantial societal figure, this stereotype easily permeated societal thinking. Specifically in an economically suffering 13th-century England, illegal coin clipping, a process that exploited the unstandardized shape, size, and material of English and foreign coinage, was also on the rise.<sup>128</sup> Jews became the scapegoat for blame, and King Edward I doubled down on the ban preventing Jews from money-lending and changing. He also arrested and executed many of England's Jews.

In more segregating efforts, Innocent also instituted laws ensuring that “Jews and Saracens of both sexes in every Christian province and at all times [were] marked off in the eyes of the public from other peoples through the character of their dress.”<sup>129</sup> While laws like this existed in some Christian and Catholic areas, Innocent universalized these sanctions and promised punishment to those who did not cooperate. Innocent's laws led to the appearance of

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<sup>126</sup> Roth, Norman. “Jewish Moneylending.” *My Jewish Learning*, April 3, 2015, <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/jewish-moneylending/>.

<sup>127</sup> Marcus and Saperstein, *The Jew in the Medieval World*, 154.

<sup>128</sup> Holmes, Tara. “Religions - Judaism: Readmission of Jews to Britain in 1656.” *BBC*, BBC, 2011, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/judaism/history/350.shtml>.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid*, 154.

markers identifying citizens as Jewish, like badges and hats. According to the United States

Holocaust Memorial Museum:

The Papal order was most successfully enforced in England, where, in 1217, King Henry III ordered male Jews to wear a badge on the front of their outer garments. In 1275, King Edward I specified the color of the badge and its size. Jews over the age of seven were required to wear a piece of yellow taffeta, six fingers long and three broad, over the left chest of the outer garment.<sup>130</sup>

Furthermore:

In England the badge took the form of the Tablets of the Law, (the Ten Commandments), considered to symbolize the Old Testament. In French territories beginning in 1217, the authorities decreed that Jews wear “*rota*,” circles of red or yellow felt in the front and back of their clothing. However, in Spain and in Italian territories, the wearing of distinctive badges—usually in the form of a yellow circle—was enforced only sporadically. In German-speaking Europe, a *Judenhut* (or “Jew’s Hat”), a cone-shaped pointed headdress often seen depicted in medieval literature, was required.<sup>131</sup>

Below are examples of Jewish-identifying badges. Note that in the first manuscript miniature a man identified as Jewish is being beaten.

**Figure 5.1) A Ten Commandments Badge, Popular in England**

([https://www.researchgate.net/publication/270704283\\_Badge\\_of\\_dishonor\\_Jewish\\_Badges\\_in\\_medieval\\_Europe](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/270704283_Badge_of_dishonor_Jewish_Badges_in_medieval_Europe))

Accessed 8 March, 2022



<sup>130</sup> “Jewish Badge Origins” *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/jewish-badge-origins>.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

**Figure 5.2) A Rota Jewish-Identifying Badge**

([https://www.researchgate.net/publication/270704283\\_Badge\\_of\\_dishonor\\_Jewish\\_Badges\\_in\\_medieval\\_Europe](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/270704283_Badge_of_dishonor_Jewish_Badges_in_medieval_Europe))

Accessed 8 March, 2022



Some *rota* badges also bore inscriptions that designated them as badges of guilt and despair--a tragedy to wear.

Innocent III also instituted laws that forbade the appointment of Jews to public office, as well as ensured that all former Jews who were forcibly converted to Catholicism cut all ties with their Jewish past. Jewish converts were closely monitored in England when, in 1218, Henry III instituted the *Domus conversorum*, or the house for Jewish converts.<sup>132</sup> Innocent pushed the agenda of conversion and extended the influence and agenda of the Crusades. As a result of Innocent's decrees, whether direct or indirect, over the next few centuries Jews were expelled from England (1290) and from Spain and much of western Europe through the Spanish Inquisition (1492). Only in 1656 were Jews permitted back on English soil.<sup>133</sup>

The antisemitisms and stereotypes perpetuated by Innocent doubtlessly permeated art, literature, and lore throughout the medieval world, and became regarded as truths. Most notably, Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice's* villain, Shylock, a Jew, comes to mind. Shylock is incredibly stereotyped and displays greed, vengeance, and violence as a moneylender who calls

<sup>132</sup> Bale, *The Jew in the Medieval Book*, 15.

<sup>133</sup> Holmes, "Religions - Judaism: Readmission of Jews to Britain in 1656."

for a “pound of flesh” in place of payment from Bassanio. However, the Shylock legend was not necessarily a Shakespearian creation, but rather inspired by long-told folktales told in many ways and places and with characters under multiple names. The stereotype of Jews as common villains, usurers, and hard creditors was so perpetuated in literature that, in England, though past 1290 there were no openly observing Jews in the country, the word “Jew” came to be a “synonym...for scoundrel and money-lender.”<sup>134</sup> These stereotypes were used to further vilify and Other Jews in society, and eventually spawned physical offshoots in the narrative that Jews possessed different biology and phenotypes from other humans, and had horns, talons, wings, and long, hooked noses. Jews came to be seen as non-human. In his book, Anthony Bale references two works portraying Jews as lesser or Other: the Caricature of the Norwich Jews, and the Synagoga statue on Paris’ Cathedral of Notre Dame.<sup>135</sup>



**Figure 5.3) The Caricature of the Norwich Jews**

(<https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2016/06/06/the-first-anti-jewish-caricature/>)

Accessed 8 March, 2022

<sup>134</sup> Marcus and Saperstein, *The Jew in the Medieval World*, 421.

<sup>135</sup> Bale, *The Jew in the Medieval Book*, 1, 3.

As one of the first known depictions of Jews in a caricatured way, this scrap of paper now known as the Caricature of the Norwich Jews is actually the upper margin of an English royal tax record from 1233 and shows three Jews in a tower under siege by demons. As the demons indicate through their gestures, the Jews have features not too different from theirs. This doodle played an instrumental role in perpetuating antisemitic stereotypes concerning phenotype, and influenced how Jews were depicted in media--probably including Chester's Corpus Christi Plays.

Bale also mentions the statue of Synagoga on the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris, which survived the 2019 fire. Synagoga, representing Judaism, stands next to Ecclesia, who represents Catholicism.

**Figure 5.4) Ecclesia and Synagoga, Notre Dame, Paris**  
([https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ecclesia\\_et\\_synagoga.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ecclesia_et_synagoga.jpg))  
Accessed 8 March, 2022



While Ecclesia (on the left in Figure 5.4) looks upward toward Heaven and Jesus, Synagoga (on the right in Figure 5.4) is blinded by her Jewish-identifying hat and instead looks down. While acknowledging Christianity and Judaism’s shared roots in the Old Testament by showing Synagoga holding a tablet of the Ten Commandments, the stature pairing emphasizes constructed differences between the two. In a prominent location at a major place of worship, the ideals presented by the statues would have easily permeated the minds of churchgoers and passersby and perpetuated antisemitism on a large scale.

Similar, yet far more sinister, one of the most heinous depictions of Jews presented in a holy space comes in Wittenburg, Germany’s *Judeansau*, or Jew’s Pig. There are multiple *Judeansau* throughout Germany, but Wittenburg’s has gained the most recent attention. On Castle Church, where Martin Luther allegedly nailed his 95 Theses in 1517, there exists an engraving that depicts Jews interacting with a pig in explicit ways. According to Bard College Professor Katherine Boivin, the *Judeansau* displays a rabbi lifting a pig’s tail to search for his Talmud in its rectum, and several other Jews suckling from the pig. Above the scene is the inscription “Rabini Schem HaMphoras,” intended to mock the Hebrew phrase for the holiest name of God.

**Figure 5.5) Wittenberg’s *Judeansau***

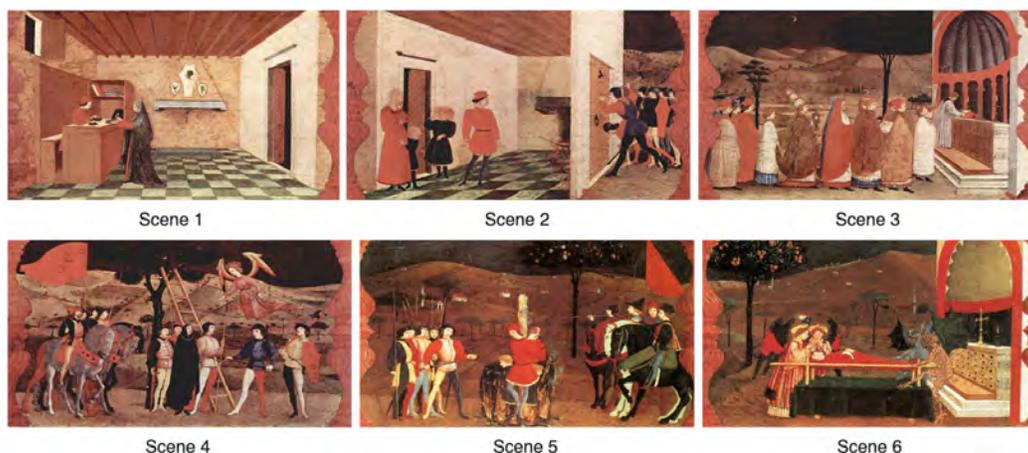
(<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/germany-nazism-medieval-anti-semitism-plain-sight-180975780/>)

Accessed 9 March, 2022



Other examples of antisemitism in art come in the form of altarpieces, which immediately pit Judaism against Christianity and Catholicism in an apparent antisemitic agenda. Paolo de Uccello's predella painting in Corpus Domini Church in Urbino, Italy illustrates a story of host-desecration, a common theme and stereotyping accusation used to persecute Jews. Host-desecration, which often didn't actually occur but was offered as an excuse to expel or execute Jews in Catholic areas, was the reported ritual destruction of the Catholic Eucharist by Jews incited by anger and innate evil. Other common accusations come in the form of the ritual murder of Christian babies and children, blood libel, poisoning water sources, and willfully spreading the plague.<sup>136</sup> In response to this alleged destruction of the holiest of holies, Jews were burned at the stake and executed in barbaric ways, and Catholics took the opportunity to commit pogroms and other violent atrocities.

**Figure 5.6) Paolo Uccello's *Miracle of the Desecrated Host***  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Miracle\\_of\\_the\\_Desecrated\\_Host](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Miracle_of_the_Desecrated_Host)  
 Accessed 9 March, 2022



Uccello captures one of these events in his predella, presented proudly at the front of Corpus Domini Church as a program for all patrons to see, and illustrates six sequential panels. In the first panel, a Christian woman trades a host with a Jewish usurer for money. In the next,

<sup>136</sup> Holmes, "Religions - Judaism: Readmission of Jews to Britain in 1656."

the Jew attempts to burn the host, but the host, Christ eternal in a tangible form, begins to bleed. In the third, a procession forms to reconsecrate the host. The fourth shows the Christian woman's execution by hanging, and the fifth shows the Jew and his family being burned at the stake. Finally, the sixth panel shows a devil and angel arguing over the Christian woman's grave.<sup>137</sup> Uccello offers his piece as the illustration of a miracle, and perpetuates the rhetoric of the evil Jew. Other altarpieces, like the master of the Pulkau altar in Austria, present vernacular stories of alleged Jewish crimes like host desecration and ritual murder and their resultant violent consequences.

As vehicles for delivering antisemitisms to the public, literature and the retelling of stories influenced visual art and culture. Paintings, altarpieces, and statues came to present Jews in stereotyped and monstrous ways, and created an ever broadening gap between Jews and Catholics in identity and treatment. Art displayed in Catholic places of worship presented the most clear agenda of differentiating, Othering, and dehumanizing Jews against a model Catholic archetype. The *mise-en-scène* offered by these visual representations can inform costuming, stage blocking, and set design choices for theatrical production

All of these antisemitisms culminate in and are represented by violent events committed in the name of Christianity against the Jews. To provide an accurate picture of the reality that medieval English Jews faced and the uncertain world in which they lived, it is pertinent to discuss some of these atrocities. In no way do the events to be discussed encapsulate the entirety of anti-Jewish violence in the Medieval world, or even in England, but they help to contextualize antisemitism in England, specifically.

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<sup>137</sup> Personal communication: Katherine Boivin, 2022.

The 1189 coronation of Richard I, who was hailed as a champion of the Crusades, incited mob attacks on London's Jewish population.<sup>138</sup> By 1190, mob mentality spread throughout England and reached a fever pitch in York. As recorded by Jacob Marcus and Marc Saperstein in *The Jew in the Medieval World*, in York the "gullible and bigoted lower estates were utilized by a band of unscrupulous nobles to wipe out the Jewish community to whom the nobles were heavily indebted."<sup>139</sup> It is important to note that the state treasury helped Jewish moneylenders collect their debts while of course taking a percentage for themselves, and that Jews operated within the parameters of the law. William of Newburgh, a devoted historian and monk, describes the riots, which initiated on *shabbat ha-Godol*, or the shabbat before Passover, in his *History of English Affairs*. He recalls that the citizens of York could be tempered by neither law "nor by feelings of humanity," and sought to wipe out their city's Jewish population entirely.<sup>140</sup> Beginning with the family of a Jewish man, Benedict, who had been beaten to death the year prior in an attempt to convert him to Christianity, the mob broke into Jewish residencies, looted their belongings, and slew whole families at a time. After the mob attacked more prominent Jewish families, York's Jews sought refuge and safety in the city's castle. Those who were caught outside the castle were killed or forced to convert, and empty Jewish households were decimated and looted. Outraged by the inconvenience that the Jews posed to him and feeling as if his property had been stolen, the castle's warden complained to the county sheriff who quickly "became indignant and raged against the Jews."<sup>141</sup> The sheriff, convinced that the Jews were plotting action against the king and mounting defenses, ordered citizens and soldiers to besiege the castle and seize it back in the name of Christianity. Though the sheriff regretted his reactionary ire and called off the attack, the

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<sup>138</sup> Marcus and Saperstein, *The Jew in the Medieval World*, 147.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid*, 147.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid*, 148.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid*, 149.

mob he incited could not be stopped. The tower was attacked for several days, and many Jews committed suicide rather than converting, starved, or died by the sword. William of Newburg describes that “the city was at that time horrid and nauseous,” and that unburied slaughtered corpses laid around the citadel for days to come. After the massacre, the records of Christian debt to the Jews were destroyed. Richard I allegedly took great offense to the happenings at York since, in 1189, he wrote into law that the Jews would have security on English soil (despite expelling them later in 1190). Furthermore, Richard I bemoaned the great loss to the English treasury that came with the erasure of debt. Despite that, the Christian citizens of York escaped with only a small fine as punishment.<sup>142</sup>

Furthermore, the formation of medieval Christian cults concerning “boy-saints” pushed antisemitic agendas and revealed public sentiments towards the Jews. Boy-saints, whether fictional or real citizens of a given city, were said to emulate Jesus’ innocence and purity in all respects, and were also venerated as young victims and martyrs of Jewish ritual murder. The antisemitic trope of ritual murder was perpetuated by these boy-saint cults, and notable boy-saints included William of Norwich, Harold of Gloucester, Hugh of Lincoln, Adam of Bristol, and Robert of Bury St. Edmunds.<sup>143</sup> At Bury, the Robert cult emerged to venerate the alleged 1181 murder of Robert, a local child, by the city’s Jews. Again, incited by Richard I’s coronation, the cult took measures to expel Bury’s Jews in 1190. As Anthony Bale summarizes, Bury’s Jews were “manipulated, slandered, attacked and finally expelled” from the city by force, and that all Christians offering them refuge would be excommunicated from the Church.<sup>144</sup> The cult of Robert then gained popularity among the laity and continued to prosper for years to come. Robert’s shrines brought fantastical oblations, and Robert was awarded his own feast day by the

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid, 151.

<sup>143</sup> Bale, *The Jew in the Medieval Book*, 106.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid, 109-110.

Church. In doing so, the Church formally endorsed antisemitic ritual murder and blood-libel narratives.

The alleged ritual murder of Hugh of Lincoln is another boy-saint story used to push antisemitic rhetoric. Allegedly, the body of a nine year old boy, Hugh, was found in a well. Hugh's friends accused a local Jewish man named Koppin of imprisoning and torturing Hugh for over a month before crucifying him. Hugh's alleged crucifixion is significant as it presents him in the image of Christ and portrays him as the ultimate martyr. While there was no evidence for this crime, the story circulated and inspired a cult following. As a result, over ninety Jews were arrested, and Koppin, who was tortured into confessing, was executed along with eighteen others. Hugh emerged as a local saint figure, and miracles soon came to be attributed to him. Hugh also became a popular reference in medieval literature, most notably appearing in Geoffrey Chaucer's *Prioress's Tale* in *The Canterbury Tales*.<sup>145</sup>

As can be seen, antisemitism permeated many facets of medieval society and Jews were systematically oppressed and rendered subordinate to the dominant Christian majority. Crusades, and governmental and Papal laws enforced and inspired rhetorics and narratives in literature, art, and legend which, in turn, reached citizens en masse. These legends, which vilified Jews indiscriminately and championed Christian aggressions, extended far beyond bigotry and led to some of history's greatest atrocities in pogroms, expulsions, and forced conversions.

## **6) Costumes**

While Play 14 is made up of a 25 person cast, this sourcebook does not aim to provide costuming ideas for each individual character. Instead, I group characters together like the

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<sup>145</sup> Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopedia. "Little Saint Hugh of Lincoln". In *Encyclopedia Britannica*, January, 1 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Little-Saint-Hugh-of-Lincoln>.

Pharisees, the Citizens, the Boys, Philip, Peter, Martha, and Lazarus, and discuss other more easily differentiable characters in more detail. For the following sections on costumes, props, and set design, dramaturgical inspiration comes in many forms and from many different sources. However, it is best to turn to historical source material and objects whenever possible. I draw heavily on archaeology, art, and historical documentation to substantiate my dramaturgical choices for Play 14. Costuming Play 14 as it would have appeared to a medieval Cestrian audience necessarily blends the clothing styles of the biblical Middle East and Africa, as well as how Cestrians might have chosen to understand or portray the characters. Certain vernacular aspects of medieval clothing and material culture are necessarily added to biblical dress to make characters more relatable, identifiable, and immediately relevant, and to also increase contemplative potential. While the Chester Banns “‘urged the guilds to 'be bolde' and to 'weathelye' and 'Lustelye' bring forth their traditional costumes and pageants regardless of how 'costelye' they [were],” Play 14 is interesting as it offers a mix of both named and unnamed characters.<sup>146</sup> Some players in Play 14 portrayed average citizens and were likely un-aggrandized, but others who played prominent biblical figures certainly would have been costumed in more elaborate and curated pieces.

### **The Citizens, Boys, Janitor, Peter, Philip, Lazarus, and Martha, and General Footwear**

Dramaturgical information pertaining to the Citizens, the Boys, Peter, Philip, Lazarus, and Martha comes largely from Alice Pfeifer’s “Clothing of the Jews in the Time of Jesus.” Pfeifer offers a detailed description of what average Jewish citizens, both male and female, wore in their daily life. That being said, most of the characters in Play 14 that were not explicitly

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<sup>146</sup> Dell, Jessica, David N. Klausner, and Helen Ostovich. *The Chester Cycle in context, 1555-1575: religion, drama, and the impact of change*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012, 143.

female, were likely male. Pfeifer's focus on Jewish citizens makes her article all the more pertinent since, given when Play 14 falls on the biblical timeline, all of its characters were still Jewish. Furthermore, all the people becoming Christian dressed in that traditional manner. Christianity and Catholicism, after all, were not established until after Jesus' death. For this dramaturgical casebook, I choose to costume these more "average" characters in the ways that they would have dressed in biblical history. Cestrian playmakers would have had access to this information, as the Bible allows one to piece together a good idea of what common dress looked like. Another angle to take might be to present Play 14 with characters costumed as medieval contemporaries. However, as I understand the Chester Banns, they indicate that players probably wore "traditional" costumes that reflected the biblical period.

Pfeiffer explains that biblical dress was very simple and consisted essentially of three outer garments: the tunic, mantle, and sash, which were crafted from linen or wool. People also wore simple, light undergarments, and sandals made of animal hide or wood. Pfeifer notes that women's clothing must have had a different cut, given the prohibition of cross-dressing found in Deuteronomy 22:5, and explains that women wore ankle-length tunics and long veils that covered their hair.<sup>147</sup> For reference, the image that follows is historical costume designer Holley Gene Leffler's example of a mantle, tunic, and sash. Leffler designs for several museums, as well as costumes for the renowned Women's Spiritual Repertory Company.

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<sup>147</sup> Pfeifer, Alice. "The Clothing of the Jews in the Time of Jesus." *Synonym*, 28 Sept. 2017, <https://classroom.synonym.com/the-clothing-of-jews-in-the-time-of-jesus-12086716.html>.

**Figure 6.1) Mantle, Tunic, and Sash**  
 (<http://www.holleygene.com/wotb/Jesus%27%20Tunic.htm>)  
 Accessed 19 March, 2022



Jews were also commanded to wear tassels on their tunics. This command, given to the Israelites, can be found in Numbers 15:38 and Deuteronomy 22:12. These tassels, called *tzitzit*, refer to the ancient blue dye which traditionally colored them. As written by The Chicago Jewish News, *tzitzit* were significant to the Jewish people as a personal reminder of the Torah's commandments.<sup>148</sup> In play 14, though allegedly every character is Jewish, *tzitzit* were likely only worn by those characters being emphasized as evil and stereotypical Jews as to differentiate them from other characters. Or, perhaps the Jewish identifying garments may have been shed by the citizens as they joined in Jesus' procession into Jerusalem to symbolize their conversion.

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<sup>148</sup> "What Did the Jewish Pharisees Wear?" *Chicago Jewish News*, <https://www.chicagojewishnews.com/what-did-the-jewish-pharisees-wear/>.

**Figure 6.2) An Example of Tzitzit**

([https://www.etsy.com/listing/203580597/tzitzit-4-torah-scroll-messianic-tassels?gpla=1&gao=1&&utm\\_source=google&utm\\_medium=cpc&utm\\_campaign=shopping\\_us\\_ps-e-jewelry-other&utm\\_custom1=k\\_CjwKCAjw\\_tWRBhAwEiwALxFPockg5SWtg53H-m\\_YeEbXmdwD9RAfSwjL5qoAxTDdfymLhJllbarqKxoC4PYQAvD\\_BwE\\_k\\_&utm\\_content=go\\_12567675069\\_114687977410\\_507203974941\\_pla-350629703727\\_c\\_203580597\\_117168114&utm\\_custom2=12567675069&gclid=CjwKCAjw\\_tWRBhAwEiwALxFPockg5SWtg53H-m\\_YeEbXmdwD9RAfSwjL5qoAxTDdfymLhJllbarqKxoC4PYQAvD\\_BwE](https://www.etsy.com/listing/203580597/tzitzit-4-torah-scroll-messianic-tassels?gpla=1&gao=1&&utm_source=google&utm_medium=cpc&utm_campaign=shopping_us_ps-e-jewelry-other&utm_custom1=k_CjwKCAjw_tWRBhAwEiwALxFPockg5SWtg53H-m_YeEbXmdwD9RAfSwjL5qoAxTDdfymLhJllbarqKxoC4PYQAvD_BwE_k_&utm_content=go_12567675069_114687977410_507203974941_pla-350629703727_c_203580597_117168114&utm_custom2=12567675069&gclid=CjwKCAjw_tWRBhAwEiwALxFPockg5SWtg53H-m_YeEbXmdwD9RAfSwjL5qoAxTDdfymLhJllbarqKxoC4PYQAvD_BwE))

Accessed 19 March, 2022



To add a Cestrian flair to Play 14's costumes, as well as to bring in aspects of Cordwainer identity, I propose that all players in Play 14 might have worn leather boots or shoes instead of sandals. As indicated in Play 14's script annotations, an incentive for guildspeople to produce Corpus Christi plays was the opportunity for civic endorsement, or what I like to call product placement. Cestrians most often wore leather ankle boots or shoes fastened with leather laces or metal buckles. For examples of medieval boots and shoes, I turn to the archaeological archives of the Museum of London. Given to the museum by archaeologists and Londoners lucky to stumble upon them, some of these boots were found preserved in the muck of the River Thames.

**Figure 6.3) Late Medieval (14th-early 15th century) Buckle-Fastened Ankle Boot**  
(<https://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/online/object/32675.html>)  
Accessed 19 March, 2022



**Figure 6.4) Late Medieval (14th - 15th century) Laced Ankle Boot**  
(<https://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/online/object/32689.html>)  
Accessed 19 March, 2022



**Figure 6.5) Late Medieval (late 14th century) Child's Leather Shoe**

Children's footwear was almost identical to adult footwear in style.  
(<https://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/online/object/32689.html>)

Accessed 19 March, 2022

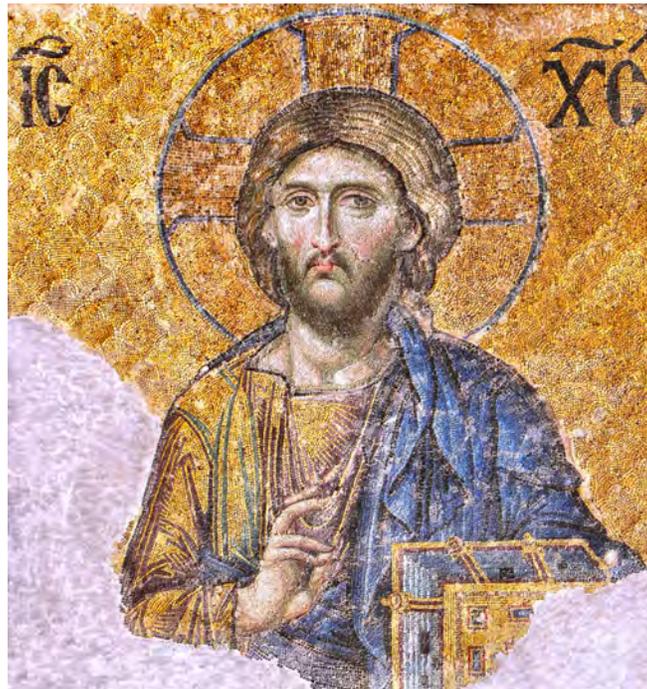


**Jesus**

Though history suggests that Jesus did not dress differently than a commoner, and early artistic depictions show Jesus in simple Greco-Roman influenced clothing, Jesus' image became aggrandized in art and media as he grew as the figurehead of a worldwide religion. It is very likely that the citizens of Chester would have costumed Jesus in this aggrandized fashion, especially as the figurehead of a procession. Jesus, a Jew himself, also likely wore *tzitzit* (as evidenced in the Gospels of Matthew and John), but the tassels almost certainly would have been left off of his costume by its Catholic creators. Instead of recognizing Jesus as Jewish, the Cordwainers and Catholic audience would have chosen to recognize Jesus as the preeminent icon of Catholicism. Jesus likely would have been adorned as Christ the King, with crown or halo affixed, and expensive gold or colored robes. While any grand and lustrous costuming could

have been a feasible presentation, it is useful to look at artistic depiction for inspiration. *Christ Pantocrator* from the *Hagia Sophia Altarpiece* in Istanbul, Turkey offers an intricate illustration of Jesus that matches the requirements and expectations laid out in the Chester Banns.

**Figure 6.6) Jesus as *Christ Pantocrator***  
 ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christ\\_Pantocrator](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christ_Pantocrator))  
 Accessed 20 March, 2022



### **Judas**

Seeing as Judas was one of Jesus' original disciples, it is likely that he was not costumed entirely differently from Peter, Philip, and the other more common-folk characters. However, Judas became a well known figure, given his betrayal of Jesus and the role he played in his crucifixion. Throughout all of Chester's program, Judas plays a pivotal part. In Play 14, Judas' immense greed and unsavory qualities are emphasized, and therefore probably manifested in physical ways on stage. I propose that Judas may have been given a large or exaggerated money

belt, purse, or pouch to wear--common accessories in biblical and Medieval times--or a large sack of coins. Juxtaposing Judas' material wealth with that of those around him would have had overt and symbolic meaning for the audience.

**Figure 6.7) A 14th Century Medieval Man's Purse**

(<https://collections.lacma.org/node/249913>)

Accessed 20 March, 2022



**Figure 6.8) The Patron of the Merode Altarpiece and His Money Pouch**

([https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/2gH9uXVRR\\_p-vQ](https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/2gH9uXVRR_p-vQ))

Accessed 20 March, 2022



**Figure 6.9) A 14th Century Leather Bag with Pouchlets**  
 (<http://www.larsdatter.com/pouches.htm>)  
 Accessed 20 March, 2022



### **Mary Magdalene**

Mary Magdalene, most likely played by a man, was likely costumed as a medieval sex-worker would have appeared in public. Given Pope Gregory The Great's popular narrative, many people believed that the sin for which Magdalene was forgiven by Jesus was prostitution. As recorded by Paul B. Newman in his book *Daily Life in the Middle Ages*, sex-workers had to wear stripes or certain colors so that they wouldnt be confused with noblewomen. The 1382 English Sumptuary Laws were instituted to regulate "the conduct of prostitution, in order (among other things) to protect the honor and sensibilities of 'honest' women."<sup>149</sup> Furthermore, many cities forbade their sex-workers from wearing hats, furs, or jewelry so that the monetary rewards

<sup>149</sup> Cadden, Joan. "‘Nothing Natural Is Shameful’: Vestiges of a Debate about Sex and Science in a Group of Late-Medieval Manuscripts." *Speculum* 76, no. 1 (2001). <https://doi.org/10.2307/2903706>, 71.

of “carnal appetites” would not be openly showcased to the public.<sup>150</sup> To differentiate these women in society, sex-workers were made to wear “hoods of ray,” or striped cloth, to identify themselves. Quentin Massys’ 15th or 16th century painting of Mary Magdalene illustrates her in a bright red dress, likely representing her identity as a sex-worker. Perhaps Magdalene would have worn a biblical tunic, mantle, and sash, but in this red color and with an accompanying hood vernacular to medieval Chester. To more easily identify her as a sex-worker, it is likely that these two eras of dress were combined. Royal MS 16 in the British Library also includes an illumination displaying sex-workers wearing ray hoods.

**Figure 6.10) Quentin Massys’ *Mary Magdalene***  
(<https://www.dia.org/art/collection/object/mary-magdalene-53584>)  
Accessed 20 March, 2022



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<sup>150</sup> Newman, *Daily Life in the Middle Ages*, 133.

**Figure 6.11) English Ladies Wearing Hoods of Ray From Royal MS 16 F II, fols. 188r-209r in the British Library**

([http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=royal\\_ms\\_16\\_f\\_ii\\_f188r](http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=royal_ms_16_f_ii_f188r))

Accessed 20 March, 2022



Holly Gene Leffler also offers an example of a hood of ray designed specifically for a Mary Magdalene costume.



**Figure 6.12) Mary Magdalene's Ray Hood**

(<http://www.holleygene.com/colospgs/index.html>)

Accessed 20 March, 2022

### Simon

Though, as the story goes, Jesus cured Simon of his leprosy, Simon's identity as a leper, or former leper, certainly remained and would have been his defining trait. After all, Simon is Play 14's namesake, and he is referred to almost exclusively as "Simon the Leper." In medieval society, Lepers were required to wear or carry noisemakers like rattles or bells to warn others of their presence, and some carried rattles known as "clappers." Leprosy in western Christendom also came with loss of social status, foreclosure of rights to property and inheritance, and came to be regarded as a sinner's disease. In the Third Lateran Council, lepers were ordered to segregate from the healthy, and soon after began to occupy what were known as Lazar houses. Lazar houses were named for Lazarus and Simon, which ties directly to Play 14. Interestingly, Leprosy outbreaks in Europe spawned architectural developments like "Leper windows," which were windows low to the ground in churches that offered those infected with Leprosy a view into the church's Mass without infecting other patrons.<sup>151</sup> Though Simon was cured of the disease by Jesus, aspects of dress forced upon lepers might have remained to emphasize his identity. Simon likely dressed similarly to the other commoners, but wore bells and rattles on his mantle and tunic. On the next page is a 13th century leper "clapper."

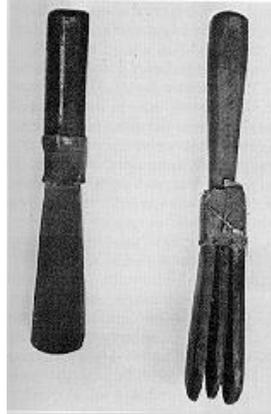
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<sup>151</sup> Newman, *Daily Life in the Middle Ages*, 133.

**Figure 6.13) A 13th Century Leper “Clapper”**

(<https://www2.kenyon.edu/projects/margin/lepfacts.htm#:~:text=The%20word%20leper%20comes%20from,gone%20by%20the%20fifteenth%20century.>)

Accessed 20 March, 2022



Additionally, the MS Lansdowne 451 manuscript, on fo. 127r, includes a 1425 illumination of an English leper with a bell.

**Figure 6.14) An English Leper With a Bell From MS Lansdowne 151 fol. 127r**

(<https://historicensland.org.uk/research/inclusive-heritage/disability-history/1050-1485/time-of-leprosy/>)

Accessed 20 March, 2022



### The Merchants, or Moneylenders

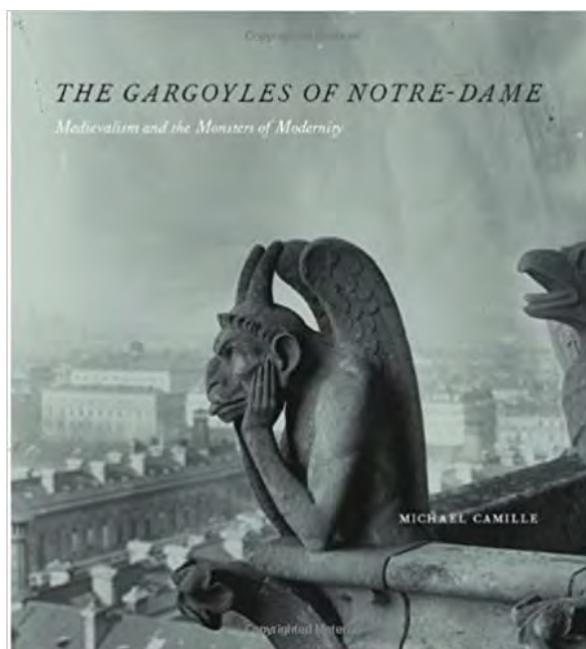
In Play 14, the Jewish merchants occupy the temple with their kiosks and sell their wares. As alluded to in Play 14's title, among the merchants were also moneylenders and money changers. Through the rhetoric of Play 14, the merchants and lenders are presented not only to be immensely greedy and concerned exclusively with commercial endeavors, but also to be in denial of Jesus' presence and identity. With narratives of greed, usury, and foul economic play permeating medieval perceptions of Jews, it is likely that the merchants and lenders were costumed in stereotypical ways and as caricatures of the stereotyped Jew. It is important to note that *tallis* and *yarmulke*, defining garments of today's devout Jews, are anachronistic to the Middle Ages. The merchants and lenders likely dressed in the same tasseled tunics that were referenced above to physically juxtapose them as Jewish in contrast to those in Jesus' party, but perhaps in more richly crafted garments to emphasize their wealth. For an example, it is pertinent to look to an approximately 1790 English painting housed in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's archives that depicts a historic, richly dressed Jewish moneylender counting coins. Unfortunately the archival image quality is lacking.

**Figure 6.15) Painting of a Jewish Moneylender**  
 (<https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn539089>)  
 Accessed 21 March, 2022



It is feasible to posit that these Jewish commercialists may have also been costumed or made up with “stage makeup,” masks, or other accessories to exaggerate their “Jewish features,” which were perpetuated by media like the infamous *Caricature of the Norwich Jews* (see figure 5.3). They may have been given horns, wings, and long pointy noses to wear. Furthermore, as Michael Camille argues in his 2009 book, *The Gargoyles of Notre-Dame: Medievalism and the Monsters of Modernity*, gargoyles posted above--on, but never in-- many European churches also took on the semiotic representation of Jews in a Catholic space. Their horns, wings, noses, and twisted visages came to represent Jews in Catholic ideologies.<sup>152</sup> Therefore, it would not have been surprising to see Play 14’s Jews costumed as such.

**Figure 6.16) The Cover of Michael Camille’s *The Gargoyles of Notre-Dame***  
 (<https://www.19thc-artworldwide.org/autumn10/the-gargoyles-of-notre-dame>)  
 Accessed 21 March, 2022



<sup>152</sup> Camille, Michael. *The Gargoyles of Notre-Dame: Medievalism and the Monsters of Modernity*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009.

Additionally, as described in this casebook’s interlude on antisemitism, Jews were accused of willingly spreading the plague, poisoning water supplies with infection, and even spawning the plague by simply existing. While the arrival of plague doctors is a 17th century anachronism to Play 14, plague doctor masks can still offer valuable contextualization of antisemitism and the caricatured Jewish phenotype. As Ari Fogel, a journalist and researcher for the Jewish Women’s Archive writes, since the plague was so heavily associated with Jews in medieval England and Europe, plague doctors’ pointed masks came to be associated with Europe’s Jewry. Plague masks helped enforce Jewish phenotypic stereotypes, and their appearance, though anachronistic to Play 14, can still be valuable in creating a costume.<sup>153</sup> Perhaps they were modeled this way to reference already established stereotypes.

**Figure 6.17) A Print of 17th Century Plague Doctor**  
 (<https://jwa.org/blog/risingvoices/antisemitism-during-coronavirus-pandemic-pandemic>)  
 Accessed 21 March, 2022



<sup>153</sup> Fogel, Ari. “Antisemitism during Coronavirus: From Pandemic to Pandemic.” *Jewish Women's Archive*, August 21, 2020, <https://jwa.org/blog/risingvoices/antisemitism-during-coronavirus-pandemic-pandemic>.

### Caiaphas, Annas, and the Pharisees

As Jewish high officials, high priests, and upholders of Jewish law, one can understand the Pharisees, Caiaphas, and Annas to be the “most Jewish” characters in Play 14 and society. In biblical society, the Pharisees dressed differently from the general population, and therefore would have been costumed differently. It is likely that the Pharisees would have been costumed to be as distinctly Jewish in appearance as possible to make them even more easily differentiable from Jesus and his followers in the play. As the “most Jewish,” the Pharisees, Caiaphas, and Annas also would likely have been the most egregiously stereotyped. Considering that the performances in Chester were performed for a Catholic audience by Catholic guildspeople, and that Jews are widely vilified in Play 14, it is most likely that the differences in religion would have been extenuated and emphasized.

While the Pharisees and high priests were known to wear *tefillin*, or *phylacteries* during morning prayer, they did not wear these leather accessories all the time. *Tefillin*, or *phylacteries* were leather straps with affixed wooden boxes containing parchment or vellum sections of the Torah to remind Jewish men of their scripture in a tangible way. The most prominent box was strapped to the forehead. Some sources recount that the Pharisees wore leather *tefillin* arm straps at all times, but evidence is inconclusive. It is also likely that Play 14’s Catholic producers would not have known what these accessories meant and therefore left them out of costuming. The Pharisees are known to have worn head coverings resembling hoods, as well as long tunic robes. These robes, like the robes of all Jews, would have been tasseled.<sup>154</sup> For reference, below is the

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<sup>154</sup> “What Did the Jewish Pharisees Wear?” *Chicago Jewish News*, <https://www.chicagojewishnews.com/what-did-the-jewish-pharisees-wear/>.

1308-1311 painting called *Christ Accused by the Pharisees* by Duccio de Buoninsegna. The Pharisees are the men wearing head coverings on the left side of the painting.

**Figure 6.18) *Christ Accused by the Pharisees* by Duccio de Buoninsegna**  
([https://www.wga.hu/html\\_m/d/duccio/maesta/verso\\_1/verso12.html](https://www.wga.hu/html_m/d/duccio/maesta/verso_1/verso12.html))  
Accessed 21 March, 2022



Another illustration of the Pharisees in robes and head coverings comes in the MS 25 (86.MN.730) manuscript on folio 10, housed at the J. Paul Getty Museum. It was illuminated between 1480-1490 in Lyon, France by the Master of Guillaume Lambert and his workshop. The Pharisees are on the left side of the illumination. Also note that the Pharisee in the green robe is wearing a small leather pouch around his waist.

**Figure 6.19) The Pharisees in the Getty Museum's MS 25**

(<https://www.getty.edu/art/collection/objects/2229/master-of-guillaume-lambert-and-workshop-christ-disputing-with-the-pharisees-and-sadducees-in-the-temple-french-about-1480-1490/>)

Accessed 21 March, 2022



As for Caiaphas and Annas, they would have worn the prescribed regalia of Jewish high priests. According to Professor Baruch J. Schwartz, the garments of the high priests can be derived from Exodus, Numbers, and Leviticus and are made up of the *Ephod*, breastplate, robe, and *Diadem*.<sup>155</sup> The *Ephod* was a sleeveless vest attached to a breastplate containing twelve stones representing the lost tribes of Israel. The robe was adorned with bells to alert citizens of a divine presence and cinched with a decorated belt, and the Diadem refers to the headdress worn

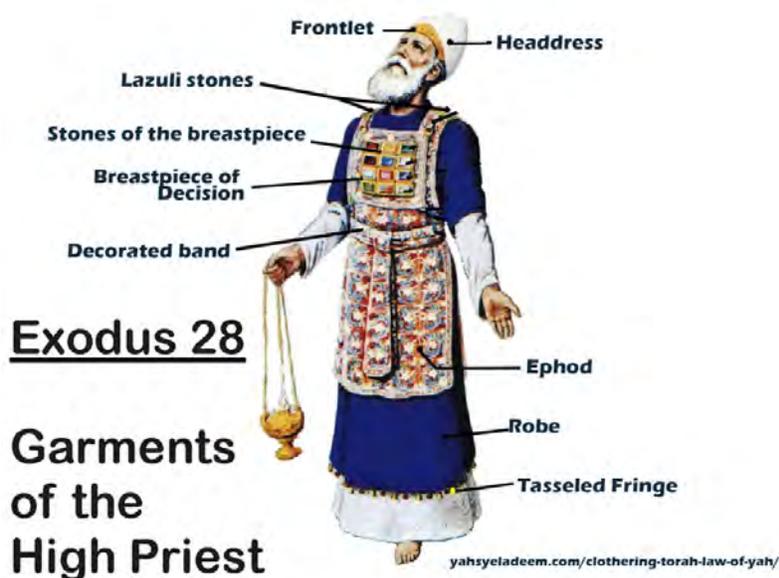
<sup>155</sup> Schwartz, Baruch J. "The Garments of the High Priest: Anthropomorphism in the Worship of God." *TheTorah.com*, <https://www.thetorah.com/article/garments-of-the-high-priest-anthropomorphism-in-the-worship-of-god>.

by the Priests. Under these garments were a tasseled linen tunic and linen pants. To understand this intricate dress, below is a diagram labeling each piece.

**Figure 6.20) A Diagram of the High Priest Regalia**

([https://static.wixstatic.com/media/7eeb4b\\_735eb9834c7b44babf98f2b300e0eb5d~mv2.jpg/v1/fit/w\\_1000%2Ch\\_1000%2Cal\\_c%2Cq\\_80/file.jpg](https://static.wixstatic.com/media/7eeb4b_735eb9834c7b44babf98f2b300e0eb5d~mv2.jpg/v1/fit/w_1000%2Ch_1000%2Cal_c%2Cq_80/file.jpg))

Accessed 21 March, 2022



It is pertinent to look at medieval manuscript illuminations of Caiaphas and Annas for reference.

In *Book of Hours, Use of Sarum*, or MS Ederton 2781, Caiaphas and Annas appear several times in full regalia.

**Figure 6.21) Caiaphas from MS Egerton 2781 fol. 177v**

Caiaphas appears with the red *Diadem* head covering.

(<https://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IIIID=11616>)

Accessed 21 March, 2022



Figure 6.22) Annas from MS Egerton 2781 fol. 140

Annas is on the right in the red *Diadem* headdress.

(<https://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IllID=11588>)

Accessed 21 March, 2022



Figure 6.23) Joseph with Caiaphas and Annas from MS Egerton 2781 fol. 182 v  
 (<https://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IllID=11619>)

Accessed 21 March, 2022



### 7) Props

Volume II of Lumiansky and Mills' *The Chester Mystery Cycle* in Middle English presents a blueprint from which dramaturgs can work to research a stage picture. In this casebook I do not venture to offer a specific stage, or pageant wagon setup since, truly, Play 14's working stage (as annotated) would have consisted of mostly the street level. The pageant wagon, itself, would have been almost fully occupied by the Play's few props. Lumiansky and

Mills, probably using the same methodologies outlined by Matther Segi in *Practical Cues*, identify the following props from the script: Ointment, an ass and a foal, palm branches, clothes, Jesus' whip, the Merchants' wares, the Merchants' tables with money, Judas' purse, and coins.<sup>156</sup> In this section, I offer suggestions on the ointment bottle, saddles for the ass and foal, Jesus' whip, the setup of the Merchants' tables and their wares, and the coinage that the Cordwainers probably used. I have previously discussed clothing, purses, and pouches in prior sections, and the palm branches require no further explanation. I also present images of a Medieval English cordwainer's materials, which may have made their way on stage as planted pieces of set. I approach offering suggestions on these props by keeping in mind appeals to the vernacular. Props offered guildspeople opportunities to share their products, as well as corroborated the biblical with vernacular material culture. Therefore, unlike costumes, props would probably not have been crafted or curated to look biblical, but rather appeared as they did in the medieval world. In Play 14's case, the biblical and medieval actually aren't too different in form. Again, curating props in this way created greater opportunity for heightened audience and actor relatability and contemplation.

### **Mary Magdalene's Ointment**

When Mary Magdalene anoints Jesus' body and washes his feet, she produces an expensive bottle of ointment, or oil. Magdalene's bottle would have been made of blown glass, and, given Judas' remarks on its substantial value, would have probably been ornate or even imported. If the ointment inside was of substantial value, one can postulate that the bottle matched. In medieval England, spoils from the Crusades, which sent Englishmen throughout Europe, the Middle East, and Africa to extend the reaches of Christendom, would not have been

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<sup>156</sup> Lumiansky, R. M., and David Mills. "The Chester Mystery Cycle." London, England and New York: Oxford University Press for the Early English Text Society, 1974, Volume II, 197.

uncommon. Furthermore, long before the 14th century, England was involved in substantial trade relationships throughout the Eastern World. The goods imported through these relationships would have been luxuries in society. Alternatively, the Cordwainers could have been displaying the products of Chester's glassblowers or perfumers. For reference, I include images of both a bottle crafted in early Medieval Syria or Egypt, and one crafted in 13th-15th century England. Both vessels are housed in the Museum of London's archives.

**Figure 6.24) A Medieval Syrian/Egyptian Ornate Glass Bottle**  
(<https://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/online/object/32970.html>)  
Accessed 22 March, 2022



**Figure 6.25) A 13th-15th Century English Glass Bottle**  
(<https://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/online/object/32960.html>)  
Accessed 22 March, 2022

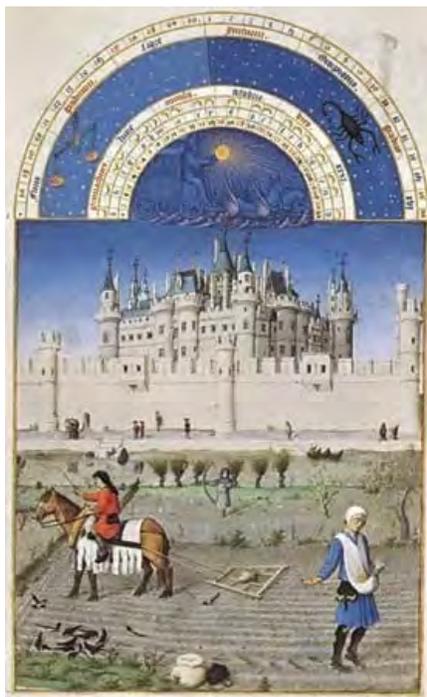


### **Saddles, Bridles and Reins, and Ridden Animal Coverings**

The ass and foal that Jesus requests to enter the city likely would have been saddled or covered for riding. They also would have had leather or rope bridles and reins. Since Play 14 likely featured real animals, for ease of use, the actors would have been given saddles or cushions to ride upon, and steered the animals with reins. Seeing that the Cordwainers, though

primarily producing shoes, were also proficient in producing other leather goods, this may have presented another opportunity for civic endorsement, or product placement. While much literature exists on medieval war saddles with high cantle and pommel to keep armor-clad knights in place, there is less information on saddles used by commoners. However, from what I have gathered, the backs of ridden animals were often padded with horse hair, wool, or other soft materials, and draped over with fabric and leather. Since Jesus was the rider of the animals, in Medieval Chester, the fabric and leather used to cover the padding would have likely been ornately crafted and adorned. Images in art reflect these padded riding cushions, and I offer two manuscript illuminations. The first is *October* from the Flemish Limbourg Brothers' *Les Très Riches Heures du duc de Berry*, completed in 1416 and housed in the The Condé Museum in Chantilly, France. It depicts a commoner plowing a field with his horse.

**Figure 6.26) *October* from the Limbourg Brothers' *Les Très Riches Heures du duc de Berry***  
(<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Paul-de-Limbourg>)  
Accessed 22 March, 2022



The second is an illumination of English hero John Ball inspiring the rebels of the English Peasants Revolt from the British Library MS Royal 18 E. I fol. 165 v.

**Figure 6.27) John Ball and His Horse From British Library MS Royal 18 E. I fol. 165v.**  
 (<https://johnball1381.org/what-did-john-ball-look-like/>)  
 Accessed 22 March, 2022



Conversely, Jesus may have been given the most expensive and ornate knight's saddle or parade saddle upon which to ride, which would have also presented an opportunity for the Cordwainers or Cestrian armorsmiths to showcase their finest and most coveted work. These saddles were made from leather, wood, fabric, metal, and sometimes bone. For reference I include a carved bone parade saddle crafted in 1450, which likely once featured a padded leather and fabric seat, as well as a European war saddle crafted in Milan, Italy in 1570-1580.

**Figure 6.28) A Carved Bone Parade Saddle c. 1450**  
(<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/21991>)  
Accessed 22 March, 2022



**Figure 6.29) A European War Saddle c. 1570-1580**  
(<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/25402>)  
Accessed 22 March, 2022



### Jesus' Whip, or "Scourge of Small Chords"

Both Play 14 and the Gospel of John recount that, when Jesus cleansed the temple and drove out the merchants who were making his father's house unclean, he produced a whip of chords. Jesus' whip might have been a sort of version of what we now call a "cat o' nine tails," or could have been a more simple bundle of chords held together by hand. Both forms are presented in many medieval and Renaissance paintings of the Cleansing of the Temple. Given the breadth of material from which to source, I present examples contemporary to, or produced before Play 14's final performances. The first is from the 13th century English Manuscript known as MS Arundel 157 on fol. 6 v, and the second is the 1570 painting of the Cleansing of the Temple by El Greco, a Greco-Spanish painter.

**Figure 6.30) Jesus with a Handheld Bunch of Chords from MS Arundel 157, fol. 6v**  
<http://imaginemdei.blogspot.com/2012/03/purification-of-temple.html>  
 Accessed 22 March, 2022



**Figure 6.31) El Greco's 1570 Painting of the Cleansing of the Temple**  
(<http://imagineidei.blogspot.com/2012/03/purification-of-temple.html>)  
Accessed 22 March, 2022



El Greco's painting shows Jesus with a sort of "cat o' nine tails" so, for reference, I include an anachronistic but representative United States Naval "cat o' nine tails" from the 18th or 19th century housed in the USS Constitution Museum in Boston, Massachusetts.

**Figure 6.32) An 18th-19th Century U.S. Naval “Cat o’ Nine Tails” From the USS Constitution Museum**  
 (<https://ussconstitutionmuseum.org/collection-items/cat-o-nine-tails/>)  
 Accessed 22 March, 2022



### **The Merchants’ and Moneylenders’ Tables and Wares**

To ascertain an idea of how the Merchants and Moneylenders booths and the inside of the temple may have appeared, it is once again pertinent to refer to the painting and illumination used to inform choices on Jesus’ whip. The works also provide us with an idea of what the inside of the temple looked like. When placing these images in conversation with Play 14’s text, the stage picture is even greater illuminated. The 1st and 2nd Merchants refer to their general wares, as well as to their table of money. Some of these wares could have been the goods produced by other guilds. The destruction of these goods could have been a friendly, or not so friendly, slight against the other guilds by the Cordwainers. Furthermore, given that temples were the main marketplace for sacrificial animals to be sold, it can be inferred that there may have been animals in cages or pens on stage and in the street. When looking at El Greco’s painting, as well as the

MS Arundel 157 illumination, one can notice animals present in the scene. These works may offer a *mise-en-scène* replicated in Play 14's staging. For reference as to what a merchant's booth or table may have looked like, I suggest an 1330 illumination from the British Library, MS 27695, fol. 7 v.

**Figure 6.33) A Merchant's Booth from British Library MS Add 27695, fol. 7v.**  
[\(https://medievalreporter.com/rise-of-banking/\)](https://medievalreporter.com/rise-of-banking/)  
 Accessed 22 March, 2022



Additionally, the temple was evidently a location where moneylenders conducted business. Money lending, again, an occupation only available to Jews, obviously involved the exchange of coins. For an idea how money lending may have been staged, I offer a 1270 illumination from an unknown French manuscript of Jewish moneylenders.

**Figure 6.34) Jewish Moneylenders From a c.1270 French Manuscript**  
(<https://medievalreporter.com/rise-of-banking/>)  
Accessed 22 March, 2022



In order to keep track of accounts and debts, moneylenders also used *tallysticks*, which were notched pieces of wood that acted as receipts. Tallysticks were notched and then split in two, with one piece going to each member of the transaction as proof. It is feasible to believe that there may have been tallysticks present on stage. Below is a late 13th century tallystick found in a cesspit under one of London's 13th century Jewish neighborhoods, now housed in the Museum of London.

**Figure 6.35) A 13th Century Moneylender's Tallystick**  
(<https://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/online/object/372215.html>)  
Accessed 27 March, 2022.



### Cestrian Coinage

Coins appear in the temple marketplace as well as during the exchanges between Judas and the Pharisees. When staging Play 14, the Cestrian Cordwainers would have probably used coins vernacular to Medieval Chester, which is evidenced by Judas' reference to the "farthing" in its script. In staging Play 14's last performance in 1575, the Cordwainers would have probably used the coinage system of Elizabethan England. According to the Elizabethan Compendium, currency worked on a system of pence and shillings (the pound was not instituted until after 1583). The following coins were in production and circulation: The *Sovereign* or *Rial* (20 shillings), the *Angel* (10 shillings), the *Crown* (the most common coin in circulation worth 5 shillings), the Venetian *Ducat* and French *Crown* were also honored in place of the English *Crown*, the *Half-a-crown* (2 shillings, 6 pence), the *Shilling* (12 pence), the *Sixpence* (6 pence), the *Groat* (4 pence), the *Penny* (1 penny, not referred to as a single pence), and the *Farthing* (a  $\frac{1}{4}$  fragment of a *Penny*).<sup>157</sup> On the next page is a chart displaying all of the Elizabethan coinage. The image was given to Shutterstock as open access by the Historia Agency. The original book from which it is sourced is not provided.

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<sup>157</sup> "Money and Coinage." *Life in Elizabethan England: A Compendium of Common Knowledge*, The Elizabethan Compendium, 25 Mar. 2008, <http://elizabethan.org/compendium/6.html>.

Figure 6.36) A Chart of Elizabethan Coinage

<https://www.shutterstock.com/editorial/image-editorial/c16-british-coins-16th-century-9874672a>

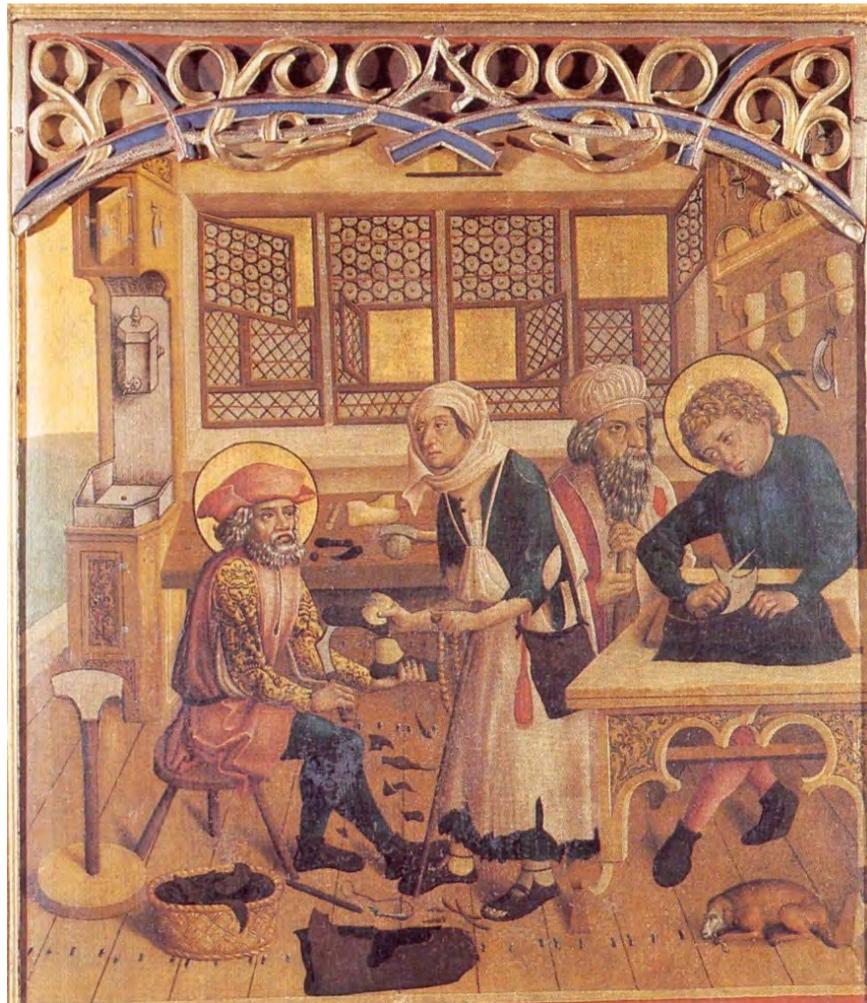
Accessed 22 March, 2022



### Cordwainers' Materials

A cordwainer's tool kit would have been composed of a hammer, awl, knife, and a sharp leather cutter. The cordwainer would have worked on a shoe stand or leather stand, and used significant amounts of thread to bind leather. A panel of the c.1500 Dinkelsbühl altarpiece shows St. Crispin and St. Crispinian, the patron saints of shoes and feet, in their cordwainer's workshop, and displays all of the necessary cobbling tools.

**Figure 6.37) A Panel from the Dinkelsbühl Altarpiece of St. Crispin and St. Crispinian's Cordwaining Shop**  
(<https://nobility.org/2013/10/crispin/>)  
Accessed 22 March, 2022



A 1467 German manuscript also illustrates a cordwainer's shop and features the necessary cordwainer's tools.

Figure 6.38) A German Manuscript Illustration of a Cordwainer's Shop c.1467  
<http://www.bildindex.de/bilder/mi03017c11a.jpg>

Accessed 23 March, 2022



## **8) The Origins of this Project and a Reflective Closing Note**

For the first semester of this project's undertaking, it looked completely different. Initially, my pursuits were to write a modern adaptation of two of *The Chester Mystery Cycle's* plays: Play 14, *Christ at the House of Simon the Leper, Christ and the Moneylenders, and Judas' Plot* performed by the Cordwainers guild, and Play 15, *The Last Supper, and the Betrayal of Christ* performed by the Bakers guild. Inspired by the continual relevance and influence of scriptural teachings in my own life, I wanted to explore whether the themes and stories in this play were truly timeless. If priests in Catholic services can craft sermons out of ancient scripture that appeal to modern audiences, and if Cestrians could adapt the Bible into relevant theater, I figured that I could do the same with these plays. As it turns out, I couldn't. Or at least I figured out that I didn't want to. I laid this project to rest about halfway through adapting Play 14.

When thinking through an adaptive lens, I found myself struggling to emulate the plays' stories in modern ways that made sense. I struggled to find modern parallels to the biblical and medieval unfoldings, felt that some things in the plays just wouldn't *happen* in a modern setting, and ultimately felt very confined throughout the process. Perhaps I remained too allegiant to the plot devices and events that appeared in each play, and might have had an easier time had I isolated the catechisms that they presented. Or, perhaps had I situated the plays in biblical times and only sprinkled in bits of modernity, similarly to how the guildspeople created the original mystery cycle, I may have had more success. However, I did not take either of these approaches and instead tried to construct a new story. I conceived of my adaptation essentially as a wrought translation which, as it turns out, was detrimental to my process. I did not let myself be creative or stray from the plot at all, and instead attempted to force my modern ideas into a mold into

which they never could fit. However, even if I had allowed myself more creativity, I think modernizing Play 14 presented a challenge that I was not yet equipped to handle.

I initially had visions of performing my plays on the bed of a truck and U-haul flat-bed to riff off of the pageant wagon dancing in my mind. Keeping Play 14's theme of commerce at my adaptation's core, as well as Play 14's production by the Cordwainers, I wanted to situate my play in a modern shoe factory and explore how Cordwainer identity may have emerged in the text. I created the Treadwell Shoe Co., staffed the company with Play 14's characters, and tried to construct a world that made sense. However, I was quickly forced to grapple with modern capitalism, production, and workplace dynamics, and failed to come up with a reason for Jesus' and other core characters' very presence at the factory that was satisfactory to me. I gave up this task when I sat for weeks trying to think of a reason that Jesus would be angry when trying to devise a parallel to the Cleansing of the Temple. I also needed to confront the immense antisemitism present in Play 14, and found myself distressed at the notion of keeping its violent and harmful sentiment in some paralleled manner, and confused as to how I'd even approach that task. I began forcing myself to equate the original play and its players to things and people that I didn't really believe in. I felt as if I captured the humorous spirit of Chester's plays well, and even captured the attitudes of Play 14's characters well, but was ultimately left wanting more and other. I quickly realized that, not only were the catechisms presented in the play best left situated in their original ways, but also that they often made the best sense when presented in those ways and in those settings. The Bible's lessons could most readily be isolated and taught when referencing the Bible's own stories, not a new one of my own. While the individual lessons presented in the play could be distilled, they could only be distilled from those particular origins and when spoken in those particular contexts by those particularly historical characters.

Serendipitously, by hitting these roadblocks I returned to the core of my interests, altered my project, and revisited exactly why I became interested in Chester's plays in the first place.

As a historically oriented anthropologist as well as an actor and theater historian, I was captured by *The Chester Mystery Plays* and their incredible feats of meaningfully constructed and charged human spectacle. Not only are the plays products of human artistry and attention, but they also are actors in and of themselves that penetrate the psyche and inspire human thought and action. Their texts and performances strike the audience and performer in a certain way that raises them above other pieces and forms, and grants them heightened levels of meaning and significance. I longed to understand why and how these plays were continually performed for centuries, how they changed over time and differed from other more classical forms of devotion, what they meant to people situated in the world and time period in which they were presented, and how they became so meaningful. By returning to my interests, I found that the plays, though surprising, funny, and shocking at times, represented true human understanding and the application of religious teachings to the vernacular of medieval Chester. Rather than continuing to performatively and repetitively attend church services (though Cestrians did that, too), Chester's festival presented the opportunity for devotees to express their piety in ways that made sense to them in their world. To continually captivate audiences, as well as capture new ones, the plays were constructed and reconstructed to remain personally relevant and relatable to a Cestrian audience, and transported the biblical imaginary to the experientially rooted vernacular in plural and dynamic ways. By incorporating local histories and sentiments into biblical understandings, conflating geographic and temporal locations with those of legendary yore, presenting medieval material goods in medieval settings, and being performed in the spoken dialect, the plays appealed more directly to Chester's audience. In turn, medieval cestrians, both

performers and audience members, were afforded the opportunity to contemplate their religion and their positionality on their own terms, find the religious within themselves, break the stifling and intimidating mold of tradition, and, in turn, foster more meaningful relationships with God and God's teachings that emerge as distinctly human. The plays offered a chance to understand the holiest of holies in lived, not idealized ways, and to embrace the scripture's explicitly stated lessons' while rooting them in ways most meaningful to audience and performers, alike. The applied understandings of religion and exercises of piety that medieval Cestrians gained from the cathartic experience of acting and viewing the mystery plays allowed them to actively cope with an ever troubling world founded in this lived reality, and hold true to their faith in ways most meaningful and relevant to their world.

What follows is the script that I was writing left untouched and unembellished since November 16, 2021. Perhaps my frustrations can be sensed when reading the pages spackled and riddled with notes, highlights, incompletions, and free-floating thoughts and grievances. Perhaps one day I will revisit this challenge, but today is not that day.

Working Title

By Andrew Roberge

**CHARACTERS**

**Jesus:** Middle-aged hot shot CFO acquisitionist.

**Lazarus:** Manager of Treadwell Shoe Co.

**Simon:** Manager of Treadwell Shoe Co.

**Judas:** Jesus' personal assistant. On edge. Placative...for now.

**Maggie:** Front desk receptionist at Treadwell Shoe Co.

**Peter:** Jesus' personal assistant. Blindly loyal. Jesus' new puppy.

**Janitor:** A janitor at the factory.

**Anna:**

**Sam:**

**Toby:**

**Casey:** Leader, replacing pharisees and Caiaphas

**TIME:** Modern and contemporary, however PLAY TITLE can be set in any post-industrial revolution era.

**PLACE:** First, the corporate office of an acquisition capitalist. Transition to the interior of the Treadwell Shoe Co. factory. industrial America. Not quite what one's mind conjures when they think of a "city," but a city by definition, nonetheless.

**Set:** [redacted] is written as a modern adaptation of Plays 14 and 15 of the Medieval Chester Mystery Cycle: *Christ at the House of Simon the Leper* and *The Last Supper and the Betrayal of Christ*, respectively. As follows, the production aims to simulate the phenomenological and sensory experience of attending a cycle of the Chester Mystery Plays. Crowds, alcohol, rowdiness, misrule! For the Spring 2022 production on the campus of Bard College in Annandale-on-Hudson, NY, outdoors in a common space sits a truck with an attached flat-bed U-Haul trailer. Specifically, my father's 1992 Dodge Dakota 4x4 Club Cab. The truck and flat-bed act as the pageant wagon stage.

Scene 1

(We see **JESUS**, well dressed, seated powerfully behind his desk. The desk sits in the bed of the truck. Standing before him are **SIMON** and **LAZARUS**. The theme from ABC's *Shark Tank* begins to play.)

**JESUS**

Gentlemen, what can I do for you today? No, better yet, what can you do for yourselves? Simon is it?

**SIMON**

Yes.

**JESUS**

Lazarus?

**LAZARUS**

Yes, sir.

**JESUS**

What do you have for me?

**SIMON**

Well, Mr. Jesus--

**JESUS**

Please, just Jesus.

**SIMON**

Jesus. Lazarus and I are the co-owners of the Treadwell Shoe company.

**JESUS**

Right, I've read your file, I'm familiar.

**Simon**

So, as you know, we've been struggling with our production and meeting our margins and... we've been in the red for 8 or 9 months now--

**LAZARUS**

Jesus, we're going bankrupt.

**JESUS**

Ya know, I had a pair of Treadwell's a few years back, maybe 10 or 15 years. Strapped sandals. I heard those are back in style now! They were alright shoes, that's a shame. Tell me, what do you think is going wrong?

**LAZARUS**

Well... we're coming to you because we have full trust that you can figure that out. Ya know, right the ship.

**SIMON**

Treadwell is important to us, Mr. Jesus... this company is our livelihood. We've kept it in the family for so long. My dad before me, his dad before him, so on and so forth. Mr. Jesus, we can't go under. We really need your help.

**JESUS**

And I appreciate your company values, truly, I do. You can do a lot with a foundation like that. You're both good men. Rest assured, I'm interested; I wouldn't have called you to the office if I wasn't. Nobody wants to see a family business go under. I want to help. So gents, let's talk.

**LAZARUS**

(Genuinely confused. Concerned.)

..I'm sorry, I don't understand.. are we not talking right now?

**SIMON** pulls **LAZARUS** aside. **JESUS** smiles reassuringly.

**SIMON**

(Whispered)

I think he means the money.

**LAZARUS**

OH! We're prepared to offer you 25% equity of our company in exchange for a \$300,000 investment...

**JESUS**

60% and I'll give you 450.

**SIMON**

Just like that?

**JESUS**

Yep.

**SIMON** and **LAZARUS**

confer, albeit  
shortly, whispering in  
a huddle. Then they  
turn. Ecstatic. Too  
ecstatic?

**LAZARUS**

Deal!

The men loudly  
celebrate, hooplah,  
and shake hands. End  
Scene 1. A large black  
sheet on a pulley  
system is cast in  
front of the truck.

**Simon and Lazarus**

exit, but **Jesus**  
remains at his desk.

Scene 2

To begin Scene 2, the sheet is pulled away again. Enter **Judas and Peter** to Jesus' office. **Peter** bounces, **Judas** strolls.

**PETER**

A half-caff caramel macchiato-american blend and a sesame bagel with lox and chive cream cheese! Capers are in that little plastic cup and--

**JESUS**

Hah, well thank you, Peter. What's this about? I didn't order anything.

**PETER**

(Suddenly self conscious)

I figured the 10:30 lull might have hit and... you... ya know you're just so busy--

**JESUS**

Thank you, it's lovely.

His attention flips to Judas.

Judas.

**Judas** gives him a head nod and a fake smile.

I've called you both today because, as you know, I met with the folks from Treadwell Shoes yesterday.

**JUDAS**

(Quietly)

Yep, I scheduled it.

**JESUS**

Sorry?

**JUDAS**

Yes! I remember.

**JESUS**

Well, I've decided that I want to help them. Their story, their mission, and their values align perfectly with what we're about here. They're just the type of people we're looking for and it sounds like they can be saved.

**Judas** rolls his eyes.

**PETER**

Amazing! So when do we head out?

**JESUS**

We'll leave tonight so we can get acquainted with the area and be there to observe the workplace dynamics from the beginning of the day on Monday. We'll be staying only a few miles outside of the city in the suburbs. We'll have to be at the factory for 7:30, sharp come Monday morning. We'll arrange rides once we're there. Go ahead home and pack your bags, boys. Remember, Peter, this is a business trip.

**PETER**

Of course! Don't worry, my bag's all set to go in my car! Shall I get your things together?

**JUDAS**

...already?

**PETER**

I keep a bag packed in my trunk! A few ties, extra white shirts, some chinos, undies--

**JUDAS**

But how did you know... Jesus...

**Jesus** and **Judas**  
exchange a look. Snap,  
Finger guns.

**JESUS**

That's quite alright, Peter. I can pack my things. Go ahead and go home. Get yourself a nice lunch or something, on me. You, too.

**Jesus** hands both the  
men company cards.

I'll see you back here at 4:30. 5:00?

**JUDAS**

5:00.

**Jesus** nods and gets to  
some paperwork.

**PETER**

(Exiting--to Judas)

Isn't this just so exciting?

**JUDAS**

(Sarcastic as ever)

Yeah, it's magic alright.

**Scene 3**

(We see the front office space and reception room of the Treadwell Shoe factory. Pretty unremarkable. **MAGGIE**, business casual, is seated at the front desk behind a laptop. **JANITOR** is making himself look busy in the corner, wearing ear buds. Enter **JESUS**, **JUDAS**, and **PETER**.)

**PETER**

Wow, boss. This is a pretty cool building.

**JESUS**

Yes, Peter. Yes it is.

**PETER**

Not much inside, though.

**JESUS**

No, but think about what it could be. Use your imagination.

**MAGGIE**

(With growing recognition)

Good morning, welcome to Treadwell Shoes. How can I assist you?  
Oh!... Mr. Jesus?

**JESUS**

Yes, hello! Are we early? I hope we haven't come at a bad time. I like to observe the workplace from the beginning of the day.

**MAGGIE**

Not at all! I'm Mary, but please call me Maggie. Simon and Lazarus have been expecting you and should be out shortly! They're just in their office. They've been absolutely buzzing. I don't think they've slept in days.

**JESUS**

Well I must say that we're excited to be here, too. These are my assistants, Peter and Judas.

**MAGGIE**

Well it's lovely to meet you all. Can I get you gentlemen anything? Coffee? Tea? Ana--she's one of our shoemakers-- her brother works at Dunkin' so she brings munchkins most mornings--

**JUDAS**

Ya know, I'd--

**JESUS****JUDAS**

We're quite alright, thank you.  
We filled up on continental  
breakfast at the hotel.  
Remind me of your name again?

Okay..

**MAGGIE**

Maggie.

**JESUS**

Well, you're very kind and welcoming, Maggie. I'll be sure to pass that on to your bosses.

**MAGGIE**

Well thank you, but respectfully, sir, I'm just the front desk lady! They hired me to greet people. I don't have anything to do with the production or--

**JESUS**

Sure, but what you do do, you do well. You've earned a raise in my book. If everyone had your attitude the world would be a magnificent place. Every cog in the machine is integral to its successful operation. You play just as big a role here as anybody.

**MAGGIE**

A raise? I'm--

(Enter **SIMON** and  
**LAZARUS**)

**SIMON**

Welcome, welcome! Thank you so much for being here. I'm sorry we weren't out here to greet you! How was your trip?

**JESUS**

That's quite alright. We've met our friend Maggie here. These are my assistants, Peter and Judas.

**LAZARUS**

Oh, don't mind her. She's a talker. I'm sure you're interested in much bigger things here.

**JESUS**

Actually she's lovely. I was just telling her how she deserves a raise.

**LAZARUS**

Oh... of course she's...I'll be sure to--

**SIMON**

(Bailing him out)

The trip was okay?

**JESUS**

It was great, thank you, everything went according to plan. It's a pleasure to see you both again.

**LAZARUS**

Believe me, the pleasure is all ours. If you come with us we'll just show you around.

**JESUS**

Certainly.

**PETER**

Us too, boss?

**JESUS**

That's okay, Peter. Make friends.

(**JESUS, SIMON, and  
LAZARUS** begin to exit)

**PETER**

(Quietly to Judas, so quiet that even Maggie can't hear)  
Well he's taken quite the liking to her. Shouldn't he be more worried about--

**JUDAS**

He loves throwing money around. I'd kill for a raise.

**JESUS**

(From off-stage)

I can still hear you, Judas. I always hear you. I hear everything. You're not as quiet as you think.

**JUDAS**

Really? I just--

**JESUS**

(Off-stage)

If you'd like a raise, maybe start with a smile. Kindness is currency, and she's been very kind. Take notes!

(**PETER** does. He genuinely begins to take notes.)

**JUDAS**

(Grumbly as ever, mockingly)

Kind...mnmnmnmnmnm...I'll

**JESUS**

(Off-stage)

Heard that!

(A collective sigh. On stage are **PETER, JUDAS, JANITOR, and MAGGIE.**)

Silence ensues. After a while **JANITOR** removes his ear buds and...)

**JANITOR**

Sup.

**JUDAS**

Sup.

**JANITOR**

What's going on?

**PETER**

You don't know?

**JANITOR**

Nah, man. Nobody tells me anything.

**PETER**

That's Jesus.

**JANITOR**

Jesus? You mean like Fortune 500 CEO Jesus?

**PETER**

(Proud)

Yep.

(**JANITOR** looks to **JUDAS**  
for confirmation)

**JANITOR**

Cool. What's he doing here?

**PETER**

You're going bankrupt and he is here to save you all.

**JANITOR**

Shit.

**JUDAS**

Yeah, man.

(More awkward silence,  
some awkward nods)

**JANITOR**

Alright.

(**JANITOR** puts his ear  
buds back in and gets  
back to making himself  
look busy. End scene.)

**Scene 4**

(We see **ANNA**, **SAM**, **TOBY**, and **CASEY** seated around a small table. This is the break room. They shoot the shit and put off the inevitable work day. To begin the scene, **JANITOR** enters. The workers look up from their distractions.)

**JANITOR**

Good morning, good morning.

**TOBY**

Hey, what's going on, bossman?

**JANITOR**

Another day, another dollar.

**CASEY**

I hear you there.

**ANA**

Amen.

**JANITOR**

You all heard the good news?

**SAM**

We've got the day off?

**ANA**

Hah. I wish. We haven't had a real break in years.

**JANITOR**

You and me, both. But no, Jesus is here.

**CASEY**

Jesus? Like the Fortune 500 CEO Jesus?

**JANITOR**

I know! I said the same thing.

**CASEY**

And you think that's good?

**JANITOR**

How could it be bad?

**ANA**

Doesn't that mean we're going bankrupt?

**TOBY**

Oh, please. You didn't already know that? We haven't hit our margins in years.

**JANITOR**

Well yeah, but it's okay because he's here to save us!

**ANA**

Cool.

**CASEY**

No, not cool.

**ANA**

Don't you want to keep your job? It sounds like he's our last shot and we go under without him.

**CASEY**

You know as well as I do that I need this job, but I don't want some hotshot with an econ degree coming in here and bossing me around-- thinking he's better than me.

**SAM**

I mean... we are going bankrupt. And look what he's done for other places I mean--

**CASEY**

You know he's gonna change everything. That's what he does. He buys up little companies like ours, fucks around with everything, and turns a quick profit.

**ANA**

Well clearly it works. He can't change everything. What's there to change?

**JANITOR**

I don't know. Maggie already got a raise.

**SAM**

See! That doesn't sound too bad.

Who does this guy think he is  
Begin making changes

**Time passes. Next scene starts with an aside to the factory floor. Janitor telling them. See characters. Then Jesus walks in.**

.....?????

**Explain what did. Explain choices made. Explain capitalist theory?**

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