

*FOR ANY SPIRRINGES IN PAT SPACE:*  
THE THEATRICAL GAME OF THE YORK PLAYS

by

Charles Costello

A thesis submitted in conformity  
with the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
in the Graduate Centre for Study of Drama, University of Toronto

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Abstract

*For any Spirringes in bat Space: The Theatrical Game of the York Plays*

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This dissertation examines the York plays as a form of medieval game drama. Based on a study of the play texts, I detail a variety of strategies for engaging the audience as active participants in the redemptive action of the drama. These strategies contribute to what I call the game of "spiring," in which the audience, in union with the figure of Jesus, is set in spiritual competition against his enemies. The strategies of this game are discussed in three categories. In the first, theatrical building, the audience's interpretation of the drama's allegorical meanings is thematized according to the doctrine of spiritual edification. In the second, theatrical witness, the audience's presence, onlooking, and listening are thematized according to the doctrine of theological witness. Together, theatrical building and witness create for the audience, in the metaphorical context of the building of and witnessing by a spiritual church, the experience of a personal encounter with the divine. In the third category, theatrical enclosure, the metaphor of the spiritual church and its auxiliaries are further grounded in the audience's reality, by reference to the enclosures of the performance stations and of the collective body of the audience itself. Ultimately, the game of "spiring" is a theatrical analogue for the audience's extra-theatrical community of faith and in particular that community's upholding of the virtue of charity.

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## *Introduction*

### The Game of Spiring

In *The Play Called Corpus Christi*, V.A. Kolve makes a remark that is suggestive of how the audience of medieval cycle dramas might be engaged in the depiction of redemption as a game: “in short, the whole of human history can be understood as a game in which the opponents are the Triune God and Satan. . . . [W]e — together with Christ in these plays — assent to His death, in order that we may later rejoice in His resurrection, in the victory He wins on man’s behalf” (204-05). This remark concludes Kolve’s chapter on “The Passion and Resurrection in Play and Game.” and the idea of the audience’s engagement through game techniques remains unexplored in his book. That idea, including the element of competition described by Kolve, is the basis of this study of the York plays. Uncovering complex theatrical strategies behind his notion of “assent,” I examine the ways in which the audience is engaged as competitors united with the dramatic figure of Jesus in his spiritual struggle against those of evil.

Kolve writes that game techniques in the cycles have a distancing effect by which they “make the physical horror [of the crucifixion] tolerable as an aesthetic experience” (199). This remark does not necessarily contradict his suggestion of audience engagement in the game drama, the aesthetic distancing effect being applicable to the audience’s participation as game contestants. That is, game techniques can potentially operate independently on the audience’s structural engagement in the action and its distance from the content of that action. In *Drama and Resistance*,

Claire Sponsler does not allow for this operative independence. Thus, she interprets Kolve's remark in terms of the audience's distance from the action itself, and in her counter-argument conflates aesthetic and audience distance:

Rather than downplaying the work of pain and distancing the audience from it, configuring torment as play can emphasize the sadistic pleasure of the torturers while also inviting the audience to join in vicariously, since after all it is just a sport. The pageants in fact take pains to draw the spectators into this pattern of sadistic pleasure that refashions torture as amusing pastime. (150)

Sponsler then gives a clear statement of how and to what degree the audience is engaged in the York plays, but in doing so begins to move away from the game model. Quoting from "The Road to Calvary," where a soldier says, "But help me holly alle þat are here / Þis kaitiffe care to encrees" (34.14-15),<sup>1</sup> she writes,

Like devotional images in books of hours, cycle plays asked from the spectator an imaginative projection into the representation such that the acts of spectatorship and participation were blurred. Watching a cycle play, like reading a book of hours, was a participatory act that deliberately drew the viewing subject into the scene being presented and thus made it difficult to maintain distance from the events being depicted or enacted. (151)<sup>2</sup>

She argues that with their depiction of the soldiers' "almost libidinous pleasure in torment," the plays, rather than providing a contrast to Jesus' ascetic stillness, "seem rather to encourage

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<sup>1</sup> Quotations of the York plays are from Richard Beadle's edition. In referring to specific plays by title, I use those supplied by Beadle. As well, I have often relied, without acknowledgment in every case, on Beadle's glossary for interpretation of words and phrases.

<sup>2</sup> The idea of the audience's imaginative engagement is discussed at the end of this introduction.

spectators to enjoy the attacks on Christ's body as moments of undisguised sadistic delight in the inflicting of bodily pain" (152).

In this discussion, Sponsler is suggesting eroticism as a new paradigm in which to view the cycle drama, and, thus, she posits a model of game drama as justification — "it is just a sport." In a sense, then, her game model is self-collapsing: the game exists only as a device to get the audience past the game to "*undisguised* sadistic delight." In the present study, the York theatrical game is examined within the traditional paradigm of salvific drama, and a certain amount of aesthetic distance is assumed. That is, the audience enters into the drama through its theatrical game, and always remains aware of the game. But within this theatrical game the sort of engagement Sponsler describes exists as a crucial potentiality. The audience is theatrically assaulted by threats of violence and temptations of pleasure, in the latter of which categories would fall Sponsler's conjectured "sadistic delight." As the audience's sense of success in joining with Jesus against evil depends upon the force with which the drama attempts to distract it from that goal, these temptations are every bit as alluring as Sponsler suggests. Yet, to reiterate, in the theatrical game of the York plays described in this study, the audience must resist those temptations.

In *The Medieval Theatre*, Glynne Wickham attributes another kind of distancing effect to game drama. He writes that game techniques

assist the actors in their task of presenting scriptural characters to the audience *at a safe distance* from reality within the overall make-believe convention of the *ludus*.

Thus blasphemy was avoided, and no actor was required to be anything other than himself fulfilling actions allotted to the character given to him to play. (92)

This reverential distance, like Kolve's aesthetic distance, does not interfere with the audience's engagement in the drama. Indeed, the theatrical game by which the audience is engaged in the York plays is the fullest expression of a reverential gesture that inheres in the game model itself. This

gesture relies on the reflexive sense of the game concept in medieval drama, noted by Kolve (22-23) and, more recently, by Glending Olson, in his article, "Plays as Play." Olson situates the English cycle dramas in a scholastic discourse that divides games into three categories: "wicked or diabolical play (which is always bad), human or recreational play (which is morally neutral and must be judged circumstantially case by case), and spiritual play (which is always commendable and of course ultimately superior to all other forms of play)" (205). He writes, "In the cycle pageants . . . play is sometimes thematized in ways that suggest the basic scholastic divisions and the drama's awareness of and perhaps anxiety about its own standing within such typologies" (214). Applying this typology to the shepherds' singing in the *Second Shepherds' Play*, Olson writes that "the punishment of Mak's wicked playing and the transformation of the shepherds' song from an effort at a limited sort of human recreation to an expression of divine celebration are in part an image of what the cycle drama might at best claim for itself as a form of play" (215). In the York plays, the audience's active engagement through a theatrical game ensures that it fully shares in the drama's reflexive attribution of spiritual play to the performance. Thus, the audience's playing is itself an act of reverence, in a positive sense that supersedes Wickham's sense of game as a medium by which to avoid blasphemy.

Olson raises the question of the medieval perception of the artistic status of game drama. He writes that "as an approach that concerns itself principally with moral action and social usefulness rather than with formal achievement, the medieval treatment of plays as play can hardly claim much theoretical comprehensiveness" (216). But he qualifies this position by drawing attention to a fragmentary cycle epilogue (from the 15<sup>th</sup>-century Reynes commonplace book) that apologizes to the audience "that present ben in play"<sup>3</sup> for any shortcomings in the performance.

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<sup>3</sup> Davis 123.

“The possibility,” writes Olson, “that artistic judgments might operate within the framework of a centrally ethical conception suggests that the theory of plays as play could accommodate more complex understandings of performance than those suggested by its most simple-mindedly moralistic applications” (217). Wickham is more certain in his denial of a theoretical basis for medieval game drama:

Throughout the Middle Ages and throughout Europe the concept of a game in which words might or might not play an important part dominated both courtly and popular attitudes to drama. Development of such games thus owed much more to experimental and pragmatic considerations than to any theoretical concepts of a literary and architectural character of the sort that have governed European drama and theatre from the seventeenth century to the present day. If we are to approach the drama of the Middle Ages intelligently therefore we must first dismiss all our own contemporary notions of what a theatre should be and of how a play should be written, and then go on to substitute the idea of community games in which the actors are the contestants (mimetic or athletic or both) and the theatre is any place appropriate and convenient both to them as performers and to the rest of the community as spectators. (4)

The theatrical game discussed in this dissertation obtains to the possible level of complexity supposed by Olson, and far surpasses any simple identification with “community games.”

Three components of the York game are discussed separately in the three following chapters. In theatrical building, the subject of chapter one, the audience “builds,” in the sense that derives from the doctrine of edification, a spiritual church. Theatrical building involves both the substantive and the verbal senses of “building.” Emphasis tends to fall on the latter, however, as it implies, to one degree of completion or another, the former, expresses the important idea of an

active faith, and exploits the dynamic potential of the dramatic form. An important implication of this emphasis on active building is that the audience is engaged in *active* game-playing. By interpreting the theological lessons of the plays in terms of theatrical building, this study avoids the problem Sarah Beckwith points to, in her article, "Ritual, Theater, and Social Space in the York Corpus Christi Cycle," where she writes, "Theological readings of the plays that perceive them as sermons in drama have no account of their symbolic working, for in such a view they merely encode simple messages whose "truths" will be passively absorbed by their audiences" (77).

Theatrical building engages the audience by way of its interpretive reception of the performance text, which functions in this respect much like an allegory. An engagement of its audience as active participants is a quality that Maureen Quilligan ascribes generally to the genre of allegory. In *The Language of Allegory*, she writes of the reader,

If he is something of a voyeur in relationship to orthodox narrative organized along the lines of verisimilitude, then he is the central character in an allegory. The narrative may be said to "read" him. Nor does his centrality derive from a position of passivity, simply receiving doctrine: the process is more one of collusion. The reader's participation in the fiction must be active and self-conscious, and it will ultimately take the form of gradual self-discovery. What distinguishes allegory from other sophisticated forms of self-reflexive fiction therefore, is the part the reader must play in order for the fiction to be perfected — and perfected primarily in realms outside the fiction. (226)

Having noted the inherent polysemy of the allegorical form, Quilligan describes the pun's effect on the reader: "The pun, by alerting the reader to the magic density of the text's language, will force the reader to become self-conscious of his own reading. The presence of the pun makes it not only easier for the reader to see connections across the surface of the text, but necessary" (41).

Quilligan's theory holds for the York plays, whose performance text is characterized by polysemy, manifested in part by puns, the prominence of which Beadle noted at a recent symposium on the plays.

In their engagement of the audience as active interpreters of an edification theme, the plays approximate the ubiquitous form of the medieval building allegory. Unlike building allegories proper, the plays are not organized around a central architectural metaphor, as is, for example, *The Castle of Perseverance*. In the plays, rather, the theme of edification is organized around the theatrical figure of Jesus. However, the focal point of the audience's interpretive reception of the edification theme is the idea of Jesus as the spiritual temple, the architectural nature of which figure is exploited in a variety of referents, ranging from the typological nativity stable to the oppositional image of the evil palace. With respect to these architectural elements and especially as it is developed as a strategy of audience engagement, the edification theme can be understood, with obvious limitations, in terms of a building allegory proper.

The central pun for the theatrical game described in this dissertation lies in the word "spirre," which contributes at least two meanings to the game. With respect to theatrical building, "spirre" describes the audience's interpretive reception of the text. One of the audience's clearest dramatic correspondents in this interpretive activity is that exemplar of struggling faith, Joseph. On the night of the nativity in the York plays, Joseph finds it very cold — "þe fellest freese" he has ever felt (14.72) — an appropriate setting for an allegory of spiritual shelter, a central element in the doctrine of edification. Arriving in Bethlehem, Joseph prays to God to look down on him and Mary.

Here in þis place wher we are pight.

Oureself allone.

Lord, graunte vs gode herberow þis nyght

Within þis wone.

For we haue sought bothe vppe and doune

Thurgh diuerse stretis in þis cité.

So mekill pepull is comen to towne

þat we can nowhare herbered be.

þer is slike prees:

Forsuthe I can no socoure see.

But belde vs with þere bestes. (14.4-14)

But he does not find the stable to be an answer to his prayer:

And yf we here all nyght abide

We schall be stormed in þis steede.

þe walles are doune on ilke a side.

þe ruffe is rayued aboven oure hede.

Als haue I roo. (14.15-19)

Joseph goes out into the cold in search for "light" and "fewell" (14.43, 44) where he prays again.

this time acknowledging that the true shelter is spiritual: "Now gud God þou be my bilde / As þou best may" (14.76-77). And this time his prayer is answered, as the birth, which has taken place in

his absence, is made known to him:

A. lord God. what light is þis

þat comes shynyng þus sodenly?

I can not saie als haue I blisse.

When I come home vnto Marie

þan sall I spirre.

A. here be God. for nowe come I. (14.78-83)

Joseph's glib threshold greeting ironically demonstrates the ease with which faith leads one into the house of God, and also expresses the reciprocity of faith, that God is in Joseph's "home," because Joseph has entered into God's house. Joseph's intention to "spirre," or inquire, about the light denotes an active faith: allegorically, to inquire (faithfully) after Jesus is to build a spiritual shelter. That he will do so when he comes "home vnto Marie," identifies her as an intercessor who leads the faithful to their home with God.

Similar allegory occurs at the beginning of "Christ and the Doctors." When Mary and Joseph, having "trauelde . . . / Fro Jerusalem many a myle" (20.27-28), realize that they have lost their son, Joseph advises,

Agaynewarde rede I þat we gang  
 The right way to þat same citee.  
 To spire and spie all men emang.  
 For hardely homward gone is he. (20.39-42)

The idea that Jesus is "hardely homward gone" is an ironic reference to the fact that he is, as the audience well knows, home at the temple, his "beyldly boure" (17.336). Here, as at the nativity, the reference to home signals an allegorical context: in searching for and finding Jesus at his home, Joseph will enter into the spiritual house of God.

Joseph's spiring into Jesus has significant homophonic correspondence — suggesting the indissolubility of faithful inquiry and holy inspiration — in a remark that predominates over the theme of edification and the engagement of the audience in theatrical building. In the opening play of the cycle, as he prepares to create the world, God declares, "But onely þe worthely warke of my wyll / In my sprete sall enspyre þe mighte of me" (1.17-18). The declaration, while referring in the first instance to God's acts of creation, is formulated for applicability to all human endeavour. It refers to the spiritual struggles depicted in the drama, and ultimately to the theatrical event itself.

Throughout the cycle, “work” and “game” are equally informative of that event, including the audience’s engagement in the drama, pointing to the moral, and perhaps artistic, seriousness of spiritual play. With respect to the plays and the audience, the sense of God’s declaration is that the theatrical event, as directed by the will of God, will inspire, through the holy spirit, a creative power morally analogous to the creative power of God. As the dramatized acts of God and his creatures, and by extension, the theatrical “acts” of the audience, are extensively informed by the theme of edification, the declaration functions like an architectural motto: As God built the world, the audience, in conjunction with the plays, builds the spiritual church in God’s name. The motto defines perfectly the audience’s activity of earnest spiritual play that is described in this dissertation under the name, the game of spiring.

The analogy between the audience and Joseph, as “enspyred” spiritual builders, is reinforced by the urban context of Joseph’s acts of spiring. Especially in his suggestion to Mary that they go to “to þat same citee. / To spire and spie all men emang,” there is an evident potential for reflection on the theatrical spiring of the audience into the dramatic figure of Jesus, as it “spies” the plays in the city of York. The analogue for the figure of Jesus, in this respect, is the medieval church, and the process by which the audience’s “worthely warke” leads to the house of God is bound up in ideas about the church and its allegorical function. The architectural motto, in uniting God and the audience as builders, reiterates the psalmic salvational doctrine, “for I shall go over into the place of the wonderful tabernacle, even to the house of God” (Ps. 41.5).<sup>4</sup> In his article, “From Admirable Tabernacle to the House of God,” Bernard McGinn discusses Augustine’s exposition on this psalm, noting that “like all the early Christian Fathers, Augustine insisted not only that the Church was necessary for salvation, but that even the ecstatic experiences that give

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<sup>4</sup> Scriptural quotations are from the Douay version.

some hint of what heavenly joy will be like are always ecclesial — it is only in and through the Church that such experiences are possible” (42). McGinn, speculating about “a possible Augustinian aesthetic of the church building” (43), describes a salvational program that we can apply directly to the theatrical event of the plays:

From an Augustinian perspective, the church building is essentially a *tabernaculum admirabile* whose function is to give access to the *domus Dei* of heaven. Two conclusions are implied in this view. First, the church building should be *admirabile* — worthy of wonder — both in itself and as the locus for what takes place within it. Second, the relation between the tabernacle and the heavenly house should be “written into” the fabric in such a way that it can be discerned by the faithful, or at least explained to them by the clergy. (42)

In the theatrical event, the *tabernaculum admirabile* is the “worthely warke” of the drama’s edification theme: not a single building image, but an array of building and dwelling images centred on the figure of Jesus as spiritual temple. According to the plays’ theatrical dynamic, the audience’s “discernment” of this dispersed *tabernaculum admirabile* is also its act of building, a “worthely warke” of interpretation that leads the audience to the shelter of the spiritual temple. The edification theme, in content and form, respectively, provides simultaneously a model and the raw material for the audience’s building. Completing the analogy with Joseph’s spiring, then, the audience’s faithful interpretation of the plays’ edification theme leads it into the house of God.

In this strategy of engaging the audience by ascribing thematic significance to its very interpretive reception of the performance text, the drama is theatricalizing an exegetical metaphor that David Cowling, in *Building the Text: Architecture as Metaphor in Late Medieval and Early Modern France*, traces to the time of Origen:

from Origen onwards, the process of exegesis of biblical texts could be figured by

the construction of a "spiritual building." Constructed within the believer, who is "edified" by the allegorical decoding of the Scriptures, this building clearly shares features with the yet more widespread notion of Christian edification. This overlap between the interpretation of texts and the creation of the individual's bulwark against temptation is typified by the famous phrase of Gregory the Great: "allegory builds faith." (143)

The phrase implies the fallibility of faith, the basis for the plays' emphasis on the act of building. In this emphasis, the plays are in keeping with the contemporaneous French tradition of building allegories proper studied by Cowling, who writes that "the common denominator of all the texts studied here is the notion . . . that Christians . . . actively construct a building that separates them as a discrete entity from a potentially hostile world, and that serves ultimately as a dwelling-place for God" (55).

As the "spirre" word-group occurs infrequently in the plays (seven times), it hardly constitutes a significant motif. But through the pervasive theme of edification, even slight gestures, such as the homophonic linking of "spirre" with "enspyre," reverberate deeply, imparting to the audience a sense of the sheer "size" of its theatrical church.<sup>5</sup> It is worth noting, in this light, a possible pun on "spirre," in the sense of "to rise or shoot up into a spire or spire-shaped form."<sup>6</sup> The earliest occurrence listed by the *OED* for this sense, in the form, "spiring" — "That spires or rises up taperingly to a point: freq. poet. or rhet., soaring aloft or reaching to a great height" — is 1538: "The old building of the chirch of the abbay remayneth having ii. goodly spiring steples" (Leland

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<sup>5</sup> The homophonic link is strengthened by association with the shortened forms of "enspyre" — "spire" and "spiring." See *MED*, spiring ger. 2, and *OED*, inspiring vbl. sb.

<sup>6</sup> *OED*, spire v.1.3.b, "of edifices, rocks, etc."

*Itinerary*: viii. 1909, III. 59).<sup>7</sup> Especially in the context of church architecture, this sense of “spiring” lends itself to a figurative sense of spiritual rising. The *OED* records such a figurative use of “spiring” for 1618, from William Lithgow’s *The Pilgrimes Farewell* (A .3): “Prayse-worthie Pilgrime, whose so spiring Sprite, / Restes not content, incentred in one Soyle.” Punning on “spirre,” for both the architectural and spiritual senses, would exploit for the edification theme and the audience’s theatrical building the potent image of the Gothic church, with its characteristic spires, rising upwards to God.<sup>8</sup> In the early years of the recorded history of the plays, the primary local referent for “spirre” would have been York minster, whose central tower had a spire, with a total height of over 300 feet, from at least 1370 until the tower’s collapse in 1407 (Tatton-Brown 36-37).

Whether or not the pun exists, the image of rising is an important element in theatrical building. In “The Last Supper,” for instance, Jesus tells the disciples,

3e schall whan I am slayne  
 In grete myslykyng lende,  
 But whanne I ryse agayne  
 Pan schall yourre myrthe be mende. (27.148-51)

Here, the temple metaphor — sometimes explicit (29.266-69), but otherwise latent, whenever the resurrection is mentioned — is implicitly juxtaposed, especially as an image of the shelter of divine

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<sup>7</sup> *OED*, spiring ppl.a.1. The *MED* does not list any occurrences of “spire” in the architectural sense specifically of rising. However, “spire,” in the sense of “a wooden rod; a bar, beam,” occurs as early as 1392 (spire n. 2), and the sense of rising was available through the botanical use of the word, “to germinate, sprout,” dating from 1325 (spiren v. 3; also spire, spiere). See Quilligan 162, where she ascribes to Langland’s punning on “spyre,” in *Piers Plowman*, the senses of germinating as, aspiring for, and inquiring after grace.

<sup>8</sup> The history of the plays, performed annually, with a few exceptions, from 1376 to 1569, overlaps with the age of the Gothic church in England, which begins in the mid- to late- 12<sup>th</sup> century. On the symbolic function of the Gothic church spire, see Edward Norman, *The House of God: Church Architecture, Style and History*, 136, 160.

charity, to the image of the disciples living in “myslykyng” until the resurrection. The rising temple image becomes stronger, by association, through a series of shelter and dwelling images, which lead to a symbolic rising of the faithful into a spiritual church. Jesus tells the disciples,

ze haue bene bowne my bale to bete.

Therefore youre belde ay schall I be.

And for ze did in drye and wete

My comaundementis in ilke contré.

The kyngdome of heuen I you behete. . . .

.....

For ze trewlye toke zeme

In worlde with me to dwell.

There shall ze sitte to deme

Xij kyndis of Israell. (27.152-56, 160-63)

“But firste,” he says, “ze schall be wille of wone [spiritually homeless — a central motif of theatrical building, to be discussed in the following chapter]” (27.164), a reference, again, to the disciples’ persecution in the aftermath of the crucifixion. During this time, he says, they must arm themselves with “swerdis” and “stones,” the latter image associated with edification, throughout the cycle (27.168, 173). Andrew points to the two swords they have, to which Jesus replies,

Itt is inowe, ze nedis no moo.

For fro all wathis I schall zou were.

Butt ryse now vppe, for we will goo. . . .

.....

Loke ze lere forthe þis lawe

Als 3e haue herde of me.

Alle þat wele will itt knawe

Ay blessid schall þei bee. (27.178-80, 184-87)

The disciples' rising anticipates their obligation to rise metaphorically into the defensive shelter of the spiritual temple, in which their literal "stones" will be figured as "living stones," and through which they will spread "þis lawe" of the Eucharist, to be taken by the "blessid" through time, within that temple's material analogue. As we shall see, the image of rising informs the audience's theatrical building, throughout the cycle.

The grounding of the idea of theatrical building in the collective body of the audience, as living stones, in part explains the sense of a physicality to the audience's engagement, noted by Beadle, in his essay, "The York Cycle." Beadle writes that the text of the plays "repeatedly insists on the presence of an audience, who are thereby drawn to participate almost physically in the illusion, finding themselves implicated in the events portrayed" (86). Also contributing to this sense of physical engagement is theatrical witness, the subject of chapter two. The plays' witness theme is expressed succinctly, in the speech that opens "The Assumption of the Virgin," where Thomas recalls his doubts at the report of Jesus' resurrection and says, "But þe poure of þat prince was presiously previd / Whan þat souerayne schewed hymselffe to my sizt" (45.79-80). Beadle glosses this occurrence of "presiously" as "dearly, with great cost," a sense that accords with the previous detailing, in this long speech, of the passion and death of Jesus. This sense of "presiously" may also refer to the emotional cost incurred by the disciple as he looked upon the "blissid body blo" (45.45). However, as the "proue" word-group is used throughout the cycle to refer to the salvific acts of bearing and receiving witness to Christ, the positive sense of "presiously" is also important in this remark. In this respect, Thomas is saying that his encounter with Jesus was itself salvific, a precious event. Together, the two senses of "presiously" suggest the theological integration of the

cost of Jesus' passion and death with the value of his self-witness.

Thomas's remark reflects most significantly on the "precious proving" of Jesus' sacrifice before the audience, his self-witness as theatrical gesture. The close analogy between the events of witness and theatre is suggested by Richard Collier, in *Poetry and Drama in the York Corpus Christi Play*: "In the Incarnation, in the sacraments, and in the plays, Christ comes to men that they might forever be with God" (116-17). In his discussion of the plays' theme of teaching, Collier touches on theological witness, when he writes, "to teach is to explain God's wonders to man, to prove them and give witness to them, to provide that understanding of God's will which for men is an essential preliminary to doing that will" (69). Though he is aware of theatrical implications of the theme of teaching — "Since the teachers offer their wisdom (or lies) first of all to the characters within the plays, the responses of these characters become a reflection of what the audience is asked to do by the expository aspects of the drama" (76) — he focuses on the forms of effective teaching and the engagement of the audience at the level of its understanding of the lessons taught (62-118). Our interest, here, is in the engagement of the audience specifically by way of the event analogy, to which Seth Lerer points in his article, "'Representyd now in yower syght': The Culture of Spectatorship in Late-Fifteenth-Century England." Lerer writes that the question of whether the audience in the cycle plays comprises spectators or participants

is a question . . . raised by the plays themselves, not simply in the ways that they work out the dramaturgy of the torturing of Christ . . . but in the ways that they thematize the issue of theatricality itself, and in turn, the nature and social function of representation. . . . "[B]ehold and see" becomes the central trope of a self-consciousness of vision in the drama. The characters within the play, together with the audience before it, bear witness to the sufferings and mutilations of the body.

(37)

Behind this simple formulation of the analogy lies a complex theatricalization of witness doctrine. As the theology of witness attributes to the witness event itself a salvific effect, which can only be realized by an act of respondent witness, the audience's presence at, and response to, the dramatic performance is, by that analogy, charged with theological significance. From the ground up, then, the theatrical event is supported by a specific theological framework, resulting in theatrical witness as a closely defined performative form.<sup>9</sup>

In theatricalizing the doctrine of respondent witness, the plays, expanding the scope of the audience's game of spiring, add a theological value to the intellectual operation of its interpretive engagement. That is, theological response, as a form of faithful inquiry, is added to faithful interpretation, to heighten the force of the audience's engagement through their game of spiring. The linking of theological response and faithful inquiry as a combined act of theatrical witness and theatrical building inheres at the semantic level, as "proue," like "spirre," means "to inquire." More profoundly, the link between theatrical building and theatrical witness inheres at the doctrinal level, where the spiritual church is defined by an imperative to bear witness. As these two theatrical strategies together thematize the experiential reality of the audience as a collective body of people, there is reference in particular to the doctrine that, in its *unity*, the church witnesses to the divinity of Jesus (John 17.21).<sup>10</sup>

The conjunctive operation of theatrical witness and allegorical interpretation is explicit in "The Transfiguration," in which the imperative to interpret allegorically is coupled with a symbolic

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<sup>9</sup> Beadle and King note in passing that the audience of the York plays was "implicated to bear witness" (*York Mystery Plays* xxv). Olga Horner discusses the audience's reception, as secular witnesses in the context of "the medieval jury system," of the York resurrection play ("Us Must Make Lies" 28). Jody Enders, in a study of medieval French drama, *Rhetoric and the Origins of Medieval Drama*, discusses many of the parallels between the witness and theatre events, but strictly in a forensic context.

<sup>10</sup> For an example of the conjunction of witness doctrine and building allegory, in the late-medieval French tradition, see Cowling 76.

enactment of the spiritual church rising to an act of witness. The first speeches of Elijah and Moses establish the cosmic parameters of the setting and action. Elijah says.

In Paradise wonnand am I  
 Ay sen I lefte þis erthely lande:  
 I come Cristis name to clarifie  
 As God his fadir me has ordand.  
 And for to bere witnessse  
 In worde to man and wyffe.  
 þat þis his owne sone is  
 And lord of lastand liff.

.....

I haue my place in Paradise. . . .

.....

Als messenger withouten mys  
 Am I called to this company.  
 To witnessse þat Goddis sone is þis. (23.65-72, 111, 113-15).

Having come from "helle," Moses declares, "Vnto Crist come, þis is þe same / þat vs schall fro þat dongeoun drawe" (23.125, 127-28). The cosmic scale is reiterated when Jesus, transfigured, tells his disciples that, with Elijah and Moses present,

So schall bothe heuen and helle  
 Be demers of þis dede,  
 And ʒe in erth schall tell  
 My name wher itt is nede. (23.141-44)

The setting of the play, though specified in Jesus' opening speech as a "mountayne" (23.8), is more

significantly the world in general, as defined in relation to the Christian cosmos and according to the act of witness.

Having engaged the audience in this thematic context, by the meta-theatrical references of “this company” and “ze in erth.” the drama then shows a failure to interpret these ideas allegorically. Peter, after praising Jesus for his revelatory generosity, says,

Here is full faire dwellyng for vs.

A lykand place in for to lende.

A. lord, late vs no forther trus.

For we will make with herte and hende

A taburnakill vnto þe

Belyue, and þou will bide:

One schall to Moyses be

And to Ely the thirde. (23.149-56)

Whereas everything that has gone before invites allegorical interpretation of the world, Peter sees the world as an end in itself, a response that, though faithful, is incorrectly literal. Especially in his desire to make a “dwellyng” of this locale, and to build a material house of God, the consequences of his literalness, according to the plays’ allegorical scheme, is made explicit: he fails to build a spiritual temple. In a significant show of disunity, the other disciples reject Peter’s proposal. James counsels a path of humility: they should not do anything without God’s command, who “hetis his men both morne and none / þare herber high in heuen to haue” (23.161-62). John adds, “where hym lykis to lende, / We will lende, with his leue” (23.167-68). Both James and John are groping towards a truth that lies beyond the material world, the latter coming closest to Jesus’ intent, as he lays emphasis on a union with Jesus over the physical locale in which it might occur. But, as the next action indicates, they have failed to grasp the full truth.

Upon the descent of God, all three disciples fall to the ground, for which he chastises them: “ze febill of faithe, folke affraied. / Beis nozt afered for vs in feere” (23.169-70). He then tells them that those “Who trowis . . . stedfastly” that Jesus is the son of God “Shall byde in endles blisse” (23.179-80). When, next, Jesus addresses the disciples, the metaphorical potential suggested by these images of feebleness and steadfastness is fully realized. First, he calms them: “Petir, pees be vnto þe. / And to zou also James and John” (23.181-82). Cowling notes that in the French religious allegories, “‘peace’ . . . is a prerequisite . . . for the nun who desires to found a defensive castle” (105), and there is a possible typological link to the blessing of peace that Jesus characteristically gives to houses, as to Zacheus’s house (25.456-57) and to the house of the last supper (27.1-2). Jesus then commands the disciples to “Rise vppe and tellis me what ze see. / And beis no more so wille of wone” (23.183-84). The blessing affirms the symbolism of their rising: they are ending their spiritual homelessness by building themselves into a spiritual house of God, in which form their obligation is to bear witness, to tell what they see. The moment is parodied in the play of the resurrection when a soldier, in alarm at finding the tomb empty, cries, “Rise vppe and see” (38.292), to which comes the reply, “Harrowe, for ay / I telle vs schente” (38.292-93). Whatever physical action accompanies this reply, the point is that the soldier’s lack of faith prevents him from rising into a spiritual temple and making theological witness, with the added irony, in this case, that the empty tomb signifies the newly-risen spiritual temple.

In response to Jesus’ command, “tellis me what ze see,” the disciples now demonstrate unity. Peter and James begin, describing merely psychological and physical responses to the vision:

þis meruayle movis my mynde

And makis my flessch affrayed.

þis brightnes made me blynde.

I bode neuere swilke a brayde. (23.189-92).

But John, again surpassing, but this time also complementing, the other disciples, strikes the truth, that they must, as he does now, bear witness to Christ as the son of God:

Lorde God oure maker almyghty,

bis mater euermore be ment,

We saw two bodis stande hym by

And saide his fadir had þame sent. (23.193-96)

In summary, the action of the play represents the disciples graduating from literal to allegorical interpretation of the world, and then shows them symbolically rising, through Jesus, into a spiritual temple of unity in Christ, to bear witness to Christ. Throughout the cycle, whether explicitly or implicitly, the formula of this play applies to the audience's theatrical engagement — the spiritual church it builds through allegorical interpretation of the text is fulfilled in their act of theatrical witness to Christ.

As, according to the doctrine of witness, theatrical witness lends thematic significance to the audience's mere presence at the theatrical event, the audience's spectating of the drama is thematized according to the doctrine that an act of witness can be completed by a respondent act of sight. This thematizing of the audience's onlooking informs what David Mills calls the "language of display" in the York plays. In his article on "The 'Behold and See' Convention in Medieval Drama," to which Lerer refers in the passage quoted above, Mills notes how both virtuous and evil characters draw the audience's attention to themselves and their acts (5-7). The effects of these acts of self-display, or self-witness, on the audience's sense of its presence and acts of sight (and hearing) provide an answer to Beckwith, who, discussing the significance of the repeated appearance of the bleeding, post-resurrection Jesus, in the York plays, asks, "What possible kind of proof does this constitute in theater's simulation of miracle, in any case?" ("Ritual, Theater, and

Social Space” 81, n.32). As we shall see, theatrical witness in the York plays, expanding upon the reflexive deployment of moral game typology, expresses its theatrical limits without closing itself off from spiritual efficacy.

The effects of theatrical witness are similar to those of the revelation scene of liturgical drama, discussed by Hans-Jürgen Diller, in *The Middle English Mystery Play*. Noting similarity with cult images, Diller writes, “the beholder of the cult image as well as of the dramatic Revelation situation is part of the represented event, standing as it were in the continuation of that line of communication which leads from the Revealer to the (represented) Recipient, being present at the gestures of announcing and hearing and sharing their communicative effect” (18). But Diller, in drawing the distinctions between liturgical and secular drama, plays down the involvement of the audience in the mystery plays. He raises the issue of

whether one could not detect a forerunner to the audience-address [of the mystery plays] in the ‘Revelations’ which are directed to the choir, for instance, by the three Marys, Mary Magdalene or the Shepherds. But these ‘Revelations’ are always directed at persons who are in the same situational context as the Revealers. . . . While in the mystery play the character addressing the audience steps out of the Second [mimetic] World, the liturgical performer draws, as it were, the choir into it. (110)

Diller notes an exception to this rule, in the York plays, which occurs when John the Baptist “quotes from his own sermons” (21.29-49) so that “the citizens of York now ‘become’ the Jewish listeners of John’s sermon” (176). And he acknowledges a general similarity, with respect to such addresses, between the liturgical and cycle drama (126-28). Overall, though, he tends to describe the audience of the cycle drama as passive receivers of information, describing that drama as “a play for spectators who are addressed, receive explanations, and who are, above all, to be instructed, edified,

and entertained as well" (110-11). In theatrical witness, however, the York plays approximate the engagement effects of the "Revelations" to a greater degree than that suggested by Diller.

Particularly in the game of spiring, with its combined effects of theatrically building (applying the doctrine of *mutual* edification), and witnessing by, a spiritual church, the York plays exhibit the quality of medieval cycles noted by Miri Rubin, in *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture*: "the Corpus Christi drama never 'left' the church, it always retained a liturgical component" (274). In this view, the theatrical game of the York plays resists the clear distinction assigned to medieval game drama by Wickham, who describes the cycles as

a new drama centred on the Eucharist, emphasizing the humanity rather than the divinity of Christ's ministry and avowedly didactic in intention rather than ritualistic and devotional, and directed as much to audiences drawn from the new middle class as to those from either the nobility or the peasantry. In consequence it was conceived from the outset as a *ludus*, "game" or "play," and never as an *ordo* or *officium*. (62)

In the case of the York plays, this opposition gives way as the audience becomes engaged as players of a spiritual game, lending a liturgical quality to the theatrical event.

The splitting of the game concept between evil and virtuous acts, as Olson describes for the Towneley *Second Shepherds' Play*, is, in the York cycle, part of a broad scheme of moral divisions, including those afforded by puns, which governs the audience's engagement as contestants caught between two moral poles. This scheme subsumes simple oppositions such as the one of "libidinous pleasure" and ascetic stillness, dismissed by Sponsler, as noted above, without overriding their thematic efficacy. Indeed, the idea of stillness, which is central to the theatrical game, is the chief sign of both virtue and evil in the plays. Such moral divisions create interpretive rifts between the audience and evil characters in the drama, by which the former is assigned a position of moral

superiority. While moral interpretive superiority applies in a specific sense to theatrical building, in which case the audience's interpretive activity is pitted against that of the dramatic figures of evil, the effect has a general applicability to the game of spiring as a whole.

The effects of these interpretive rifts are analogous to those produced within the drama by what Mills calls "inferential pressure." Referring to the semantic duality of the word "work," as used by Jesus and his crucifiers, he writes that the resultant inferential pressure indicates for the audience the "conceptual gulf between [the] Soldiers and Jesus" (9). Mills argues against interpreting this effect as having a "committedly restrictive aim of inviting condemnation of wrongdoers," suggesting rather that it "springs from that Aristotelian desire to argue on both sides of a case, that the true state of the case may not escape us" (9). Regardless of a possible Aristotelian influence, Mills's suggestion, especially as he qualifies it with "committedly restrictive," is generally compatible with the theatrical game I describe in this dissertation, though ultimately condemnation is a part of that game.

Elaborating on the spatial effect of wordplay, Mills writes that inferential pressure is a way of indicating that characters who inhabit the same stage simultaneously may occupy different contexts. Since it presupposes a shared context, dialogue may serve to indicate and mark off an area within which competition may occur; but it will inevitably also define adjacent areas from which challenges may come for audience-attention. (9)

In the York theatrical game, the audience's space is implicated in both spatial effects described by Mills. The place of competition is the audience's space and the dramatic space, together, which I refer to as the theatrical space. The moral boundary exists in this space as an essentially uncertain variable subject to the audience's mental determination to side with the dramatic figure of Jesus against the figures of evil. In the game of spiring, theatrical space is always in a state of crisis, with

the audience struggling to keep that space against the claims being made on it by the figures of evil in the drama.

Governing this spatial level of the game is theatrical enclosure, the subject of the final chapter. Complementing the components of building and witness, theatrical enclosure further grounds in the physical realities of the audience's presence the metaphor of the spiritual temple, the central image of a broad range of literal and metaphorical enclosures deployed in the game of spiring. As these enclosures are continuously imposed on the audience's experiential reality of physical space throughout the cycle, theatrical enclosure especially evinces Sponsler's idea of an "imaginative projection into the representation." The audience's imaginative engagement through theatrical enclosure is paralleled in what Denis Renevey, in his discussion of *Ancrene Wisse* and the Wooing Group, describes as the exploitation of "the fundamental design of the anchorhold . . . to strengthen the *affectus mentis* towards God in his humanity" (55). Though theatrical enclosure involves a sense of openness, as in public witness, precluded by the anchoritic experience, the parallel holds for the combined sense of physical and metaphorical enclosure.

The imaginative creation of theatrical space is an effect typical of medieval drama. In "Theatre Space, Theatrical Space, and the Theatrical Space Without," Hanna Scolnicov discusses such effects, in the context of the *teatrum mundi* metaphor, where she writes that "The spectators as well as the actors are engulfed within this re-enactment of the Christian story of the world" (23). Pamela King, in "Spatial Semantics and the Medieval Theatre," writes of the illusion of "the world of the play running over into the world of the audience at the edges" (56). In her article "Ritual, Church and Theatre," where she is discussing the processional ending of the *Croxton Play of the Sacrament*, Beckwith writes,

it is possible to see this ending of the play not so much as the movement out of theatrical space, but rather the absorption of procession into theatre. The spectators,

the 'congregation,' become not so much processors, following the body of Christ (which is, after all, a stage prop), but actors, absorbed into the histrionic heart of the play. (78)

Theatrical space, as a model of medieval dramatic spatiality, complements the place-and-scaffold, or *platea-and-locus*, model, as King implies when she writes that in the cycle plays "delimitation of the playing space into *locus* and *platea* combines with a significant abstention from dividing playing space from audience, theatre from the world" (56). A combination of the effects of physical space with imaginative engagement, in indoor drama, is suggested in the following passage from William Tydemann's *The Theatre in the Middle Ages*:

the traditional *platea* was supplied by the central floor between the tables, and architectural features or furnishings could be incorporated into the action, just as the proximity of the spectators enabled them to be addressed directly or even brought into the action itself, if only by being requested in the course of the drama not to obstruct the access to the stage through the screen-passage. (80-81)

As we shall see, the York plays' strategy of theatrical enclosure is exemplary of such exploiting of the physical properties of a performance space at an imaginative level.

The three components of the game of spiring — theatrical building, witness, and enclosure — are ultimately indissoluble. As we have seen, theatrical building and theatrical witness — faithful interpretation and theological witness — are especially interlinked and tend to go hand-in-hand as a single act of faithful "inquiry." In examining the three components separately in the following chapters, their particular theological and theatrical nuances — many of which are linguistically unavailable to a contemporary audience — are made more readily apparent. As those nuances are multiple, each component bears extended analysis, and these together yield a sense of the richness of the theatrical experience that was to be had by the medieval audience of the York

plays.

## Theatrical Building

The opening play of the York cycle introduces the major theme of spiritual edification, which comprises the elements of strength and power, support and comfort, joy and happiness, defense and protection, and spiritual shelter and refuge, all finding expression through the metaphor of dwelling (in unity) with God.<sup>1</sup> The idea of shelter from evil is stated when God declares, “My blyssyng o ble sall be . . . / . . . heldand, fro harme to be hydande” (1.5-6), and is repeated when, having created bliss, he says that it is “al-beledande [all-protecting] abowte me” (1.21). This latter remark is the first of seven occurrences in this short play of the “belde” word-group, whose semantic range — *courage, strength; help/helper; comfort, happiness; defense/defender, protection/protector; a refuge, a dwelling place*; and corresponding verb forms, including *to edify, to give/take shelter, to find refuge, to dwell in a place (MED)* — accommodates the full scope of edification doctrine. As the dramatic action of the play unfolds, it establishes for the cycle a schematic link between the “belde” group and the edification theme.

The second two occurrences of the word-group convey the idea of dwelling in the shelter of bliss. God encloses Lucifer to protect him from harm:

I beelde [place] þe here baynely in blys for to be

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<sup>1</sup> See G.T. Montague, “Edification,” in the *New Catholic Encyclopedia*.

Nothyng here sall þe be derand:

In þis blis sall be ȝhour beeldyng [dwelling place].

(1.35. 37-38: Beadle's glosses)<sup>2</sup>

God adds that Lucifer's dwelling in bliss is conditional on his being "buxumly berande" (1.40).

In the fourth and fifth occurrences of the "belde" group, angelic obedience is defined according to the mutual nature of edification. A seraph says,

Ay-lastande in luf lat vs lowte hym.

At beelde vs [flourish] thus baynely abowete hym.

Of myrthe neuermore to haue myssyng. (1.46-48)

Moments later, a cherub says,

All blys es here beeldande [flourishing] aboute vs:

To-whyls we are stabyll in thoughte

In þe worschipp of hym þat us wroght.

Of dere neuer thar vs more dowte vs.

(1.61-64: Beadle's gloss and *MED* listing, respectively)

Thus, the happiness and protection enjoyed by the angels in bliss depends on their edifying themselves in union with God. The final two occurrences of the word-group express a perversion of and consequent failure in mutual edification. Eyeing the heavenly throne, Lucifer says, "Abowne ȝhit sall I be beeldand. / On heghte in þe hyeste of hewuen" (1.87-88). Then, after he and his cohorts have fallen, a devil cries out from hell, "We þat ware beelled [sheltered, comforted, etc. —

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<sup>2</sup> The *MED* lists this occurrence of "beelde" for the senses of "to encourage, strengthen," etc. In the context of the passage and the entire play, the word expresses the ideas of "to shelter" or "to protect" as well as "to comfort" or "to make happy." The *MED* lists this occurrence of "beeldyng" for the senses of "a refuge or dwelling place." Given the context, it is useful to shift from Beadle's gloss to the more pointed sense of "refuge."

*MED* listing] in blys, in bale are we brent nowe" (1.107). The fall of the angels reiterates the lesson of "beeldyng": inclusion in bliss depends upon a contribution to its edification.

The edification theme in this opening play establishes clear terms by which the audience can emulate angelic obedience. That is, the audience will understand that, as for the angels in heavenly bliss, so for humankind in the Church, it must "beelde abowete" God in order to have him "beeldande aboute" them. During the performance, this lesson is implemented in the audience's theatrical building, in which activity it represents the living stones of the Church, building with Jesus, the corner stone.<sup>3</sup> Throughout the plays, Jesus is referred to as the "belde," with reference to various concepts in edification doctrine.<sup>4</sup> Especially with respect to edification as mutual sheltering, the imperative for the audience to theatrically build is strongest in the trial and passion plays, which present Jesus simultaneously in his greatest need and in the final actions by which he becomes the new temple.

As discussed in the introduction, theatrical building thematizes, according to edification doctrine, the audience's interpretive reception of the performance text: "allegory builds faith."<sup>5</sup> Opposed to the audience's faithful interpretation, in the trial and passion plays, is the proud interrogation of Jesus by his enemies. The interrogators' pride is manifested by their failure to

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<sup>3</sup> As we have seen, in some occurrences of the "belde" word-group a sense of building is manifest. Both the *OED* (at "bield [belde]" v. 4) and the *MED* (at "belden") note the semantic overlap of "belden" and "bilden," the latter being the medieval equivalent of "to build." (The *OED* cites two occurrences in the York plays where "[belde] is possibly confused with *build*": "All blys es here beeldande aboute vs" (1.61), and "Pees, bewscheres, I bidde you, þat beldis here aboute me" (32.1).) Given this overlap and the fact that the image of building is inherent to the doctrine of edification, it is likely that a building metaphor is at least latent whenever the word-group occurs in the cycle. For an overview of the scriptural use of the building and stone metaphors, see "Build" and "Stone" in the *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, Xavier Dufour-Léon, ed.

<sup>4</sup> The word is also applied to his incarnation — his actual dwelling on earth — in a typological figure, when Noah releases the dove to "sadly seke on ilke a side / Yf þe floodes be falland nowe, / þat þou on þe erthe may belde and byde" (9.242-44).

<sup>5</sup> See above, 6-12.

recognize the allegorical nature of Jesus, which failure is concomitant with an idolatrous fixation on the material world as an end in itself. For the proud interrogators there is no polysemy such as the performance text presents to the audience. In opposing faithful interpretation to proud interrogation in this manner, the plays uphold the Augustinian interpretation of the incarnation elucidated by Rowan Williams, in his article, "Language, Reality and Desire in Augustine's *de doctrina*":

The coming of the Word in flesh establishes, we might say, the nature of fleshly being as word, as sign, the all-pervasiveness of 'use'. That is to say, we live in a world of restless fluidities in meaning: all terms and all the objects they name are capable of opening out beyond themselves, coming to speak of a wider context, and so refusing to stay still under our attempts to comprehend or systematize or (for these go together) idolize. (141)

In fostering such "restless fluidities in meaning," the plays achieve the same quality Augustine found in scripture (Williams 142), a deliberate ambiguity that forestalls interpretive closure, the consequence of which, in the plays, is that the audience is spurred on in its "worthely warke" of interpretation. In fulfilment of the edification theme, the audience's theatrical building about Jesus is opposed by the evil palaces in which he is tried and tormented, these settings representing, in conceptual opposition to spiritual shelter, spiritual entrapment.

The opening plays of the cycle establish two interconnected motifs — the heavenly home and spiritual homelessness — that inform the audience's theatrical building throughout the cycle. The edification theme is vivified by the conventional metaphor that heaven is the true home, which is elaborated with another conventional metaphor, that heaven is God's palace: he sits in a throne (2.10), and hell is his "presone" (1.32), suggesting a palace dungeon. In the aftermath of the fall of the angels, the second play opens with God at "hame" (2.2), contemplating some recent unpleasant business with "sume foles" (2.8). The palace setting is reinforced with his description of the angels'

fall in terms that suggest the dismissal of insubordinate staff:

And sen þai wrange haue wrought

My lyk ys to lat þam go.

To suffir sorowe onsoght.

Syne þai haue seruid so. (2.13-16)

When Adam and Eve are expelled from paradise, they pine for “byggly blys” (6.42, 125). The *MED* lists the first of these occurrences of “byggly” under the sense of “perfect happiness.” Given the palace metaphor, however, there is good reason to assume that the other sense of “byggly” — “comfortable, stately (mansion)” — is also intended in these occurrences. The true home in the palace of God stands in schematic opposition to the earthly palaces of pride and is the archetype of the spiritual temple through which the audience resists entrapment in those palaces. Building with Jesus under the “architectural” motto, “But onely þe worthely warke of my wyll / In my sprete sall enspyre þe mighte of me” (1.17-18), the audience is ultimately building with God, the “maker,” who “Vnto [his] dygnyté dere” makes “A place full of plenté”(1.2, 9, 11-12).

Upon expelling Adam and Eve from paradise, the angel tells them, “do you to goo. / For here may ze make no dwellyng” (5.171-72), a remark that implies their obligation to build (physically and spiritually), as it sends them out of their original home. Throughout the cycle, the imperative to build spiritually is reiterated in the motif of spiritual homelessness. The motif is introduced, at the expulsion, when Adam declares, “Was neuere wrecchis so wyllle of wane / As nowe ar wee” (6.121-22). The phrase “wyllle of wane” elaborates on “will” in its sense of “bewildered,” or as Beadle glosses it, “wild, perplexed, distraught.” Both senses of “bewildered” — wandering without shelter, and going astray in one’s thoughts, or perplexed — are accommodated in the phrase, “wyllle of wane,” as “wane” can denote either “dwelling” (*OED* “wane sb.2), or “hope of favourable outcome, alternative choice, resource” (*OED* “wone” sb.3). The two senses tend to be

conflated in the plays, where the “wylle of wane” motif is used in reference to the metaphorical homelessness of spiritual anguish, either directly or as symbolized by physical homelessness. The formulaic link between physical and spiritual homelessness is established by the archetypal homelessness that occurs with the expulsion. Elsewhere in the plays, spiritual homelessness is symbolized by the sort of transient homelessness suggested in the journeying of preachers and pilgrims, the flight of the oppressed, or the wandering of the mentally anguished.

Spiritual homelessness may refer to the state of absolute homelessness humankind must endure until it can return to heavenly bliss. It is such homelessness to which Jesus refers in part when he tells his disciples, at the last supper, that they will one day join him in heaven. “But firste . . . schall be wille of wone.” Here, absolute homelessness is associated with the spiritual homelessness to which, as noted in the introduction, Jesus makes primary reference, the mental anguish the disciples will feel upon his arrest, to be mitigated in part by his post-resurrection manifestation and more fully at Pentecost. There is perhaps also a distant reference to the transient homelessness the disciples will experience in their evangelical missions. Physical homelessness may be symbolic of, but also offset from, spiritual homelessness, as in an exchange between Mary and Joseph at the end of “The Flight into Egypt.” Mary, having learned that she must flee to Egypt to protect her child, says, “Allas Joseph, for woo, / Was neuer wight in worde [world] so will” (18.207-08). Mary’s bewilderment gains from the exilic context a sense of homelessness, which is reinforced by Joseph’s reply, “God is oure frende, / He will be with vs wherso we lende” (18.211-12). The lesson, then, is that to be without a physical home is not necessarily to be spiritually homeless.

Jesus’ last supper remark foreshadows the widespread feelings of spiritual homelessness aroused by his death, all of which are associated in some sense with physical homelessness. The physical homelessness of the pilgrim on the road to Emmaus, where he will “herber and hyde”

(40.15). suggests the idea of spiritual homelessness for his prayer. "That lorde þat me lente þis liffe for to lede. / In my wayes þou me wisse þus will of wone" (40.1-2). Though she does not refer specifically to bewilderment, Mary Magdalene's stumbling along her way (39.15) lends a sense of spiritual homelessness to her words: "Allas. in þis worlde was neuere no wight / Walkand with so mekill woo" (39.1-2). In "The Ascension," Peter is filled with bewilderment as he struggles to understand Jesus' post-resurrection manifestation, while at the same time watching him prepare to leave again:

O mightfull God, how standis it nowe.  
 In worlde þus will was I neuere are:  
 Butte he apperes, bot I ne wote howe —  
 He fro vs twynnes whanne he will fare. (42.1-4)

From the context of Jesus' returning to his true home, leaving Peter "In worlde þus will," the disciple's bewilderment acquires a sense spiritual homelessness. In the same play, Mary, having seen Jesus ascend, taken comfort in the promise fulfilled, but suffered the pain of separation, worries at an expected isolation and persecution, indicative of the sense of spiritual homelessness in her expressed bewilderment:

But vnto whome schall I me mene?  
 þus will in worlde was I neuere are,  
 To dwelle amonge þes Jewes kene —  
 Me to dispise will þei not spare. (42.187-90)

All these instances of a feeling of spiritual homelessness after the death of Jesus are generally typified when a housewife, who has lost her child in the slaughter of the innocents, cries, "Was neuere so wofull a wyffe / Ne halffe so wille of wone" (19.216-17). Here, and, more clearly, in the intensification of the "wylle of wane" motif following the crucifixion, the overall ironic point is that

Jesus' death has won a spiritual home for humankind.

In one sense, Jesus, as he shares in humanity, shares in its homelessness, to which he refers in the gospel, with reference to his ministry: "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air nests: but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head" (Lk. 9.58). In the plays, this passage is transposed to express the keen sense of homelessness Jesus feels on the cross:

For foxis þer dennys haue þei.

Birdis hase ther nestis to paye.

But þe sone of man this daye

Hase noȝt on his heed for to reste. (36.192-95)

The transposition, as well as increasing the affective power of the scene, also draws attention to the nearness of Jesus, at this moment, to the final "reste" of his true home.<sup>6</sup> In another sense, Jesus, as the spiritual temple, is never "wylle of wane." The theological integration of Jesus' homelessness with his status as spiritual shelter is evident in the semantic duality of the soldier's remark, "Naye we gete noȝt o worde, dare Y wele wedde, / For he is wraiste of his witte or will of his wone" (31.271-72). The point always with respect to Jesus' homelessness is that his function in the plays as the solution to spiritual homelessness is balanced by his function as the drama's chief exemplar of the necessity to actively engage in spiritual building.

The full implication of the angel's command — "do you to goo, / For here may ȝe make no dwellyng" — is that Adam and Eve must build a material dwelling in the understanding of its proper subordination to its spiritual analogue. Throughout the cycle, the faithful are depicted rejecting the material for the spiritual dwelling, a constant reminder that through its allegorical interpretation of the performance text — reading the material for the spiritual — the audience builds

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<sup>6</sup> The speech is discussed again in the final chapter.

a spiritual church. From the expulsion on, then, the audience spiritually builds with the faithful of fallen humankind.

Upon the expulsion, Adam, having received his spade (6.58), goes off to “make [his] dwellyng”:

On grounde mon I neuyr goo gladde.

My gamys ere gane.

Gone ar my games withowten glee. . . .

.....

And nowe is alle thyngge me agayne

pat gois on grounde.

On grounde ongaynely may Y gange. . . .

.....

On grounde mon I never gladde gange.

Withouten glee.

Withowten glee I ga.

This sorowe wille me sla.

This tree vnto me wille I ta

pat me is sende.

He pat vs wrought wisse vs fro wa.

Whare-som we wende. (6.85-87, 97-99, 161-68).

Straight out of bliss, Adam demonstrates the proper attitude to take towards material existence. The ground and, by extension, anything he might build on it is nothing without the presence of God. In

this context, his final words of faith point to the possibility of his reunion with God through spiritual edification. The audience's spiritual building, specifically its interpretation of Adam's spade (the likely referent of "tree") as the cross, is possibly reflected in Adam's bemoaning of the loss of his "games" and "glee." That is, the audience has the advantage of knowing that faith itself can be expressed in a game, as in the immediate case of its theatrical building, a game *with* glee.

The lesson of Adam's complaint is then given by Noah to his son, who has taken the rainbow at the end of the flood to be God's "syne" that "bis worldis empire / Shall euermore laste, is nozt to layne" (9.296, 297-98). Noah corrects him,

Nay sonne, þat sall we nouzt desire,

For and we do we wirke in wane:

For it sall ones be waste with fyre,

And never worþe to worlde agayne. (9.299-302)

This exchange reminds the audience of its "*worthely* warke" of spiritual building — against the "worldis empire" — through the proper interpretation of the plays' signs. According to the usual method by which theatrical building overlaps the interpretive act with its metaphor, the most pertinent "syne" at this point, the ark, typifies the spiritual church referred to by the audience's theatrical building. In other words, its interpretation of the ark names the spiritual shelter the audience thereby builds.

In the following play, Isaac asserts that, like his father, he would willingly sacrifice himself to God. "Leuer þan lange to leue in lande" (10.142). Here, as with Adam's "On grounde," a stock phrase is used to suggest the superiority of the spiritual over the material realm, the comparative emptiness of the material reflected in the linguistic dross of such phrases. The edification theme, in "Abraham and Isaac," is developed through the tradition of Isaac as a type of Jesus, with typological

intricacies that bear directly on the audience's interpretive engagement.<sup>7</sup> The reciprocal sheltering of the faithful and of Jesus in the spiritual temple is expressed through the shifting of intra-familial responsibility over time. Abraham recalls that Sarah "wroght as a wyse woman: / To haue a barne vs for to beelde" (10.33-34). "Now," says Abraham, that baby "is wight hymselfe to welde / And fra me is all wightnes wente. / Therefore sall he be my beelde" (10.57-59). Bringing himself closer to the sacrifice demanded by God, Abraham exclaims, "To bynde hym þat shuld be my beelde!" (10.223).

At the end of the play, these allusions to the spiritual shelter in Jesus are coupled with the idea of humankind's return to its true home in heaven. When the sacrificial scene is concluded, Abraham twice speaks of leaving the place of sacrifice to return home, in the name of God. To Isaac he says,

And sone, I am full fayne  
 Of oure spede in þis place—  
 Bot go we home agayne  
 And lowe God of his grace. (10.329-32)

Then he says to his servants,

My barnes, yee ar noght to blame  
 3eff 3e thynke lang þat we her lende:  
 Gedir same oure gere, in Goddis name,  
 And go we hame agayne  
 Euyn vnto Barsabé. (10.374-78)

Under the force of the typological identification of Isaac with Jesus, this return home from the place

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<sup>7</sup> For a discussion of the medieval audience's capacity to interpret such typologies, see Walter Meyers' "Typology and the Audience of the English Cycle Plays."

of sacrifice figures the return to the heavenly palace from earth. Therefore, the travellers' sense that they have been "lang" in this place refers to Christian alienation from the world, and the proper subordination of even the holy place to the spiritual home in bliss. As the play closes, the focus returns to the spiritual temple provided by God in Jesus. The return to "Barsabé" is driven by the genealogical imperative to marry Isaac, placed on them by the angel, who says that from their "seede sall ryse, / Thurgh helpe of hym and his, / Ouere-hande of all enmys" (10.342-44). The angel adds that if in God they "trowe or triste / He will be with ȝou euere and aye" (10.349-50). The idea of nearness to God, which is central to the edification theme throughout the cycle, suggests that the image of the rising "ouere-hande" is meant to evoke, in a conflation of genealogy and metaphor, an image of the rising spiritual temple, the metaphorical locale of divine nearness.

In the Old Testament plays, the theme of the subordination of the material to the spiritual dwelling culminates in "Moses and Pharaoh." In his opening speech, Moses prays to God as his creator and the creator of the place he inhabits:

Grete God þat all þis grounde began  
 And governes euere in gud degree.  
 That made me Moyses vnto man  
 And saued me sythen out of þe see. (11.85-88)

He goes on to describe his life thus far as an expression of God's power:

Kyng Pharo he comaunded þan  
 So þat no sonnes shulde saued be,  
 Agayns his wille away I wan —  
 Thus has God shewed his myght in me. (11.89-92)

As Moses defers, in everything, to God, it is understood that he does so also with respect to the better fortune he now awaits:

Nowe am I here to kepe.

Sett vndir Synay syde.

The bisshoppe Jetro schepe.

So bettir bute to bide. (11.93-96)

Given the locational context for this expression, an image of shelter is likely to be among those evoked by “bettir bute.” According to the religious deference that characterizes this speech, that image alludes ultimately to spiritual shelter.

Pharaoh’s opening speech correspondingly focuses on the relationship between an individual and the material world. Like Moses, Pharaoh introduces himself by reference to his origins and the place he inhabits. But whereas Moses sees his origins and destiny in God, Pharaoh proudly invokes his mortal father and rejoices in his attachment to his material home:

Kyng Pharo my fadir was,

And led þe lordshippe of this lande.

I am his hayre as elde will asse,

Eure in his steede to styrre and stande. (11.5-8)

The ensuing drama, in which these contrasting attitudes to the world come into direct conflict, is typologically rich for the central struggle of the edification theme, in the trial and passion plays. In particular, “Moses and Pharaoh” establishes the important themes of virtuous stillness and entrapment within a proud order.

Given the historical circumstances of the story, the context for types of the trials and passion conflict is the realm of Egypt as a whole, for which, however, Pharaoh’s palace serves as the symbolic locale. The first typological element to be noted in this respect is a frustrated desire for peace in a world defined by a proud order. Pharaoh’s first words, in the play’s opening speech, are “O pees, I bidde þat no man passe, / But kepe þe cours þat I comaunde” (11.1-2). A few lines

later, he says, "All Egippe is myne awne / To lede aftir my lawe," (11.9-10), and then,

Therefore als kyng I commanude pees  
 To all þe pepill of þis empire.  
 That no man putte hym fourthe in prees  
 But þat will do als we desire. (11.13-16)

While Pharaoh demands obedience upon pain of death (11.4, 20), he rewards those who do obey, as he reminds his "pepill," when he tells them he is their "sufferayne sire. / That most youre comforte may encrease" (11.18-19). His counsellors declare their support for Pharaoh's order, to which end one of them reports that the "childir of Israell" threaten Pharaoh's rule both by their sheer numbers and as the prophesied genealogical source of "a man . . . / That suld fordo vs and owre dede" (11.32, 65-66). Importantly, one of the counsellors says that this prophecy originates with "clerkis, þat ful wele couthe rede" (11.64), a remark that indicates that the "childir of Israell" are invested with an order to challenge that of Pharaoh. The counsellor's report serves as the first notice of the failure of Pharaoh's order as it goes up against the divine order.

In response to the counsellors' warning, Pharaoh says he will kill the Israelites' male children and put the rest of that race in "bondage . . . / . . . þus sall þe laddis beholden lawe. / Als losellis ever thaire lyff to leede" (11.74, 77-78). This image of bondage leads to the second typological element to be noted, a sense of entrapment that attaches to pride, and that equates with the disorder that infects Pharaoh's rule. Three times it is said of the children of Israel that in Egypt they dwell in danger or evil (11.186, 212, 247). But the effects of the plagues, which show that evil inheres in Egypt as a Godless place, serve to distinguish material entrapment alone from material entrapment without spiritual shelter. After the first plague, a counsellor declares, "Oure blisse is all with bales blende" (11.258). In the word, "blisse," the counsellor's concern for the loss of material "comforte" is betrayed as an exclusion from the palace of God. When, with the locusts swarming,

an Egyptian cries out to Pharaoh. "We dar not loke oute at no dore" (11.290), there is a sense that, because the Egyptians do not enter into the palace of God, they become imprisoned behind the doors of their earthly palace. Thus, Pharaoh's plan to enforce the order of the earthly palace by placing the Israelites in "bondage" is turned against him, the Egyptians, in rejecting God's order, becoming entrapped in their own proud order.

The image of the door alludes to the spiritual shelter that is to come in Jesus.<sup>8</sup> For now, the children of Israel are going to the promised land, described as a "more plener place" (11.200), suggesting the "openness" of the spiritual union into which Moses is also leading his people.<sup>9</sup> It is typical of the plays that metaphorical fluidity should be unimpeded such that spiritual shelter is "open" so as to oppose it to material entrapment. In this metaphorical flow, the plays share in a feature that Cowling, with respect to the idea of enclosure, attributes to certain building allegories proper of the French tradition: "the special semantic status of the building with its multiple metaphoric complements provides the ideal vehicle for the articulation of a complex, multifaceted message" (147). The "wall" of sea at the end of the play (11.380) partakes of such fluidity, contributing both to the images of an entry into spiritual shelter and a crushing entrapment in the earthly place of evil.

The third typological element to note is contained within an interchange between God and Moses just after God has told him that, in order to protect the "seede," he must go to Pharaoh "To warne hym with wordes hende / So þat he lette my pepull passe" (11.120, 123-24). Moses says,

But to the kyng, lorde, whan I come

And he ask me what is thy name.

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<sup>8</sup> The metaphor of Jesus as the door to the spiritual church is discussed in detail in Calvin Kendall's *The Allegory of the Church: Romanesque Portals and Their Verse Inscriptions*.

<sup>9</sup> The theological and theatrical significance of "openness" is discussed in chapter two.

And I stande stille þan, defe and dum.

How sal I be withouten blame? (11.169-72)

God replies.

... if þou myght not meve ne mum

I sall þe saffe fro synne and shame.

.....

Be bolde in my blissyng.

Thy belde ay sall I be. (11.175-76, 179-80)

Moses' concern about violating palace rules by restraining from pronouncing God's ineffable name brings those rules right to God's doorstep, so to speak. As God understands, Moses, in voicing this concern, doubts the strength of his faith against the dual assaults of the palace: death for those who disobey, "comfort" for those who follow, Pharaoh's rule. Thus, God promises Moses to be his "belde ay," the constant spiritual shelter of the faithful, in which Moses will be "saffe fro synne and shame." Moses' silence, therefore, will be simultaneously an act of restraint from sacrilegious utterance, an act of steadfastness against the temptations of the palace, an act of patience against the threats of the palace, and a signification of the peace of the spiritual shelter that both arises from and sustains his virtuous silence, and which refers ultimately to final rest. Moreover, this peace will manifest the divine order that, in Moses' subversive act of silence, triumphs over the proud order of the palace, in which sense, therefore, his silence will symbolize also an act of obedience to God. Moses does not find himself having to remain silent before Pharaoh. With the drama avoiding the potential conflict over the naming of God, Moses' expressed concern in this respect is purely for the sake of typologically foreshadowing the traditional stillness of Jesus in the courts of his trials and passion. Restraint from uttering God's name is not, of course, carried through to the New Testament plays. But each of the other values of Moses' silence is attached to the stillness (bodily

and vocal) of Jesus, with steadfastness against temptation, patient suffering, and obedience to God being particularly prominent.

In the trial and passion plays, the opposition of the divine to a proud order governs the splitting of various concepts into moral opposites. These moral opposites constitute in part the polysemy presented to the audience, and contribute to the allegorical purpose of that polysemy by conforming to a material-spiritual opposition. Most prominent of these moral oppositions in the action of the trial and passion plays is that between virtuous and idolatrous (courtly) courtesy, the cultural forms of the opposition between divine and proud order. And most important of the practices of courtesy in this scheme are virtuous and evil stillness. As a guide to the audience's distinguishing between the two values of stillness, the plays, with typical conflation of interpretive material and means, present the still figure of Jesus. Indeed, in his stillness, Jesus is a potent guide in all aspects of the opposition between the audience's faithful interpretation and the proud interrogation conducted by the idolatrous palaces. In terms of the Augustinian polysemy of the text, Jesus' stillness clarifies that "the sign chosen for itself as against the liberation towards the one true *res* offered by the final sign of Christ is being turned into a pseudo-*res*: symbolic practice has lost its innocence" (Williams 146-47). The plays' treatment of Jesus' virtuous stillness is complex, and needs to be examined in detail, first separately and then in the context of courtly courtesy, before turning to the primary conflict of theatrical building, in which that stillness defines the spiritual shelter against entrapment typified by God's protection of Moses.

The depiction of Jesus' stillness in the courts of evil is discussed at length by Alexandra Johnston in her article, "*The Word Made Flesh: Augustinian Elements in the York Cycle.*" Johnston distinguishes between silence and bodily stillness, and takes into account the full range of possible meanings ascribed in Christian thinking to the concept of stillness, from the metaphysical to the moral. She contextualizes the depiction of Jesus' silence by showing the importance of the concept

of the *logos* to the cycle. The idea of the *logos* informs the depiction of God at the beginning of the cycle where allusions are made to “the creative power of the Word” (228). Johnston notes that in subsequent plays Jesus is described as the creator, but also that “more than the other English collections, this cycle emphasizes the Ministry episodes,” depicting Jesus as “a teacher, a gentle presence” (230). Finally, she shows that “the many connotations of the ‘word’ associated with Christ become a motif in the cycle from the episode of the Sacrifice of Isaac onward” (231). Johnston’s focus in this article is the play, “Christ before Herod,” in which, she writes, “for 424 gruelling lines, Christ stands silent as his tormentors shriek at him in English, French, and Latin demanding that he prophesy for them to provide sport for the king” (225).

With respect to Jesus’ bodily stillness, Johnston writes that the familiar idea of God as a “point of stability” leads to the idea that

the farther away one moves from God the less stable one becomes. This is, of course, related to sin and control of the bodily appetites. By implication, therefore, good is stable, tranquil, and harmonious; evil is unstable, restless, and dissonant. Augustine expresses this notion clearly when he describes the citizens of the City of God as “tranquillus” and those of the City of Man as “turbulentus.” (234-35)

Johnston adds that

the idea of good as static and evil as active seems to have become attached to the concept of “the evil one” through the Book of Job. When God asks Satan where he has come from in the prose prologue of the book, Satan replies, “From going to and fro in the earth and walking up and down in it (235):

and notes that the York Satan echoes this passage in the “Harrowing of Hell” (37.333). She draws examples of evil haste in the plays primarily from the activities of the soldiers in the passion, which she describes as a “demonic dance [that] has been emphasized throughout the trial sequence by the

reiteration of the phrase "daunce forth in þe deuyll way" (239).

Johnston's discussion shows that the two kinds of stillness have separate traditions in Christian thought, and independent thematic developments in the plays. The divergence of these traditions is no doubt partly attributable to the inevitably closer association of silence to verbal language, which for obvious reasons diverges, in its many cultural manifestations, from other forms of body "language." The divergence between silence and stillness may also be partly rooted in a difference of practicability. Silence is the more practicable of the two, allowing for other activities to continue, as in the case of monks living under a rule of silence. A rule of bodily stillness is much more extreme and difficult to maintain to any significant degree. For both these reasons, silence bears a richer tradition in religious life and thought than does bodily stillness.<sup>10</sup> In art, the constraints that apply to bodily stillness in real life may be entirely lifted. Even in performance art, they are considerably lessened. Thus, the plays develop both themes, and in doing so, demonstrate their divergent traditions.

But, of course, the two kinds of stillness have the potential to be mutually reinforcing, as Johnston shows:

The Christ in the Trial before Herod, then, is the silent Word, manifesting two characteristics of the Trinity. As the *logos*, he here refuses to be drawn into the parodic game of prophecy for entertainment, but he also stands as the "immobile One," the still silent center of the stage action that swirls around him. (233; quoting Eugene Vance).

Silence and bodily stillness may support one another by signifying, as in Johnston's example.

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<sup>10</sup> For a succinct discussion of the scriptural sources of various forms of virtuous silence, see Margaret Harvey's *Worship and Silence*, 6. More detail can be found John Chung-che Wu's unpublished dissertation, "The Significance of Silence in the Old Testament with Particular Reference to Psalm 39."

different, but compatible, values. On the other hand, there may be a conflation of the two kinds of stillness in one meaning. In a 13<sup>th</sup> century tract, silence is listed “under the gift of fortitude, treated chiefly as resistance to temptation.” notes Edwin Craun, in *Lies, Slander, and Obscenity in Medieval English Literature* (19). And in *The Myrour of Recluses*, bodily stillness is associated with steadfastness against temptation in the idea that the fixing of Jesus’ hands and feet on the cross is a sign that he will dwell with humankind in temptation (34.1051-53). In the plays, silence and stillness converge in reference to the virtue of patient suffering, when Jesus, at the time of his arrest, counsels vocal and bodily stillness to Peter, who has cut off Malchus’ ear: “Pees, Petir, I bidde þe. / Melle þe nor move þe no more” (28.278-79). This conflation is seen, again, when at the end of the cycle God says, “Whan þei me strake I stode full stilly, / Agaynstes þam did I nothyng greue” (47.263-64). Although emphasis falls, in this remark, on Jesus’ silence, the image evoked also suggests bodily stillness.

As the fixing of Jesus’ limbs on the cross may signify his steadfastness, his binding during the trial and passion plays is assimilated, by the sheer power of his willingness to be sacrificed, in the operation of his stillness as a sign of religious values. In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus reminds Peter of the “poure grete plenté / Of aungellis full many” that he might call upon but that “he þat takis vengeance all rewlid schall be right / With purgens and vengeance þat voydes in vayne” (28.281-82, 284-85).<sup>11</sup> Thus, the soldiers and Jews’ holding of Jesus “fast” (28.303), as they

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<sup>11</sup> In his glossary, Beadle writes that the meaning of “purgens” is unknown, and suggests the possibility of scribal error. The *MED* lists this occurrence under the gerund, “purging,” suggesting, “?chastisement.” Especially in the context of “voydes in vayne,” though, the general sense of cleaning away impurities seems likely. Given the circumstances of the scene, this sense of purging would have to apply to objectionable persons, in which case, Jesus is counselling against the ridding of undesirable people as an act of vengeance. There is, therefore, a possible reference to the medieval purgings of the Jews in England, and such a message may have been included in this scene of Jesus’ arrest (the speech headings include four “Judeus” among the arresting officers) in anticipation of ill-will towards Jews, and especially in remembrance of the Jewish massacre in York in 1190. The Jews were expelled from England in 1290, but this did not prevent individual Jews from carrying on active lives there. See Cecil Roth, *A History of the Jews in England*, 132-48.

lead him away, is assimilated specifically to the virtue of patient suffering.<sup>12</sup> Under the force of this assimilative power of Jesus' stillness, the actions of his tormentors are rendered futile. The point is made in the buffeting. Jesus, who has been bound for the buffeting (33.350), is unbound when it has ended (33.384), and attention is called to the fact: "Nowe vnbounde is þis broll and vnbraced his bandes" (33.386). As Jesus is yet to suffer the crowning, in which the soldiers "thryng to hym thrally with þis þikk þorne" (33.398), this remark on his unbinding points to the fact that, while the torments continue, he yet remains still in his body, patient in his suffering.

Patient suffering inevitably rises as one of the primary referents of Jesus' stillness as he is subjected to the torments of the trials and passion. As Johnston suggests in her remark on "sin and control of the bodily appetites," steadfastness is another primary referent of Jesus' stillness in these plays. After Moses, the steadfastness of Jesus is typologically figured in the fixedness of the star of Bethlehem, which one of the magi attributes to God, who "stedde yone sterne to stande stone stille. / Tille I þe cause may clerly conne" (16.84-85). Jesus is explicitly identified with the star in the next play, "The Purification," when, at the temple, Simeon addresses the departing baby Jesus with, "Fayrwell starne stablyst by lowde and by styl" (17.455). The star refers to both the moral and the metaphysical (God's immutability) steadfastness of Jesus. But the moral sense is stressed, as the star's guidance to those who would "þe cause . . . clerly conne" serves as a type of the exemplary patience and steadfastness that Jesus offers to humankind at the end of "The Temptation":

For whan þe fende schall folke see  
 And salus þam in sere degré,  
 Þare myrroure may þei make of me  
 For to stande still,

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<sup>12</sup> In the next play, Malchus specifies that the arresting soldiers "in bandis full bittirly bande hym sore" (29.138).

For ouercome schall þei nozt be

Bot yf þay will. (22.193-98)

A moment later, Jesus specifies patience and steadfastness as the referents of this stillness:

My blissing haue þei with my hande

þat with swilke greffe is nozt grucchand.

And also þat will stiffely stande

Agaynste þe fende. (22.205-08)

This closing statement reiterates the lesson of Jesus' resistance, earlier in the play, to the devil's first temptation (to gluttony) by declaring himself patient in suffering and steadfast against temptation:

My fadir, þat all cytte may slake.

Honnourre eueremore to þe I make

And gladly suffir I for thy sake

Swilk velany.

And þus temptacions for to take

Of myn enemy. (22.67-72)

In this emphasis, "The Temptation" anticipates the importance of steadfastness and patience in the drama of the trial and passions, in which Jesus is obliged, as Moses was, to enter into a world of sin and violence.

The link between steadfastness and patience and fortitude, the cardinal virtue under which they are classed, is shown in a soldier's address to Jesus, after the buffeting, once the prisoner has been sat on a stool (33.397) and crowned:

Hayll, freyke without forse þe to fende.

Hayll strang, þat may not wele stand

To stryve. (33.414-16)

Even Jesus' physical weakness is assimilated to his virtuous stillness. As he has told Peter, he could at any point call upon a "poure grete plenté." But his physical weakness is also a sign of the spiritual fortitude — the strength that *does* "wele stand / To stryve." Moreover, it is this fortitude that has allowed for his patience — his refusing to use his "forse . . . to fende." in which refusal also is seen his steadfastness against temptation. When, next, another soldier forces Jesus to raise his hand —

We, harlott, heve vp thy hande.

And vs all þat þe wirschip are wirkand

Thanke vs, þer ill mot þou pryve (33.417-19) —

there is a richly ironic echo of Jesus' promise, in "The Temptation," to bless with his "hande" those "þat with swilke greffe is noȝt grucchand, / And also þat will stiffely stande / Agaynste þe fende." To the extent that the York plays partake of the medieval tradition of building allegories, the virtue of fortitude becomes the strength of the spiritual temple, while steadfastness against temptation becomes, more specifically, the temple's defensive function.

The multivalence of the concept of stillness is attributable to that concept's quality of resisting, at one level, all signification, and thus being a cipher for any. As Johnston's article suggests, the plays fully exploit the concept of religious stillness for all its meanings. Three other referents that can be attached to the stillness of Jesus are those specified for the stillness of Moses: obedience to God, the peace of spiritual shelter in this world, and the final rest of bliss. In "The Temptation," obedience, and peacefulness and harmony, are reiterated, and one additional value is specified, as referents for Jesus' stillness. In his second attempt, the devil tries to lure Jesus into an act of pride, asking him to jump from the "pynakill" (22.91). Importantly, the devil adds, "And but þou do I will be wrothe, / þat I þe hette" (22.113-14). Jesus responds, with significant restraint, by chastising the devil for this threat:

Thy God þou schall not tempte with tene

Nor with discorde.

Ne quarell schall þou none mayntene

Agaynste þi lorde. (22.117-20)

He then adds, "Be subgette to þi souereyne" (22.123). Finally, the devil tempts Jesus to covetousness, claiming sovereignty over the world, offering to be Jesus' "belde," and to give him "Sere kyngdomes and sere contré," if Jesus will "fall and honour" him (22.149, 152, 155). Jesus resists this temptation by declaring God as the true lord, the one to be feared:

Non othyr myght schal be thy mede.

For wretyn it is, who right can rede.

Thy lord God þe aught to drede

And honoure ay. (22.163-66)

Thus, "The Temptation" lists, along with steadfastness and patience, peacefulness and harmony, obedience to God, and awe before God — all of which find expression in the scriptural image of stillness — as referents of Jesus' lesson "to stande still" in the face of the devil, as he subsequently does in the trial and passion plays.

It is important to note that, in each resistance to temptation, Jesus turns to God, which tends to enlarge the single lesson of obedience — "Be subgette to þi souereyne" — into a primary referent for his stillness, to be added to those of steadfastness against temptation and patient suffering.<sup>13</sup> The idea of stillness-as-obedience had wide currency in medieval culture in general. Peter Burke, in his

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<sup>13</sup> Collier notes the importance of obedience throughout his discussion. He includes it in the "paradigm of responses to the will of God" established in the first play of the cycle, and isolates it as the unique response of faith, writing that towards the end of "The Baptism," we see that "All help does come from heaven as John had earlier stated — Christ makes salvation available for all men — but as John has learned, the fulfillment of God's will also calls for the faithful obedience of man" (96, 115). Cf. Kolve, 238-9.

essay, "Notes for a Social History of Silence," writes that an important principle in the "system of silence in early modern Europe" was

the principle of respect, or deference, one of many signs of a fundamentally hierarchical society. Women were supposed to be silent in the presence of men, children in the presence of adults, courtiers in the presence of the prince. The respect of servants for their masters was also supposed to be shown by silence. Silence in church had a similar meaning. (135-36)

In the cycle, obedience is first established as a referent of stillness in the "The Fall of the Angels." God's stipulation that the angels bear themselves obediently in order to remain in bliss ensures the primacy of the concept of obedience in the angels' ensuing speeches. Thus, when they say, "Ay- lastande in luf lat vs lowte hym," and "Lorde, with a lastande luf we loue þe allone" (1.46, 57), their steadfastness is coupled with the virtue of obedience. When one of the angels says, "Ay with stedefaste steuen lat vs stande styll, / Lorde, to be fede with þe fode of thi fayre face" (1.75-76), steadfast obedience is located, as "berande" implies, in both bodily and vocal stillness. Conversely, the proud boasting and climbing (to the "trone") of Lucifer, are acts of inconstancy and disobedience.

After "The Temptation," obedience to God is reiterated as a referent of Jesus' stillness, in "The Agony in the Garden," where Jesus prays to God that if he might not "this payne . . . ouerpasse."

Be it worthely wrought  
Euen at thyne awne will,  
Euermore both myldely and still,

With worschippe allway be it wrought. (28.58, 60-63)

Once "this payne" has begun, the element of obedience to God, symbolically present in all of Jesus'

acts of stillness, is actualized in those acts of stillness that constitute, as we shall see, disobedience to the earthly princes' commands. Jesus begins this prayer by noting his nearness to God: "Þe nowys þat me neghed hase it nedis not to neuen. / For all wate 3e full wele what wayes I haue wente" (28.43-44). This sense of intimacy, evoking an image of Jesus and God together in their spiritual dwelling, reinforces the association of the "worthely worschippe" Jesus promises, at the end of the prayer, with spiritual building. The last line of the prayer, quoted above, especially reflects on the "worthely warke" of the audience, as it represents theatrically the spiritual church that is "With worschippe allway . . . wrought."

In its indexing of a total of five referents for Jesus' stillness, "The Temptation" draws attention not only to the multivalence of the concept of stillness, but also to the coextensiveness of all positive values attached to that concept. As we saw in the case of Moses, the various virtues that are signified by stillness tend all to be latent in each other, with all opening up through the concept of stillness to the metaphysical realm, for which the idea of stillness, again in its cypher-like quality, is especially suited. But the indexing of these five values in acts of resistance to temptation suggests that steadfastness functions as the governing idea for the multiple values referred to by Jesus' stillness in the trial and passion plays. The usefulness of steadfastness, in this respect, is that, as noted above, it has both metaphysical and moral senses, and thus demonstrates the full range of religious values signified by Jesus' stillness. Moreover, in the moral realm, it logically assumes a governing function in that, as well as denoting specifically steadfastness against temptation, it also applies to all the other virtues, in the sense of constancy. Therefore, the value signified by Jesus' stillness, in the plays, can be identified generally as steadfastness, with the understanding that the chief components of this value are, besides steadfastness against temptation, steadfast patience and steadfast obedience.

The depiction of the courtly courtesy to which Jesus' stillness (and the audience's spiritual

building) is opposed generally upholds the traditions of “the clerical rebellion against courtliness,” which is examined in Steven Jaeger’s *The Origins of Courtliness* (176-94). The term, “courtesy,” is applied, in the expected sense, to proper courtly behaviour, as when a soldier approaching Pilate’s palace remarks, “We must yappely wende in at þis yate. / For he þat comes to courte. to curtesye muste vse hym” (30.231-32). Earlier, in the same scene, the term is applied to the soldiers as they are commanded to bind Jesus: “Sir knyghtis þat are curtayse and kynde. / We charge you þat chorle be wele chyned” (30.211-12). Its use in the context of what becomes, as we shall see, a violent binding of Jesus identifies courtly courtesy as a corrupt code, and indicates the full range of its applicability. While, in the plays, the proud order to which Jesus is opposed is manifested in various forms, of which courtliness is just one, “curtayse” nevertheless also serves as a general term for that proud order, and is typologically figured in Pharaoh’s “pees.”

In this respect, courtly “curtayse” is opposed to the virtuous “curteyse” of Jesus, the variance in spelling having no significance in this respect. The term is applied to him in “The Entry into Jerusalem,” where a burgess greets Jesus with,

Hayll prince of pees schall euere endure.

Hayll kyng comely, curteyse and clere.

Hayll souerayne semely, to synfull sure. (25.490-92)

Here, virtuous courtesy is associated with both peace and especially, by way of the end rhyme (“endure . . . sure”), steadfastness, both of which are associated with the repeatedly noted princely status of Jesus. Thus, Jesus’ courtesy is firmly set in schematic opposition to the courtly courtesy of the earthly princes, and becomes attached to his stillness, the chief indicator of his virtue in that scheme.

Courtly courtesy is ascribed some of the qualities of idolatry as Augustine defines that term in the first books of *On Christian Doctrine*. The pertinent point there is based, as Williams puts it,

on

a definition of moral and spiritual error in terms of confusing means with ends.

God alone is the end of desire: and that entails that there is no finality, no “closure.”

no settled or intrinsic meaning in the world we inhabit. (140)

All material things are to be used — to be interpreted — for that one end. Augustine writes, “if we set ourselves to enjoy those [things] which we ought to use, [we] are hindered in our course, and sometimes even led away from it: so that, getting entangled in the love of lower gratifications, we lag behind in, or even altogether turn back from, the pursuit of the real and proper objects of enjoyment” (9: bk. 1, ch. 3, sec. 3). We have seen this notion of “getting entangled in the love of lower gratifications” in the plays’ theme of entrapment in the material place.

Taken to its extreme, this entanglement becomes systematized as superstition and idolatry, which constitute, as Augustine describes them in Book 2, a destructive kind of humanly-instituted knowledge. The world of “lower gratifications” becomes organized through the fabrication of a “common language” between humankind and devils: “For it was not because [omens] had meaning that they were attended to, but it was by attending to and marking them that they came to have meaning” (61: bk. 2, ch. 24, sec. 37). Augustine’s thoughts in this regard are summed up well by John Cavadini, in his article, “The Sweetness of the Word: Salvation and Rhetoric in Augustine’s *De doctrina christiana*,” where he writes that idolatry is

described as the construction of the universe as though it were a language which we invented . . . and then worshipping it as though it were the creator. But what we are worshipping is a construct of our own sign systems. In effect we use culture, the realm of signs and signification, to construct ourselves as the creators and this is the perverse sweetness which ‘delights’ us — it is our own pride, and we are worshipping — ourselves. (170)

In the plays, the idolatrousness of the earthly palaces is suggested when Herod delights in the “blessing” of a pagan divinity: “Be prince of planetis þat proudely is pight / Sall brace furth his bemes þat oure belde blithes” (16.12-13). To the extent that his “belde” is identified with the material comforts of the palace, Herod’s idolatry becomes more clearly a failure in spiritual edification: finding, that is, comfort in his sunshiny material world rather than delighting in, and entering into the shelter of, God’s blessing. It is worth noting that in the opposition of the idolatrous courts of the earthly princes to the spiritual building of the audience, the York plays may be informed to one degree or another by the patristic tradition of opposing the pagan theatre by figuring the church as a theatre of God. That tradition is traced by Christine Schnusenberg in *The Relationship between the Church and the Theatre*. As Schnusenberg shows throughout her work, the early church’s criticism of the pagan theatre centred on the charge of idolatry. As an alternative, the church offered, in Chrysostom’s terms, a *theatrum non fictitium et spirituale* (33).

Overall the plays emphasize the kind of idolatry described by Cavadini, depicting courtly courtesy as a culture of pride, an overwrought code of conduct that betrays its followers as self-worshippers. Courtesy as a culture of pride is manifested in both the speech and the actions of the courts, corresponding to the opposing silence and bodily stillness of Jesus. In both forms, an excessive concern with order leads to entangling disorder, so that the corruption of courtesy is self-evident. The theme of the courtesy of courtly speech is prominent in “The Conspiracy,” where it is developed in the appropriate context of the titular action. Pilate warns the priests, who have come to make allegations against Jesus, “But and his sawe be lawfull, legge noȝt to lange, / For we schall leue hym if us list with luffe here to lende” (26.45-46). The virtue of Pilate’s concern for justice here is undermined in its parodic reference to the divine order — God’s “luffe” — in which the providential plan precludes, and deflates, Pilate’s gesture towards accommodating Jesus in his jurisdiction. As well, over the course of the play, Pilate’s concern with justice is thematically

overwhelmed, as his other concern for controlling speech is repeatedly echoed by himself and other characters. When Pilate suggests that Jesus might be the son of God, Caiaphas argues against him, beginning with “A, softe sir, and sese” (26.58). Similarly, when a soldier recommends Jesus be hung, Pilate responds with “A, hoo sir nowe, and holde in” (26.104). Upon hearing that Judas is waiting outside the gate, Pilate tells his beadle, “Go gete hym þat his greffe we grathely may grope, / So no oppen langage be goyng amys” (26.201-02), and upon showing Judas into the court, the beadle warns him, “But vtir so thy langage that þou lette noght þare blys” (26.204). The merit of the court’s, and especially Pilate’s, desire to control speech, is undermined from the beginning, as it is preceded by the procurator’s opening speech, a typical tyrannical rant, in which for 22 lines he boasts of his rank, power, intellect, beauty, and viciousness. That the desire to control speech is rooted in pride is affirmed when Pilate reverses the usual concern to limit speech so as to encourage his praise (26.193, 207).

The court’s effort to control speech reaches its peak, in “The Conspiracy,” when Judas offers an opinion on the law: “For of als mekill mony he made me delay, / Of ʒou as I resayue schall but right be reprodred” (26.244-45). The court is outraged:

Annas: I rede noght þat ʒe reken vs oure rewle so to ray.

For þat þe false fende schall þe fang.

Soldier 1: When he schall wante of a wraste.

Doctor 1: To whome wirke we wittandly wrang.

Doctor 2: Till hym bot ʒe hastely hang.

Doctor 3: ʒoure langage ʒe lay oute to lang. (26.246-51)

There is a sense, here, that the court, in its intense desire to check Judas’s speech, becomes disordered in its own speech, which is both excessive and, at least in content, demonic. This general

disorderliness, particularly the demonic associations, may in part account for what Beadle deems to be textual problems in the lines. 247-54 (with which this passage mostly overlaps), about which he writes that they “appear unsatisfactory as to both sense and metre” (*York Plays* 443). That is, the demonic content may be reflected in the form of the speeches. Thus, the third doctor’s line is possibly directed at the others who have spoken on behalf of the court. If his rebuke is directed at Judas, there is yet an ironic comment on the verbal excess of the court.

Indeed, the passage can be read, regardless of possible textual irregularities, in the context of the play’s theme of evil and virtuous speech, the development of which in this play is a good example of the richness of the traditions in which the idea of religious silence may be located. In the context of this theme, the significance of Jesus’ silence in the later plays is further clarified. Twice, in the opening scene, reference is made to the power of Jesus’ words. Annas tells Pilate that “þer is a ranke swayne whose rule is noȝt right, / For thurgh his romour in þis reme hath raysede mekill reke” (26.33-34). Then a doctor tells Pilate, “Sir, þe strenghe of his steuen ay still is so strange / That but he schortely be schent he schappe vs to schende” (26.49-50). These remarks have the effect of affirming the power of Jesus’ word by pointing to his strong presence in this play, from which he is physically absent, paradoxically through the very words of those who conspire against him.

In the second of these two remarks, Jesus’ words are contrasted, in two related ways, with those of the conspirators. In one sense, the line means that Jesus’ voice is always (“ay still”) so “bold,” the gloss Beadle gives for this occurrence of “strange.” In this sense, attention is drawn to the constancy, or steadfastness, of Jesus’ word, which contrasts with the “curtayse” speech of the court that has an order which will not hold. In another sense, the line means that Jesus’ voice is quiet, or controlled, and yet “bold,” whereas, by implication, the court’s voice, for all its concern with controlling speech, is loud, excessive, and ineffective. This sense is particularly noticeable as

the remark comes just 21 lines after Pilate's opening rant, which is a model of loud, excessive speech that adds up to nothing. Direct allusion to the court's floundering in excessive speech occurs, through a pun, in Annas's explanation of the hatred he and Caiaphas feel for Jesus:

Nay, for swilke mys fro malice we may nozt vs meese.

For he sais he schall deme vs. þat dote.

And þat tille vs is dayne or dispite. (26.64-66)

As their inability to restrain their malice is reflected in their inability to restrain their words, the pun on "dote" is unmistakable — they do, indeed, speak foolishly.

The contrasts thus established point to the obvious but important point that Jesus' literal silence may be, at one level, symbolic of religious values that do not necessarily require literal silence, as Johnston shows in her contextualization of that silence in the broader themes of the Word. To Johnston's discussion, and to the values we have listed for Jesus' stillness, we can add the idea of verbal control or restraint, as a sign of prudence. Craun notes the importance of the Stoic sense of prudence in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> century French and English pastoral texts that treat of sins of speech. "Prudence is essential for the good life because it ensures that humans act from right choice: it is concerned with how a good act is performed, not just whether or not it is good" (48-49). Thus, these texts recommend "moderation of the tongue" (52). "Such precepts — speak briefly, speak rarely, deliberate before speaking (the mnemonic *breviloquium*, *rariloquium*, *tardiloquium*) — limit sharply the number of words, restricting the occasions and length of utterances" (53). "One recommended practice," writes Craun, "dominates most treatises: silence" (53).

Likewise, the silence of Jesus is the chief expression of verbal restraint in the plays. But throughout the plays, this prudent silence is supported, with or without irony, by evil and good characters alike advising (or passing comment on the idea) that "wordis schall nozt be wroght in

waste" (27.44).<sup>14</sup> This recommendation is summed up by Jesus, when, in one of his few speeches in the trial and passion plays, he responds to one of many demands that he speak, with the following words:

Euery man has a mouthe þat made is on molde  
 In wele and in woo to welde at his will.  
 If he gouerne it gudly like as God wolde  
 For his spirituale speche hym thar not to spill.  
 And what gome so gouerne it ill.  
 Full vnhendly and ill sall he happe:  
 Of ilk tale þou talkis vs vntill  
 þou accounte sall, þou can not escape. (33.300-07)

In the context of prudence, then, Jesus' literal silence equates with "spirituale speche," the objective being not constant silence, but that one "gouerne" one's speech "gudly like as God wolde."

Courtly verbal courtesy runs into disorder, because it is governed as the earthly princes would. In other words, it is not truly governed at all. Johnston writes that the moral opposition of "frenetic activity by the wicked" and "the calm stillness of good" is a tradition found generally in the late-medieval art and literature of western Europe, and that "it provided for the English playwrights an underlying theological principle around which to build their dramaturgy" (236). With respect to courtly courtesy, we can see how this tradition is combined with that of verbal prudence, so that the opposition between "frenetic activity by the wicked" and "the calm stillness of good" is elaborated with an ironic contrast between false, fitful stillness and a true one.

Craun notes the reliance, in the most extensive treatment of verbal sin in his period of study

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<sup>14</sup> See also, for example, 12.53-54, 30.236, 32.181, 33.460, and 41.87.

— Guillaume Peyraut's *Summa de vitiis*, which had wide circulation in England (16) — on the “key Augustinian metaphor: to utter a word, the messenger of reason, without reason's control reduces the speaker to a beast (a *iumentum*, a plodding beast of burden), undeserving of the power of speech” (33). In the plays, this metaphor occurs, when Caiaphas, having returned from Herod without a conviction against Jesus, says to Pilate, “Resayue in your sall þer sawes þat I saie you. / Late bryng hym to barre and at his berde sall we baye” (33.86-87). Importantly, this remark emphasizes the locale in which this baying will take place. Therefore, the theme of speech governed by courtly courtesy is linked to the edification theme: those whose verbal prudence is based in the imperfect order of courtly courtesy are not only excluded from spiritual dwelling and entrapped in their material palaces, but, for all their courtesy and comfort, become like animals.

The court's inability to truly control speech is most evident in its willingness to deal with Judas, who, ironically foreshadowing the presence of the silent Jesus in the earthly courts of evil, is figured as evil speech come to Pilate's court to “bargayne” away his master (26.219). Satan claims, in “The Harrowing of Hell,” that he “entered in Judas” in order to counsel the death of Jesus (37.165). In “The Conspiracy,” this evil in Judas is externalized as physical disfigurement. He is met at the palace gate by a porter, who is repulsed by his “fals face,” and tells him that he is “wikkid of werk” and “combered in curstnesse” (26.161, 165, 171). But in the ensuing threshold scene, with its implicit allusion to the metaphorical threshold in Jesus, the potent metaphoricity points to the earthly palace itself as a speaker of evil. That is, in this case, the allegorical opposition of the palace to Jesus as the spiritual temple is achieved with an inversion, on the side of the earthly palace, of the person-building metaphor.

Judas verbally worms his way into the palace, repeatedly telling the porter — and saying little else — that he has something to tell the court, and urging the porter to listen to his words:

... I have tythandis to telle.

.....  
 . . . mirthe meve I moste.  
 .....  
 . . . take tente to my talkyng þis tyde.  
 For tythandis full trew can I telle.  
 .....  
 . . . and þe truthe schulde be tryed  
 Of myrthe are þer materes I mell.  
 .....  
 If I be callid to counsaile þat cause schall be knawen.

(26.160. 173. 177-78. 181-82. 185)

As the porter finally agrees to inform the court of Judas's desire for audience, the power of the evil word, as figured in Judas, is seen in its ability to achieve its evil ends. The ineffectiveness of verbal restraint based in the imperfect order of courtly courtesy is especially evident in the porter's assumption that, even as he prepares to admit Judas through the gates, he is controlling speech:

Byde me here bewchere or more blore be blownen,  
 And I schall buske to þe benke wher baneres are bright  
 And saie vnto oure souereynes, or seede more be sawen,  
 þat swilke a seege as þiselff sewes to þer sight. (26.187-90)

In fact, the admission of Judas, as evil speech come to sell Jesus, through the gate is, metaphorically, the most profound act of verbal incontinence imaginable.

The elaboration of these themes in a threshold scene implicitly draws upon the anatomical threshold imagery that, as Craun shows, is used to illustrate the virtue of prudent speech in the pastoral texts. Craun describes the "Solomonic strain" in the idea of verbal prudence:

First it appeals generally to self-preservation by arguing that speaking leaves us vulnerable to enemies. Its keynote is the text "Qui custodit os suum: custodit animam suam" [He that keepeth his mouth keepeth his soul] (Prov. 13.3), with its emphatic paralleling of physiological cause and spiritual effect. It relies on scriptural analogy: the open mouth is a city without walls, a camp or house without a gate, a vase without a lid. (49)

The pertinent gate image is elaborated in, for example, *The Rule of the Master*, in which "depraved speech" is blocked at a gate:

Thus our soul has in place its door the mouth, and its lock, the teeth, which it closes to depraved speech so the soul may not offer the excuse that its maker did not in any way provide it with defenses for its protection. In other words, when some sin arises from the root of the heart and sees that its exit is blocked by the enclosure of the outside wall, namely, the mouth and the teeth, returning again to the root of the heart it perishes there as a miscarriage and is dashed upon the rock while yet young instead of being born of the tongue and growing up to be punished. (126)

In this metaphorical tradition, Judas and the palace are conflated in the act of verbal imprudence, the former becoming the open gate, the latter (with its literal open gate) becoming the speaker of evil. That is, as Judas crosses the threshold of the gate, the palace metaphorically opens its mouth and speaks the vilest of words, pointing again to the utter futility of the court's proud ordering of speech.

Despite the fact that the court's evil, as represented by its "curtayne" speech, is established before the arrival of Judas, there is a sense, in the metaphorical cross-over between evil speaker and palace, that the palace is infected with the evil speech of Judas. In this sense of infection lies the idea, from the Solomonic and Jamesian tradition, that "to speak heedlessly, in defiance of nature and of God, is to harm all within the circle of speech: speaker, listeners, those spoken about" (Craun 50).

Thus, in the porter's accusation, "To marre men of myght haste þou marked in thy mynde" (26.172), we should understand that Judas's evil will strike at the earthly princes as well as Jesus.

Returning to the court's outrage at being counselled on the law by Judas, we can now read that passage in the context of the pastoral tradition of prudent speech. When Annas warns Judas, "þe false fende schall þe fang," the image needs to be understood as a duality of evil catching evil. That is, for speaking out of turn, Judas will be caught by the devil, but also he will be catching the devil in his own mouth. Annas's warning, then, exactly expresses the pastoral tradition of words becoming sinful as they pass through the mouth. The soldier's line — "When he schall wante of a wraste" — reinforces this sense of something caught in the mouth, through a pun on the word, "waste," which can mean, besides "evil trick," to "twist the body (in order to afflict)," Beadle's gloss for other occurrences of the word. The image of these combined lines is that of Judas twisting, as he speaks evil, the devil in his mouth. The first doctor's remark — "To whome wirke we wittandly wrang" — makes no clear distinction between the court being for or against the devil. The reckless sentiment is echoed by Pilate, moments later in the scene, when he says, "For it is beste for oure bote in bayle for to bowe" (26.270). The second doctor's remark — "Till hym bot ȝe hastily hang" — continuing with the sense that they knowingly work evil for the devil, suggests, in a highly compressed fashion, that they will do so until both Judas and Jesus hang. Finally, we should note that the idea of the infectious quality of evil speech affirms the universal applicability of the third doctor's charge, "ȝoure langage ye lay oute to lang.": all these "men of myght" have been "marred" by the evil speech that has entered into Pilate's court.

In the archi-anatomical threshold context, Satan's later remark that he "entered in Judas," thus, has surprising semantic depth, including the ideas that he possessed Judas, that he did so specifically through verbal sin and the threshold of the mouth, and that, in the parallel threshold

image, he entered into Pilate's court in Judas, infecting further that already verbally sinful place. That Satan's remark itself is made at a threshold — inside the gates of hell, with Jesus, who, says Satan, "traueses vs alway" (37.150), on the outside, crying "Opyne vppe" (37.194) — is indicative of the central place of the edification theme in the York cycle.<sup>15</sup>

The plays develop the theme of verbal prudence in tandem with that of fruitful movement, which — though bodily stillness, as I have suggested, does not generally have the extensive tradition silence does — substantially matches the verbal tradition, providing a useful thematic parallel for the depiction of courtly courtesy. The tradition of fruitful and fruitless movement, in the context of Augustine, is summed up well by Douglas Gray when he writes in his article, "Saint Augustine and Medieval Literature," that "the pilgrimage of life of the citizens of the city of God is purposeful and teleological — as against aimless wandering ("blustering forth like beasts" in Langland's phrase) or choosing to take the lefthand road" (38). But even haste can be fruitful, as exemplified by Abel's desire to "go . . . in haste" to make sacrifice (7.57). The idea is a commonplace of medieval thought, expressed here by Gueric of Igny, in his third sermon on the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Happy is he who in all his labors and in all his ways seeks blessed rest, always hastening, as the Apostle exhorts, to enter into that rest. For desire of it he afflicts his body, but already prepares and disposes his spirit for that rest, being at peace with all men as far as it lies with him. Giving the preference, where his will is concerned, to the rest and the leisure of Mary, to the extent that necessity demands he accepts the toil and the business of Martha, yet does this with as much peace and quiet of spirit as he can, and always brings himself back from that manifold

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<sup>15</sup> Threshold scenes are discussed in detail later in this chapter.

distraction to the one thing necessary.

A man of this sort is at rest even when he is working, just as, on the contrary, the godless man has to work even when he is resting. (Sermon 49: vol.2, p.180)

This passage contrasts well with the plays' depiction of the futility of courtly courtesy as a source of order. Having wrongly chosen that code of conduct as "the one thing necessary," the court has not an anchor in the "manifold distraction" of the world, but rather a falsity that leads them always back into that distraction.

The depiction of this failure, with respect to bodily and verbal courtesy in conjunction, is particularly evident in actions that involve Pilate's beadle, who appears to function in the plays in large part for the sake of the courtly courtesy theme. In "Christ before Pilate I," the beadle is given instructions by Pilate, who wants quiet while he sleeps (30.138-39). The beadle acknowledges the command, but then Pilate goes on:

Yha, who chatteres, hym chastise, be he churle or childe,  
 For and he skape skatheles itt were to vs a grete skorne—  
 Yf skatheles he skape it wer a skorne.  
 What rebalde þat redely will rore,  
 I schall mete with þat myron tomorne  
 And for his ledir lewdenes hym lerne to be lorne. (30.142-47)

The excessiveness, and thus self-defeating nature, of this command for peace, which is particularly evident in the repetition in ll.143-44, is slyly noted in the beadle's reply: "Whe! So sir, slepe ye, and saies no more" (30.148).

Later in this play, the beadle kneels to Jesus in an act Pilate refers to as "yone curtasie." That he thinks this "curtasie . . . had som cause" merely points to his obliviousness to any but the proud order by which his court functions (30.329). A soldier says of this act that the beadle "prayed

hym of pees" (30.320), a remark that gathers ironic significance as the beadle is then further subjected to excessive ordering. He is commanded to call the prisoner to the bench, but not before Pilate properly positions him to make the call: "But steppe furth and stonde vppon hight" (30.365). Pilate then has the beadle call "Oyas" (30.370), asks him to do it again, and then asks for it to be

Yit lowdar, that ilke lede may lithe—

Crye pece in this prese, vppon payne þervppon.

Bidde them swage of þer sweying bothe swiftly and swithe

And stynte of þer stryuyng and stande still as a stone.

Calle Jesu þe gentill of Jacob, þe Jewe.

Come preste and appere.

To þe barre drawe þe nere.

To þi jugement here.

To be demed for his dedis vndewe. (30.371-79)

As the action then immediately shifts to the soldiers guarding Jesus, Pilate's ordering of courtly procedure, both bodily and verbal, is revealed as being redundant, and, in its excessiveness, self-defeating, bringing disorder instead of order, creating commotion in the pursuit of "pece."

In "Christ before Pilate 2," Pilate not only orders the beadle into position and makes him follow instructions for what must be a familiar procedure, but allows an outsider to the court to give those instructions:

Do stiffely steppe on þis stalle.

Make a crye, and cantely þou call

Euene like as ser Annay þe sais. (33.261-63).

Annas then makes an elaborate call, which is followed by a stage direction for the beadle to repeat it after him:

Oyes. Jesu. þou Jewe of gentill Jacob kynne.

þou nerthrist of Nazareth. now neuend is þi name.

Alle creatures þe accuses. We commaunde þe comme in

And aunswer to þin enemys: deffende now thy fame. (33.264-67)

Again, the excess of the language (evident particularly in the inappropriate word-play of “nerthrist of Nazareth”) and the physical positioning betrays courtly courtesy as a false order that is inherently corrupt.

As the inherent corruption of courtly courtesy is self-evident in its inability to sustain order, the stillness of Jesus self-evidently opposes this courtesy, in its constancy. With respect specifically to the idolatrous element in courtly courtesy, we can add another possible, and self-evident, referent to Jesus’ stillness: that it opposes the false culture as, in Rowan Williams’ words, the “emptiness of meaning and power that makes Christ supremely *signum*” (144). To the extent that the idolatrous nature of the earthly palaces is always in evidence in the staging of the plays, this referent of Jesus’ stillness, though it may not be specifically articulated, will be generally understood, as an element of the metaphysical sense of stillness discussed by Johnston.

But there is also a direct conflict between Jesus and courtly courtesy. Historically, that direct conflict, as it pertains broadly to the proud order of the earthly princes, is most apparent in Jesus’ attack on the money-changers. As James Williams puts it, in *The Bible, Violence, and the Sacred*, Jesus’ attack in the temple is a threat “to the ancient order of things, to the whole system of differences that has been established between orderly and disorderly, clean and unclean, inside and outside, superior and inferior — a threat, in short, to the total language of signs and gestures and marks that make up a culture” (230). The attack is narrated in “The Conspiracy,” where, supporting the high priests in their accusations against Jesus, a doctor says,

For in oure temple has he taught by tymes moo þan tenne

Where tabillis full of tresoure lay to telle and to trye.

Of oure cheffe mony-changers — butte, curstely to kenne.

He caste þam ouere, þat caystiffe, and counted noȝt þerby. (26.71-74)

The speech makes it clear that Jesus' target should be understood as his enemies' false culture by punningly reiterating Jesus' rejection of that culture, in the final remark that he "counted noȝt þerby." That the counting tables and courtly courtesy are two parts of the same false culture is indicated, in the second last line, by the doctor's parenthetical expression of his sense of shame at having to speak of such violent behaviour.

In the trial and passion plays, Jesus' direct conflict with the proud order continues as his bodily and vocal stillnesses constitute, as well as symbolic opposition, acts of resistance to courtly courtesy. These violations of courtly courtesy are constantly remarked upon throughout the trials and passion. Caiaphas says that Jesus "will noȝt bowe for oure bidding," and commands his soldiers to "lerne yone boy bettir to bende and bowe" (29.339, 349). In Pilate's court, when Jesus does not move to the bar at the appropriate time, the soldiers, who think he "heldis oute of harre," ask him, "why brawlest [disobey — with obvious punning] þou?" and tell him, "Steppe on thy standyng so sterne and so stoute. / Steppe on thy standyng so still" (30.380, 382-84).<sup>7</sup> When Jesus is brought forward, Pilate's son, echoing the devil's desire, in "The Temptation," for Jesus to "fall and honour" him, chides him for not falling "flatte" before his father: "þou can not be curtayse, þou caytiffe I calle þe" (30.392, 390). When he is brought before Herod, he is warned,

Harke cosyne, þou comys to karpe with a kyng.

Take tente and be conande, and carpe as þou knowis.

Ya, and loke þat þou be not a sotte of thy saying.

But sadly and sone þou sette all þi sawes. (31.169-72)

Jesus does not "karpe" with the king, and Herod says, "Hym semys full boudisch, þat boy þat þei

bryng" (31.173).<sup>16</sup> And when he does not kneel before Herod, the king remarks, "Loo sirs, he mekis hym no more vnto me / Panne it were to a man of þer awne tounē" (31.179-80; see also 31.236).

It is in these acts of resistance to courtly courtesy, and in his willingness to suffer the torments of his passion, that Jesus exemplifies the lesson of "The Temptation": to be with "greffe . . . noȝt grucchand," and to "stiffely stande / Agaynste þe fende." Each act of stillness also signifies all the values of stillness specified in the plays, each shading into the other. There is, to elaborate on steadfastness in particular, a sense of the true, constant order (both moral and metaphysical) that opposes the instability of the false order of the evil courts. There is in each act of stillness also a sense of obedience to God entailed in disobedience to evil: a sense of the "emptiness of meaning and power" that opposes idolatry; a sense of peace and tranquility that opposes anger and violence; a sense of awe before God that opposes the grandeur of the earthly princes; a sense of prudence that opposes excess; and finally a promise of final rest that opposes eternal damnation. All are gathered into the edification theme where they become attributes of the spiritual temple that opposes the imprisoning disorder of the palaces of evil.

The incorporation of the themes of virtuous stillness and entrapment in a proud order into the theme of spiritual edification is notable in their development in threshold scenes, which depict the arrival of Jesus at the gates of the palaces of evil. Outstanding in this respect is the threshold scene in which Caiaphas and Annas bring Jesus to Pilate. The irony of Caiaphas's remarking upon their courtesy in the context of the binding of Jesus lies at the heart of the thematic integration of stillness, order, and entrapment. The soldier's having "drevyn" (30.199) Jesus through the night from Caiaphas's palace to some point within view of Pilate's gates (30.230), Caiaphas commands,

Sir knyghtis þat are curtayse and kynde.

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<sup>16</sup> A point of distinction between Jesus and his Old Testament type in this action is that Moses, having been sent by God to negotiate rather than redeem, does, as he says, "carpe to þe kyng" (11.201).

We charge you þat chorle be wele chyned.

Do buske you and grathely hym bynde

And rugge hym in ropes his rase till he rewe. (30.211-14)

The soldiers comply with relish: "late vs feste þis faitour full fast. / . . . / Latte vs pulle on with pride till his poure be paste. / Do haue faste and halde at his handes" (30.216, 218-19). That the code of courtly courtesy governs the binding of Jesus, in which the courtesy of his stillness is figured, is a good example of the sort of irony regularly achieved, in the plays, in the impacting of persistent spiritual blindness against the light of divine truth. In the context of the edification theme, this irony reads as the inability of these "dowtiest" (30.227) to enter into spiritual shelter even as they reinforce, however vainly, the stillness of that shelter.

Each time Jesus is brought to court, someone remarks on the fact that he is bound (29.30; 30.260; 31.79; 33.45), indicating the general symbolic significance of that binding. Outside the gates of Pilate's palace, attention is drawn to the bodily and vocal stillness of Jesus, misinterpreted by one of the soldiers, who remarks, "Loo, he stonyes for vs, he stares where he standis" (30.223). Foreshadowing the major interpretive rift that opens in the trials, this misinterpretation sets the soldiers apart from the audience, which knows full well the meaning of Jesus' stillness. In his vocal stillness outside these gates, Jesus stands in direct contrast to Judas, talking his way through the same gates, in "The Conspiracy." The association of Jesus' stillness with steadfastness is affirmed by an ironic allusion to the fixed star of Bethlehem when, approaching Pilate's palace, a soldier tells those gathered outside the gate, "Here, ye gomes, gose a-rome, giffe vs gatte. / We must steppe to yone sterne of astate" (30.229-30).

The failure of the soldiers and their commanders to enter into the spiritual shelter of him whom they have bound implies their entrapment in the courtly courtesy by which they have bound him. The inherent corruption of that code is made clear by the fact that the line, "We must yappely

wende in at þis yate. / For he þat comes to courte, to curtesye muste vse hym" (30.231-32), is delivered as the soldiers are discourteously butting their way through the crowd towards "yone sterne of astate." Moreover, their very need to clear room in the crowd symbolizes their entrapment in a proud materiality, a device that is also used, in "The Temptation," to symbolize the devil's self-entrapment, as he struggles through the audience, crying, "Make rome belyve, and late me gang!" (22.1). In this image of the entrapped soldiers leading the bound Jesus, there is a distinction, following the typology of "Moses and Pharaoh," between material entrapment without spiritual shelter and material entrapment alone. Thus, the binding of Jesus is figured in the threatened enslavement of the Israelites, and the entrapment of Jesus' enemies in courtly courtesy is figured in the entrapment of the Egyptians in Pharaoh's proud order.

In two other threshold scenes, the perversity of a palace that attempts to function on a proud order is suggested, in the context of the theme of stillness, by an interchange between those who bring Jesus and those who guard the palace. Having reached the gate of Caiaphas's palace, one soldier says, "Sir, þis is Cayphas halle here at hande. / Go we boldly with þis boy þat we haue here broght." To which another replies, "Nay sirs, vs muste stalke to þat stede and full still stande. / For itt is nowe of þe nyght, yf þei nappe oght" (29.174-77). The same soldier, then, asks, "Say, who is here?" to which a palace guard responds with, "Say who is here?" (29.178).<sup>17</sup> This action is repeated, when the soldiers arrive with Jesus at Herod's palace. One of them asks, "Who is here?" to which a guard responds, "Who is there?" (31.59). When they identify themselves, they are told, "Sirs, but youre message may myrthis amende. / Stalkis furthe be yone stretis or stande stone still" (31.61-62). In both scenes, the guard's need to assert his authority by overruling the initial

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<sup>17</sup> The scene outside the gates of Caiaphas' palace includes Peter's denial of Jesus, which will be discussed in the following chapter.

challenge points to the instability of the proud order of the palace.<sup>18</sup>

The references to stillness, as the soldiers arrive with Jesus bound, sharply focus the ongoing ironic contrast between the virtuous stillness of Jesus and courtly courtesy. Throughout the plays, the earthly princes demand stillness both of specific characters and of their generic court audiences, with which the plays' real audience more than likely overlapped. Thus, the soldiers who bring Jesus for his second trial before Pilate are told, "Wele, stirre nozt fro þat stede, but stande stille þare" (33.157), and Pilate orders his beadle to command the court to "swage of þer sweying bothe swiftly and swithe / And stynte of þer stryuyng and stande still as a stone" (30.373-74). The bowing banners in Pilate's court, which are discussed in detail below, are a good example of how the concept of stillness contributes, by way of contrast with Jesus, irony to the depiction of the earthly prince's frustrated desire for order: "Sir, oure strenght myght nozt stabill þam stille" (33.186). The command for stillness in the court audience is discussed in detail in the context of theatrical enclosure, in the final chapter. For now, it is important to note that the spiritual blindness of the soldiers outside the gates of Pilate's palace is all the more apparent in their willingness to stand still according to their temporal code of conduct, while Jesus stands still in steadfastness next to them.

In three threshold scenes, Jesus' stillness is specifically contrasted with a peace that will not hold. In scenes which immediately, or penultimately, precede the action of bringing Jesus to their palaces, Caiaphas, Pilate, and Herod retire to sleep, with warnings that they not be disturbed (29.83-84; 30.137-39, 31.42), but are shortly thereafter awoken, much to their anger, by the arrival of the

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<sup>18</sup> At the opening of *Hamlet*, Barnardo challenges the guard he has come to relieve with, "Who's there?" Francisco overrules him with, "Nay, answer me. Stand and unfold yourself" (1.i.1-2). The New Variorum edition of the play notes that Barnardo's irregular challenge has been interpreted as a sign of his fear at meeting the ghost. It is worth adding that the issue of rightful authority is a major theme in the play, and that Shakespeare may have written this opening in awareness of some minor dramatic tradition involving such themes set in castle interiors.

soldiers with Jesus (29.191, 30.242, 31.71).<sup>19</sup> The suggestions that the soldiers be still outside the gates, prove, in this respect, to be in vain, further undermining the value of courtly courtesy. The sleep of the princes itself is also associated with courtly courtesy. As each prince prepares for bed, there is drinking of wine (29.75, 30.135, 31.41). In the first example, much is made of the “licoure full delicious” (29.77), suggesting the tone of excessive refinement that is intended in each case. Caiaphas also takes inordinate pleasure in the very act of being “dayntely” laid out and covered (29.81). In the cases of Pilate and Herod, similar expressions of excessive sensitivity also include suggestions of various sexual acts. Pilate commands his servant, “tene me not with þi tastyng, but tendirly me touche. / . . . / Yhit helde doune and lappe me even here. / For I will slelye slepe vnto synne” (30.134, 136-37), and Herod tells his, “Ya, but as þou luffes me hartely, laye me doune softly. / For þou wotte full wele þat I am full tendirly hydid.” adding that he is “All hole at my desire” (31.48-49, 51). Thus, the retirement scenes depict three elements of courtly courtesy, that, as Jaeger shows, were targeted in clerical attacks on courtliness: “refinements of . . . eating habits” (189), “softened, effeminizing vanities” (178), and “fornication and lasciviousness” (188). When Herod wishes all “goode nyght,” in the names of “Satan oure sire. / And Lucifer moste luffely of lyre” (31.52-54), the sinfulness of this courtliness is made explicit. The association of sinfulness with the sleep of the evil princes creates a double contrast with the bound Jesus, in both the true peace and the steadfastness against temptation that are figured in that binding.

In the court scenes, the depiction of the proud order of the palace as a failure to interpret allegorically is evident in the mocking of Jesus as king. At one level, such mocking contributes to the edification theme simply by drawing attention to the presence of the king of the heavenly palace

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<sup>19</sup> In the case of Pilate, there is an intervening scene, but as it depicts the interrupted sleep of Pilate’s wife, who is visited by the devil, it reinforces the theme of a peace that will not hold. In the second Pilate play, Jesus is brought into the court while the procurator is consulting with the high priests (33.45), with no scene of his arrival at the palace gate.

in the earthly courts of evil. But there is an inherent failure in this mocking, because it is based on the false assumption that Jesus claims to be a temporal king. To the earthly princes and their helpers Jesus is the “kyng þat no kyngdom has kende,” a “lord without lande for to lende” (33.409, 412). The irony that these remarks unwittingly hit upon the truth of Jesus’ spiritual kingship sharply points to the failure of interpretation that mars the earthly courts: all signs are understood only in a material sense.

This failure of interpretation is noted and specifically placed in the context of edification, when Herod, having heard that Jesus claims to be king, says, “But he schalle sitte be myselfe sen ze saie soo. / Comes nerre, kyng, into courte. Saie, can ze not knele?” (31.235-36). Jesus’ refusal to “comes nerre” registers as Herod’s failure to build, through faithful interpretation, the spiritual temple in which divine nearness would occur. The allegorical corollary of this failure is entrapment within the evil courts. As “allegory builds faith,” its absence locks the soul in a prison of materiality. Entrapment is specifically alluded to when Pilate, having ordered his soldiers to arrest Jesus, tells them, “Do flitte nowe forthe till ze fette hym / With solace all same to youre sale” (26.293-94). The idea that the soldiers will find “solace” in bringing Jesus to their “sale” — one imagines the palace dungeon where the prisoner can be held for arraignment — points to the absence of true “solace” from that place, which becomes, then, symbolic of the soldiers’ spiritual imprisonment.

Of particular significance in the opposition of spiritual shelter to material entrapment is a semantic duality in the word, “spirre.” Designating both the audience’s faithful interpretation and the judges’ proud, anti-allegorical interrogation of Jesus — the single instance of the latter application to be discussed below — “spirre” describes, as it prompts, that interpretive conflict. Moreover, as with all such moral dualities in the plays, the semantic split in “spirre” also entails an expression of spiritual consequences. The selective capacity inhering in the pun is an effect noted

by Quilligan. Commenting on *The Faerie Queene*, she writes.

The whole *Visio* implies that there are two different kinds of wordplay: the good sort, such as "trielich" which reflects the polysemy invested in language by God and which points toward truth; and the bad sort, which gains power when man does not recognize its punning doubleness. (63)<sup>20</sup>

Thus, only those who faithfully "spirre" shall "enspyre þe mighte" of, and "comes nerre" to, God. In reverse of the evil courts, the allegorical corollary of the audience's faithful spiring is its avoidance of entrapment in proud materiality.

Complementing "spirre," in this sense, is "game," which refers to both evil interrogation and faithful interpretation, as well as, respectively, to the corruption and joy engendered therein. The clearest association of "game" with faithful interpretation is made as Jesus prepares to release the prophets and patriarchs from hell:

All þat in werke my werkemen were.

Owte of thare woo I wol þame wyne.

And some signe schall I sende before

Of grace, to garre þer gamys begynne.

A light I woll þei haue

To schewe þame I schall come sone. (37.17-22)

From the audience's perspective, the harrowing is analogous to the second coming of Jesus. Thus, the "signe . . . sen[t] before / Of grace, to garre þer gamys begynne" figures the present theatrical game, in which Jesus' "werkemen" are doing their "worthely warke" of interpreting the signs of the

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<sup>20</sup> Evil figures of the supernatural or metaphorical kind are privy to the cosmic knowledge that allows for such punning, as noted most famously by Shakespeare's Richard the Third: "Thus, like the formal Vice, Iniquity, / I moralize two meanings in one word" (3.1.82-83).

plays, in joyous anticipation of their return to bliss. In the drama, Adam is the first to respond to the light:

Nowe see I signe of solace seere,

A glorious gleme to make vs gladde.

Wherfore I hope oure helpe is nere. (37.41-43)

The audience's knowledge that Adam's hope is about to be realized lends to his faithful interpretation of the "glorious gleme" a sense of the power of spiring — for Adam, as for the audience, it brings God near. The edification theme, in this case, is set firmly in the action of harrowing, a triumph of spiritual shelter over the place of evil.

Kolve shows that there is a high frequency in the cycle passion plays of "the words 'jape,' 'jest,' 'bourde,' and 'layke,' all of which are used again and again to describe the actions by which Christ is captured, brought to trial, buffeted, scourged, and killed" (180). In one point in particular, Kolve's discussion of game terms supports the present argument. He writes that these terms are "used in the text to signal a series of game substitutions made *in the minds* of Christ's opponents . . . [with] frequent substitution of a game figure for Christ as a real person . . . [and] frequent substitution of game action for essential parts of the *tortores'* assigned task." (181). Of the York plays, specifically, he writes, "only intermittently do the tormentors actually focus upon Him as He really is, charged with certain specific crimes; for the most part He is simply a person in their power, from whom they derive such amusement and diversion as they can" (186). Thus, as "game" denotes for the audience faithful discernment of the plays' signs, for the interrogators it points to their failure to do so, as their games take them far in the opposite direction, into substitutions even for Jesus' temporal reality.

Kolve writes that, in the cycles, "game" also applies to the willing participation of Jesus in his passion, and more broadly to divine providence:

the great subject [of medieval cycle drama] was a struggle for power played out as game but in fact historically real and deadly serious — a battle between God and Satan for man's soul, in which the outcome is never in doubt, but where the price of victory is a terrible one. (204)

In this context, he writes,

free-will in these plays is, in some sense, an illusion: the judges themselves choose to doom Christ, and the executioners think they are serving only their official masters, but all this is ironic in meaning. They do not know what we know as audience, that they are playing essential roles in a divine game. (201)

Within this broader perspective, though, the theatrical building that joins the audience with Jesus against the courts operates on the related principles that faith is uncertain and individuals are free to choose. In the context of spiritual edification, the wrong choice is championed by Satan, who argues that Jesus does not deserve honour because “þe lady þat calles hym lorde in leede / Hadde neuer gitt herberowe, house, ne halle” (37.135-36). The uncertainty of the redemptive game as it applies to the individual soul is exemplified in the case of the perfect soul of Mary, to whose dying request that she be prevented from seeing the “fende,” Jesus replies, “But modir, þe fende muste be nedis at þyne endyng / In figure full foule for to fere þe” (44.134, 154-55).

For the audience, its obligation to choose between material entrapment and spiritual building is reinforced by a self-evident temporal overlap of evil interrogation and faithful interpretation. Attention is drawn to this overlap by the actions and words of the judges, as they prepare for interrogation. When Caiaphas is woken with the news of Jesus's arrest, he calls Annas to the court and tells him, “A, sir, come nere and sitte we bothe in fere,” this desire for nearness invested with the usual irony (29.201; also 29.199). Annas then says, “Do sir bidde þam bring in þat boy þat is bune” (29.202). “Pese now sir Anna,” says Caiaphas, “þe stille and late hym stande. /

And late vs grope yf þis game be grathly begune.” with typical ironic contrast between courtly and virtuous stillness (29.203-04). Annas replies, “Sir, þis game is begune of þe best. / Nowe hadde he no force for to flee þame” (29.205-06). Finally, Caiaphas says, “Nowe in faithe I am fayne he is fast. / Do lede in þat ladde. late me se þan” (29.207-08). The double sense of “þis game is begune of þe best” points to the fact that both games are beginning at once, the arraignment of the dramatic character of Jesus for interrogation coinciding with the appearance of the theatrical figure of Jesus for interpretation. This simultaneity is reinforced perhaps by a pun on “best”-“beast,” here, and in a later play, when Herod remarks, “That were a bourde of þe beste, be Mahoundes bloode” (31.254), both occurrences thereby contributing to the innumerable ascriptions of the demonic to these courts.

The theatric-forensic overlap extends to the sitting of the interrogators. When Caiaphas and Annas arrange themselves “bothe in fere,” they are not unlike any members of the audience taking their seats for the performance, either at the windows of second-storey rooms or in the scaffolds that were erected at the performance stations.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, in “Christ before Pilate I,” when Caiaphas and Annas arrive at Pilate’s court, they are invited by him to sit at the bench. The moment is prolonged by their declining to do so. They feel “laughter is leffull for vs” (30.276). When Pilate tells them “curtayse” demands it (30.277), Annas still resists. But Pilate will have them higher: “Sais no more, but come sitte you beside me in sorowe as I saide youe” (30.279). Such displays of courtesy would surely be familiar to the audience from similar behaviour in its own settling in for the performance, the moral status of courtly courtesy creating certain discordance in any such recognition. With this overlap, the audience is put in a position analogous to that of all Christians: the evil place triumphs by default, as is suggested by God’s directive to be “wynly wake,” to those who would “right repente” (47.195), but even to those who are with him in heaven (2.24). To fail to

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<sup>21</sup> For evidence of spectators in rooms and on scaffolds, see “rooms” and “scaffolds” in the index of Johnston and Rogerson’s *REED York*.

partake in Christian allegory is tantamount to entrapment; and like Adam in hell, the audience must actively interpret the "signe" of Jesus with worthy vigilance *against* the evil place.

The sitting of the earthly princes of evil is an important motif throughout the trial and passion plays. The association of sitting with pride is established at the start of this play sequence, when Caiaphas, in his court, says, "So semely in seete me semys for to sitte" (29.7). Always, the image of Jesus sitting on his heavenly throne — itself or as referred to by his forced sitting in a stool — semantically governs the sitting of the earthly princes, marking the evil courts where those acts occur in significant opposition to the heavenly court.<sup>22</sup> Particularly, when, in "Christ before Pilate 2," Annas tells Pilate, "3e sall sytt [judge] hym full sore, what sege will assay 3ou" (33.25), there is an ironic allusion forward to both the violent seating of Jesus in these courts and his sitting in a throne at final judgement.

Moments later in this second Pilate play, in which the sitting motif is most prominent, the image of proud sitting is enhanced, when a soldier greets Pilate and the priests where they sit at their dais, as "semelyest vndre sylke on euere ilka syde" (33.49). The line recalls an earlier reference to the setting of Pilate's court, the porter's remark, in "The Conspiracy," that he will "buske to þe benke wher baneres are bright" (26.188). As the image of silk is clearly symbolic of pride, the image of the tribunal sitting "vndre sylke" is thus doubly symbolic, in this respect. These references to the "baneres . . . bright" and to "sylke" foreshadow the bowing of the banners to Jesus in this play, the connection between the "sylke" and these banners holding even if they are represented independently in the setting. Next, pride is thinly disguised as kindness, when a soldier tells the procurator that Herod "In what manere þat euere he mete 3ou, / By hymselfe full sone wille he sette

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<sup>22</sup> The heavenly throne is seen or referred to in many places in the cycle, including the opening plays, "The Death of the Virgin" (44.181), presumably "The Coronation of the Virgin," and the "The Last Judgement" (47.189-90, 202, 215). Jesus is forced to sit in a stool at 29.356-60 and presumably at 33.397.

zou" (33.57-58), and Pilate responds "I thanke hym full thraly: and ser. I saie hym þe same" (33.60).

This focus on the tribunal's sitting anticipates the employment of the sitting motif, in conjunction with the bowing of the banners, to demonstrate, with masterful dramaturgy, the failure of Pilate and the priests to "spirre" Jesus faithfully. In further anticipation of this action, the audience is first firmly engaged in opposition to the judges. Referring to the Jesus' interrogation in Herod's court, Pilate asks, "But what meruelous materes dyd þis myron þer mell?" (36.61). To which a soldier replies,

For all þe lordis langage his lipps, ser, wer lame:

For any spirringes in þat space no speche walde he spell,

Bot domme as a dore gon he dwell. (33.62-64)

For his interrogators, here and in Herod's court, because their interrogations fail at allegorical interpretation, the metaphor for his silence never rises above its conventional, material significance. Therefore, Jesus himself remains for them merely a "domme dore" in the material sense, and their "spirringes" are bereft of holy inspiration. Their specific failure to interpret Jesus as the spiritual door is especially indicative of their corollary fate of entrapment in material pride. For the faithful "spirringe" of the audience, on the other hand, the punning potential of "domme dore" and "spirringes" supplies the material, and names the reward, for the audience's "worthely warke" — entry, by holy inspiration, into the house of God. The speech is an interesting temporalization of theatrical building, providing continuity in the audience's building with the figures of Jesus, through the procession of plays, from when "gon he dwell" with them to his dwelling now with them, "in þat [performance] space."

With the first bowing of the banners, Caiaphas exclaims, "We! Outte! Stande may I nozt, so I stare" (33.160), suggesting entrapment in the pride that is associated with sitting, an entrapment

that, in this case, is especially suggestive of a failure to rise as a spiritual temple. This semantic duality of entrapment and failure to rise is complemented by the bowing of the banners, which, in a compressed fashion, symbolize, iconographically, the collapse of the palace of “syk,” and, metaphorically — as an act of worship — the rising of the spiritual temple. Caiaphas’s entrapment lends a note of irony to the subsequent address of a soldier denying responsibility for the bowing: “We beseke you and tho senioures beside 3ou sir sitte” (33.180). The symbolism of Caiaphas’s inability to rise is affirmed, by way of a complex pun, when next another soldier admits that it was “vnsittyng [unbecoming]” that they seemed to worship Jesus (33.191). The potency of this pun, which in a single stroke exposes the courtly courtesy corrupting these acts of sitting, is to be further exploited as the banners bow a second time. But, first, the audience is signalled to be on its interpretive guard. Caiaphas responds to the soldier with, “A, vnfrendly faytours, full fals is youre fable, / Pis segge with his suttelté to his seett [sect] hap you sesid” (33.192-93), and Pilate joins in with, “Shamefully 3ou satt [allowed yourselves] to be shente” (33.202). With typical signifying unison of content and form, the drama invites faithful interpretation of the “suttelté” of this “fable,” by which the audience will be “sesid” by Jesus and find themselves *worthely* “satt” in *his* court.

It is perhaps no coincidence that the more educated audience members, for whom such subtleties may have been intended, would also have been those more likely to have afforded a seat. As if to balance the engagement strategy, the plays follow these subtleties with a broader stroke, casting the second set of banner bearers as builders. “Lorde,” announces the beadle, “here are þe biggest bernes þat bildis in þis burgh” (33.228). The beadle’s meaning may be that these are the biggest men who dwell in the city, or that they are the biggest of men who build in the city, the implication being that builders are big to begin with. The latter sense is supported by the remark made by one of these men that he “sall holde þis [the banner’s shaft] as even as a lyne” (33.244), which may refer to a measuring line, as Noah uses in building the ark (8.98). In either case, given

the thematic context, the image of these men as builders is clearly intended, whether through wordplay or directly.<sup>23</sup> As the builders are outsiders brought into the court at the last minute from “þis burgh,” they are especially representative of the audience as theatrical builders.

The thematic implications of the banner image are suggested when Pilate responds to the beadle that he will discover for himself. “or they founde vs fer fro / To what game þai begynne for to go” (33.237-38). Pilate’s remark appears to allude to the doctrine that the actions taken in this world bear directly on the final outcome “vs fer fro,” with reference, theatrically, to the distance in the cycle from this to the final play, last judgement. His remark also suggests the uncertainty of that outcome, until judgement. The builders “begynne for to go,” here — the dramatic ones obeying Pilate — but at some other time they may change their direction. This expression of the doctrine that grace is available to all sinners until judgement is then ironically reinforced in its subversion by Caiaphas:

Schape 3ou to þer schaftis þat so schenely her schyne.

If 3on baners bowe þe brede of an hare

Platly 3e be putte to perpetuell pyne. (33.241-43)<sup>24</sup>

When Jesus is called into court the second time, the banners bow again, and this time the tribunal rises involuntarily. “To reuerence hym ryally we rase all on rowe,” remarks Caiaphas, and blames Jesus’ “sorcery” (33.288, 290). Pilate is taken aback at his own rising:

Slike a sight was neuere 3it sene.

Come sytt.

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<sup>23</sup> The text identifies, in speech headings, these banner-bearers as soldiers, a convenient formality used here, as elsewhere in the plays, to identify minor characters passing through the action.

<sup>24</sup> An Old Testament type for this salvational doctrine occurs at the end of “The Flood,” where Noah advises his family, “Gud lewyn latte vs begynne. / So þat we greue oure God no more” (9.273-74).

My comforth was caught fro me clene —

I vpstritt. I me myght nozt abstene

To wirschip hym in wark and in witte. (33.271-75)

Caiaphas responds with, “Perof meruayled we mekill what moued 3ou in mynde / In reuerence of þis ribald so rudely to ryse” (33.276-77). Pilate does not rebuke the suggestion of rudeness: “I was past all my powre þogh I payned me and pynd. / I wrought not as I wolde in no maner of wise” (33.278-79). Thus, as their rising registers for them as a violation of courtly courtesy, it operates as a visual pun on “vnsittyng,” in the soldier’s sense of “unbecoming.” This “vnsittyng” unsitting of the tribunal illuminates with great irony the pervasiveness and consequent danger of their courtly courtesy. Even as they interpret their rising correctly — “To wirschip hym in wark and in witte” — a prior devotion to their proud order precludes that interpretation from being faithful — “My comforth was caught fro me clene.” The audience, thus, receives an important lesson: it is not enough that they merely understand the intricacies of the allegory; their spiring must be “enspyred.” It is one thing to recognize courtly courtesy as a code that, directly opposing holy inspiration, prevents spiritual building. But only with faith will that understanding lead them away from the trap of Pilate’s proud and chaotic order, into the peace of spiritual shelter figured by the still, bleeding figure of Jesus, steadfastly resisting the enormous temptation of the court’s “comforth.” The contrast between his shelter and the court is further informed, moments after the second bowing, by Jesus’ lesson that the faithful their “spirituale speche . . . thar not to spill”: all others “accunte sall, þou can not escape” (33.303, 307).

Throughout the trial and passion plays, the edification theme is embellished by stone imagery, in which the plays generally follow scripture. A basis for this imagery is established in the first trial play, when a soldier tells Caiaphas,

Sir, oure stiffe tempill þat made is of stone.

That passes any paleys of price for to preyse.

And it were doune to þe erth and to þe gronde gone

This rebalde he rowses hym it rathely to rayse. (29.266-69).

The stone image is subsequently evoked, in the trial and passion plays, primarily in the stock phrase, "still as stone." The phrase tends to suggest, with irony or not, the scriptural living stone metaphor that is applied to both Jesus (the "chief corner stone") and the faithful who together with him make a "spiritual house" (1 Pet. 2.4-6). Thus, a duke explains to Herod, "My lorde, it astonys hym, youre steuen is so store / Hym had leuere haue stande stone still þer he stode" (31.251-52), and one of Herod's sons asks Jesus, "Why standis pou as stille as a stone here?" (31.324). The answer, as the audience well knows, is that he is the living stone. The stone image occurs again, without the idea of stillness, at the end of "The Road to Calvary":

All yf he called hymselffe a kyng

In his clothis he schall nozt hyng.

But naked as a stone be stedde. (34.310-12)

As it is in his death and resurrection that Jesus replaces the material temple, this image of a stone on the cross is particularly suggestive, with a possible pun on "stedde" in the sense of "dwelling in." The referent for these stone images is specified when Jesus is scorned, as he hangs on the cross, for his promise to destroy and raise the temple (35.273-76; 36.82-85).

With the pun on "stedde," the images of stone and stillness are used in these plays to suggest the exclusion of Jesus' enemies from his spiritual temple. During the conspiracy to arrest Jesus, Judas advises, "But loke þat ze haue many myghty men / That is both strang and sterand, and stedde hym stone stille" (28.174-75). In "The Road to Calvary," the potential for such ironies, as the drama moves towards the ultimate stillness of Jesus on the cross, is fully exploited, as the soldiers, impatient with their slow progress, repeatedly comment on being made to stand still: "And

he is brosid and all forbledde. / That makis vs here þus stille be stedde" (34.243-44; also 207 — without "stedde." and 220). Especially where the pun on "stedde" occurs, the enemies of Jesus are shown to fail at allegorical interpretation, and thus to fail to dwell in Jesus as the spiritual temple. The idea of this failure is nowhere as clear as when, worn out with lifting the cross, one of the soldiers says, "He made vs stande as any stones" (35.217). Here, the failure of allegorical interpretation and its consequence are conflated: the soldiers are left out of the spiritual temple, because in their spiritual blindness they see themselves as "any," rather than as living stones.

In "The Crucifixion," the edification theme is focused in the symbolism of the cross and the soldiers' struggling with their task of nailing Jesus and planting the cross. The audience's interpretive obligation is signalled at the start, when one soldier says, "Thanne to þis werke vs muste take heede. / So þat oure wirkyng be noght wronge." and another replies, "None othir noote to neven is nede. / But latte vs haste hym for to hange" (35.25-28). Thus, the audience is alerted, as the drama enters into this crucial action, to listen for the other "noote," and thereby set themselves, in their "worthely warke," against the executors and their workaday attitudes. The audience is reminded again to engage interpretively with the drama when a soldier recalls, "þei badde we schulde hym hyng / On heghte þat men myght see" (35.155-56), that "myght" impressing the divide between faith interpreters and proud interrogators.

With the cross raised, the edification theme becomes focused in the primary conflict between virtuous stillness and courtly courtesy, the latter manifested in the soldiers' attempts to achieve stillness in the cross. They find that it "will noght abide / Ne stande stille": an error in the "morteise . . . / . . . makis it wave" (35.229-230, 232). After hammering in some "Goode wegges" (35.235), they are satisfied that it will "full stabely stande. / All-yf he raue þei will noght ryve" (35.247-48). At the end of the play, one of the soldiers sneers, "Ȝaa, late hym hyng here stille /

And make mowes on þe mone.” (35.285-86). As Rowan Williams notes, the stillness of Jesus, as representative of the “emptiness of meaning and power,” culminates in the cross (144). In this respect, the extended laboring to still the cross is the culmination of all the futile actions of binding Jesus, the symbolic stillness of the cross — as suggested by the stillness of Jesus on it, but also in a moral sense — exerting its assimilative power even before the soldiers have brought it to literal stillness.

At the allegorically crucial moment of Jesus’ death, the drama orchestrates an interpretive rift between the audience and Jesus’ enemies, rigging the theatrical game, as it were, to ensure the superiority of the former. The audience is prepared for the theological significance of the death, as Annas mocks Jesus with, “þou saggard, þiselffe gan þou saie, / þe tempill distroie þe todaye” (36.82-83). When Jesus dies, offering himself to God — “My spirite to þee right sone / Comende I, *in manus tuas*” (36.259-61) — the dramatic event is confirmed with Mary’s lamentation, “Allas, nowe my dere sone is dede, / Full rewfully refte is my rede” (36.264-65). Then, exploiting a potential irony in the gospel accounts of Mark and John, in which Pilate or the soldiers become aware of the death only after the fact, the drama has Pilate order Jesus’ death:

Ser Longeus, steppe forthe in þis steede:

    þis spere, loo, haue halde in thy hande.

To Jesus þou rake fourthe I rede,

    And sted nouzt, but stiffely þou stande

    A stounde.

    In Jesu side

    Schoffe it þis tyde.

    No lenger bide.

But grathely þou go to þe grounde. (36.291-99)

In the pattern established with commands to the beadle, the speech depicts an obsessiveness with order: the obedient soldier will come forward, as commanded, take the spear, and hear the order and the subsequent imperative to make no delay. Then, just as he starts off, he will stop at the counter-order to stand a moment, hear the specific instructions about where to stab Jesus, and then, at the final order, start off again. The thematic consistency with courtly courtesy is reinforced by the detail that the tribunal of Pilate and the priests are sitting on a dais (36.329), which sustains the important context of the struggle between the spiritual temple and the evil courts, even as the action has shifted to the exterior setting of Calvary. In this context, Pilate's postmortem command, in the pattern of the torturers' "game substitutions," manifests an ignorance, rooted in pride, that is indicative of his even greater fault of spiritual blindness, in other words, a failure of allegorical interpretation.

Conversely, the audience's prior knowledge of the death is tantamount to spiritual insight. Thus, the audience has been placed in a superior interpretive position from which to observe a good example of what Lawrence Clopper describes as "Pilate's folly . . . the tyrant going about his petty affairs while Christ reverses cosmic history" ("Tyrants and Villains" 15). In light of Jesus' stillness on the cross, its symbolism as spiritual shelter now peaking with the redemptive action, the audience, firmly committed to that symbolism, will see Pilate's proud obsession with order as spiritual imprisonment. Thus, in the final battle between virtuous and courtly courtesy, the audience triumphs with Jesus, as theatrical builders, through their "spirringes in þat space."

## Theatrical Witness

The York plays' theatrical witness is rooted in the theology of the gospel of John and the Johannine epistles. This source, acknowledged perhaps by John's unique insight, in "The Transfiguration," into the obligation to bear witness, is to be expected, for, as Lothar Coenen notes, "the concept of witness has . . . a more central theological significance for this [scriptural] writer than for all the others" ("Witness" 1044).<sup>1</sup> Gerhard Friedrich writes that John, in stressing the witness event itself, avoids suggesting that

Christianity contained something decisively new in content — a new doctrine, or a new view of God, or a new cultus. The decisive thing is the action, the proclamation itself. For it accomplishes that which was expected by the [Old Testament] prophets. (704)

The Johannine doctrine of witness, then, is an important source of thematic continuity for a drama that integrates Old and New Testament stories. Through theatrical witness, the audience is included in the scope of that prophetic continuity, the process which we can begin to understand by briefly looking at the three basic elements of Johannine witness — the event, its salvific effect, and respondent witness.

The importance of the act of witness as event is evident, writes Coenen, in John's treatment

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<sup>1</sup> For the explicit influence of Johannine theology on the Chester cycle, see Martin Stevens, *Four Middle English Mystery Cycles*, 281 ff.

of the word for witness — the Greek *martyria*:

John . . . adopts the [verb] *martyreō* and the noun *martyria* (i.e. both the words of the group which denote action), in order to express the event of the divine communication of revelation in all its aspects. This observation is also supported by the fact that he abandons the noun *martyrion*, which was more of a material designation, in exactly the same way that, though he is aware of the witnesses, he does not make use of the word *martyrs*, witness, so as to be able to concentrate attention on the event. (1044)

As the theological significance of the event of witness lies in its formal relationship to divine revelation, it is defined, in the plays, as in Johannine theology, essentially as a personal encounter between the bearer and the receiver of the witness. In certain cases, however, the bearer of witness need not be an actual person, but must be divinely inspired. Thus, scripture may bear witness to Christ, as Coenen suspects is meant by Jesus' remark, at Jn. 5:39, "Search the scriptures, for you think in them to have life everlasting; and the same are they that give testimony of me" (1045). An important corollary of Johannine witness theology is that, as in the incident described by Thomas, the mere appearance of Jesus — his personal presence — constitutes an act of witness.

The notion of a salvific effect in the witness event is related to the Johannine theology that the personal presence of Jesus, as Georg Braumann puts it, is a relativization of the *parousia*, "its blessings . . . already being experienced here and now (cf. e.g. Jn. 6:39 ff; 11:24, 26)" (900). Colin Brown writes that John's realized eschatology cannot be understood in isolation from his future eschatology. Yet, while John acknowledges the importance of future salvation, "he does so in ways which avoid as far as possible apocalyptic language and concepts" and "lays great emphasis on the eschatological dimension of the present" (929). Thus, John is more concerned with witness to "what has already happened, and been seen or experienced," than with the "proclamation of the age

of salvation, the heralding of a coming event" (Becker and Müller 46).

The plays depict two related kinds of response to the act of witness. In the first instance, there is the faithful response required by any event of revelation. This is a response of knowing, not in the intellectual sense, but in the sense of acknowledging God, in an act of faithful obedience. Any act of faith qualifies, in this regard. Faithful hearing and seeing, however, lie at the heart of theatrical witness, as they establish the fundamental theological requirement of personal encounter, and coincide with the audience's acts of onlooking and listening. One of the plays' clearest expressions of the obligation to respond faithfully to Jesus' self-witness is made in the context of hearing. Jesus, who has been chastised by a soldier for being "so bolde," replies: "Sir, if my wordis be wrange or werse þan þou wolde. / A wronge wittnesse I wotte nowe ar ze" (29.326, 328-29). The soldier's moral error, then, is evident in his failure to recognize the truth of revelation.

As faithful seeing is contingent only on the event of Jesus' presence, it is given more thematic emphasis than faithful hearing, which depends upon some vocal stimulus. Faithful seeing is an important element in the Johannine concept of the event of salvation through Christ: "And this is the will of my Father that sent me: that every one who seeth the Son, and believeth in him, may have life everlasting, and I will raise him up in the last day" (John 6:40).<sup>2</sup> The availability of Jesus to mortal sight as compensation for the erosion of personal contact with God is a context established early in the cycle, just after the fall:

God: Adam. Adam.

Adam: Lorde.

God: Where art thou, yhare?

Adam: I here þe lorde and seys the nozt. (5.138-39)

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<sup>2</sup> See Karl Dahn 516-17.

In Thomas's description of his encounter, just as Jesus' self-witness is constituted in his very presence, the salvific effect is realized in Thomas's respondent act of sight: "But þe poure of þat prince was presiously previd / Whan þat souerayne schewed hymselffe to my sizt" (45.79-80).

Also prominent in the plays is the verbal response to revelation. Verbal response from the audience, while not impossible, would have been of necessity in every way greatly constrained. The important point, though, is not how often it occurred, but its theological significance when and if it did. Thomas does not mention his verbal response to Christ, but in the incident he describes, as it is enacted earlier in the cycle, he responds in words: "Mi lorde, my God, full wele is me. / A, blode of price, blessid mote þou be" (41.181-82). Thomas does describe, though, his response by an act of touch, in which the salvific power of Jesus was further "presiously previd":

þe woundes full wide of þat worthy wight

He frayned me to fele þame my faith for to feste.

And so I did douteless, and doune I me dizt —

I bende my bak for to bowe and obeyed hym for beste. (45.83-86)

The act of touch is not unique to Thomas. It is prominent also, as we shall see in the following chapter, at the nativity, the purification, and the death of Jesus. With respect to the audience, touching the enacted figure of Jesus is, again, a possibility, but necessarily a secondary element, at best, in its theatrical witness.

The second kind of response to the act of witness is respondent witness proper, the obligation to pass testimony on to others. As Coenen puts it, the "testimony of Jesus, for those who have accepted it and thus confirmed (sealed, Jn. 3:33) the truth of God, becomes testimony about Jesus" (1046). The pertinent theology is seen in the description of John's testimony in Revelation: "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to make known to his servants the things which must shortly come to pass: and signified, sending by his angel to his servant John.

Who hath given testimony to the word of God, and the testimony of Jesus Christ, what things soever he hath seen" (Rev 1:1-2). Commenting on this passage, Coenen writes that "the thought is that to be touched by the testimony of Jesus Christ places one in the service of witness. It obliges one to pass it on, and reveals that there is an inherent power in the *martyria*, by means of which God does not merely give men intellectual knowledge, but also sets them in motion" (1046). At the earlier enactment of the encounter described by Thomas, his verbal response includes both faithful acknowledgment (quoted above) and then respondent witness proper: "Mankynd in erth, behold and see / bis blessid blode" (41.183-84). Generally, as the audience's attention is absorbed by the dramatic performance, it is precluded from making this sort of respondent witness. However, as there is great emphasis, in the plays, on the public setting of the audience's theatrical witness, the onlooking of each member of the audience acquires some sense of being testimony passed on to every other member. In other words, the unifying effect of respondent witness — its power to bring others into the fold — inheres in the audience's collective reception of the drama. To this extent, therefore, the "inherent power in the *martyria*" can be said to be setting the audience "in motion," which becomes, as we shall now see, a crucial element of theatrical witness.

The effect of theatrical witness is fully realized only in the operation of these elements — salvific event and respondent witness — as a whole, a condition also of theological witness, as Coenen's comments show. He writes that the "*martyria* of Jesus Christ as the revelation of the significance of Jesus, communicated and accepted in faith, is for the seer of Revelation identical with the *logos tou theou*, 'the Word of God'" (1046). This identification, Coenen adds, is made also in Rev. 1.9 and Rev. 12.11, in the latter of which the two concepts are connected as "the word of the testimony." Coenen writes that "the *martyria* is more precisely qualified as the *pneumas tēs prophēteias*, "the Spirit of Prophecy" ["For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy" (John 19.10)], which could mean testifying to what has been here revealed concerning the future" (1046).

While the phrase, "spirit of prophecy," does not occur in the plays, it well suits their depiction of the convergence of Christian witness and ancient prophecy in divine revelation, and the extension of the salvific effect of these events through time by means of divinely-inspired respondent witness.

The identification of salvific power with divine revelation is a particular instance of the convergences that characterize Christian theology in general, and that have been discussed in relation to medieval drama in Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis* where he notes that in the late 12<sup>th</sup>- century *Mystère d'Adam*, God is identified as "Salvator" (156-57). The identification, in the plays, of God's creative power with the Word is noted by Johnston. Commenting on God's statement, in the opening play, "I am lyfe and way vnto welth-wynnyng" (1.3), she writes,

The citation from John is unique to this cycle. Although the other creation sequences begin with some form of Trinitarian statement, only *York* takes this particular phrase from the chapter from John that is so closely associated with orthodox Christology ["I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14.6)]. By adding this attribute to the speech of Deus at the moment of creation, the figure of Deus becomes *Verbum apud Patrem, per quod facta sunt omnia* (the Word with the Father, through whom all things were made). (*Word Made Flesh* 228: citing Augustine, *In Psalmos* CXXX.9, in *PL*, XXXVII, col. 1711)

The extension of such convergences of Christ's salvific with God's creative power, through the "spirit of prophecy," to all who witness to Christ is key to theatrical witness.

The concept of the "spirit of prophecy" informs Peter's remarks at Pentecost where he notes the connection between ancient prophecy and the disciples' obligation to preach:

He badde vs preche and bere wittnesse

That he schulde deme bothe quike and dede.

To hym all prophetis preuys expresse

All þo þat trowis in his Godhede,

Off synnes þei schall haue forgiffenesse.

So schall we say. (43.15-20)

The disciples' witnessing to Christ is a major theme at the end of the cycle, running continuously through the five plays from "The Incredulity of Thomas" to "The Assumption of the Virgin." Besides the central action of "Pentecost," we see them receiving the command to preach from Jesus (41.87, 193-96; 42.129-30) and from an angel (42.227-28), and acting on that command (41.183-84, 42.255-56, 44.66, 45.287-299). But Peter's, "So schall we say," has its greatest significance in the performative context, in which it encompasses the audience in the spiritual continuity of the act of witness.

That Peter's prescriptive remark should be taken to include all Christians to come is affirmed when John responds with,

Serely he saide þat we schulde wende

In all þis worlde his will to wirke.

And be his counsaile to be kende

He saide he schulde sette haly kirke. (43.25-28)

The reference to "haly kirke" extends to the audience, as the builders of the spiritual temple in the plays' performance. Thus, in these Pentecost speeches, the audience's building is linked to the disciples' witness, and through that, back to ancient prophecy of the messiah.

Beneath Peter's inclusive gesture lies a sophisticated strategy of audience engagement, in which the convergence of theology and theatre in the form of theatrical witness is ordered according to the metaphysical convergences that define the witness event. This strategy can be seen in full light in the doctor's prologue to "The Annunciation and the Visitation." Collier has noted the importance of the prologue for the expression of the motif of prophecy fulfilled (216-18). With

respect to plays in which the prophecy fulfilled motif is prominent, Collier describes the general theatrical effect of the "spirit of prophecy": "what makes them distinctive is that the language of the plays ranges over the whole of historical time, concentrating it into a single moment shared by the audience, to demonstrate that the will of God informs all moments and ordains time itself to be its revelation and fulfillment" (238). But he does not note how prophecy fulfilled is related to the theme of witness, one consequence of which is that, like Diller, he posits a rather passive engagement of the audience in the drama. For example, he writes,

. . . it is . . . a matter of the audience's experience as they watch. Events anticipated come to pass as the cycle progresses, thus offering experiential proof of the inexorable process of the working out of God's will, reassuring proof that the promises God makes to men will be fulfilled, and constant encouragement to believe in and place themselves in accordance with the will of God that directs all history toward the fulfillment of His will. (193)

Here, and where he remarks on "the audience's actual experience as the action of the play proceeds" (232), Collier points to a phenomenological effect that is fundamental to the operation of the event analogy. Adding to Collier's analysis, we need to consider how the audience's response, within this effect, is incorporated into the motif of prophecy fulfilled.

The doctor's prologue shows the "spirit of prophecy" at work in the act of witness, through the device of embedded witness. In embedded witness speeches, which occur throughout the cycle, acts of witness are embedded with ancient prophecy of the messiah, and thus realize, in a single verbal act, the conflation suggested by Peter's, "So shall we say." The device of embedded witness, therefore, is a primary expression of the concept of the "spirit of prophecy." But, in this case, as the doctor directly addresses the audience, there is, in a theatricalization of the "spirit of prophecy," an interlinking of the performative convergence entailed by theatrical witness with the

metaphysical convergences of theological witness.

The doctor begins by acknowledging, in prayer, the “grete meruell” of salvation history (12.1), his brief description of which ends with the harrowing of hell:

And howe they lay lange space  
 In helle, lokyn fro lyght.  
 Tille God graunted þam grace  
 Of helpe, als he hadde hyght. (12.9-12)

The speech foreshadows the play of the harrowing of hell where John the Baptist says of Jesus.

Nowe se I all þi poyntis appere  
 Als Dauid, prophete trewe.  
 Ofte tymes tolde vntill vs:  
 Of þis comyng he knewe.  
 And saide it schulde be þus. (37.368-72)

As we shall see, the “poynte” motif is a key element of the witness theme, expressing the idea of the self-witnessing presence of divine light, and, thus, John’s “poyntis” corresponds directly to the doctor’s “lyght.” When the doctor goes on to say, “þan is it nedfull for to neven / How prophettis all Goddis counsailes kende” (12.13-14), that “þan” refers simultaneously to John’s recalling of David’s prophecy and to the doctor’s ensuing utterances of embedded witness. In both cases, ancient testimony is recalled in an event of witness that realizes the “grete meruell” of salvation. For John, that event involves the immediate presence of Jesus. In the case of the doctor’s prologue, the witness event, with roughly 130 lines of embedded witness, occurs between him and the audience, before the enactment of the Incarnation begins.

The emphasis on convergence — it occurs in both cases of embedded witness and in the

typological transfer<sup>3</sup> between John and the doctor — draws attention to what Auerbach calls the “vertical connection” by which all temporal events converge in God (74). Commenting on the use of anachronism in a 13<sup>th</sup>-century French Easter play, Auerbach writes that “the figural ‘omnitemporalness’ of the events works most harmoniously and effectively toward the end of embedding them in the familiar setting of popular everyday life” (161). We do not have to move far from such anachronism in the drama to find a similar harmony between figural convergence and the “embedding” of the audience in dramatic witness. Just as the doctor and John converge with each other and with the ancient prophets, the audience converges with them all through theatrical witness, the converging quality of which is particularly prominent, here, as the doctor mediates between the dramatic and real worlds. That the audience’s engagement in dramatic witness is to be taken as analogous to the convergences created by the “spirit of prophecy” is strongly suggested by the fact that the doctor’s prologue is the definitive instance in the plays of both audience address and embedded witness.

The idea of convergence permeates the doctor’s ensuing speech. After telling of Amos’s prophecy, he establishes a link between divine revelation and prophecy, by telling of God’s revelation to Abraham. When he goes on to say, “To proue thes prophette ordande er” (12.37), there is conflation of the ordering by divine providence of the prophets for the sake of revelation and the doctor’s own ordering of prophetic testimony for the sake of his witness to the audience. The doctor moves on to the prophecy of Isaiah and, then, Joel. In recounting the latter’s testimony, he says,

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<sup>3</sup> The phrase is from Theo Stemmler’s article, “Typological Transfer in Liturgical Offices and Religious Plays of the Middle Ages,” in which he refers to Auerbach and Herbert Grundmann, who “have shown that in the Middle Ages authors and artists did not restrict themselves to the traditional prefigurative method of juxtaposing Old Testament type and new Testament antitype but developed this originally hermeneutical approach to the Scriptures into a literary and artistic technique” (242).

Pis passed all worldly witte.

How God had ordand þaim þanne

In hir one to be knytte.

Godhed, maydenhed, and manne.

Bot of þis werke grete witnes was

With forme-faders, all folke may tell. (12.105-10)

The ambiguity allowed for by the syntax of the final two lines suggests the theological identification of the “grete witness” of the prophets with the incarnation — the primary event of metaphysical convergence in Christian religion — as itself a “grete witnes.” But the doctor’s assumption of a general knowledge among “all folke” of the prophecies is also a reminder to the audience of its obligation to bear witness to Christ — to “tell” — the implication being that in doing so it too will converge, through realized salvation, in “þis werke.”

The doctor moves on to Jacob’s testimony to his son, then to God’s revelation to Jesus that an “aungell” will be sent before him “to rede þe thy way” (12.124), and, penultimately, to the consequent testimony of John the Baptist, whom God “menyd þore” (12.125). Finally, he turns to the testimony of the gospel:

þus of Cristis commyng may we see

How sainte Luke spekis in his gospell:

Fro God in heuen es sent, sais he.

An aungell is named Gabriell,

To Nazareth in Galalé,

Where þan mayden mylde gon dwell,

þat with Joseph suld wedded be:

Hir name is Marie — þus gan he telle.

How God his grace þan grayd

To man in þis manere.

And how þe aungell saide.

Takes hede. all þat will here. (12.133-44)

Having been preceded by a reference to Jesus' self-witness after death, the doctor's witness-bearing to the audience is to be immediately followed by Gabriel's annunciation to Mary, the act of revelation that precedes the Incarnation. That is, the Incarnation and harrowing, here literally framing the definitive instance of theatrical witness in the plays, are themselves "framed" in the context of theological witness, which then governs the subsequent dramatization of Jesus' life and death. Thus, the doctor's prologue instructs and engages the audience in theatrical witness in preparation specifically for its respondent witness to the theatrical presence of the figure of Jesus. The doctor's final, "Takes hede," emphasizes the audience's obligation to do so.

Crucial to our understanding of theatrical witness is the fact that the doctor's long testimony to the audience instructs and involves it in making witness without the theatrical presence of Jesus. The point is made, therefore, that the experience of Jesus' self-witness in person was merely a matter of historical chance, the salvific power of that event being extended, by the "spirit of prophecy," beyond the temporal range of his earthly existence to all those who respond to subsequent witness events. This point is supported by the doctor's timely reference to Luke, in the form of embedded witness, just before the enactment of the Incarnation. By this reference, the entire, incarnational cycle is identified as an act of respondent witness to gospel, the primary medium by which the "spirit of prophecy" is working to extend the salvific power of the historical Jesus to the performance event. The combined effect of these features of the doctor's prologue is to relieve the drama of the burden of seeming to endow the theatrical figure of Jesus with any special

power, while at the same time coupling the performance to theological witness. Thus, while the embedding of the audience in the drama — its incorporation into dramatized witness events — remains purely a game of event analogies and parallels, the game itself is identified as respondent witness to the testimony of gospel. In other words, the performance constitutes a theatrically-mediated witness event, the idea of which appears to be expressed in Pilate's remark, "Ther is no prince preuyd vndir palle / But I ame moste myghty of all to behold" (32.26-27). The ironic point, here, is that there *is* a more mighty prince to behold, with the suggestion that in doing so over the course of the performance he is indeed "preuyd vndir palle," literally "witnessed-under-robe," or "witnessed-under-costume." This sense is supported by Pilate's immediately preceding remarks, in which his description of his appearance achieves humour in theatrical self-referentiality:

And þe hore þat hillis my heed  
 Is even like to þe golde wyre,  
 My chekis are bothe ruddy and reede  
 And my coloure as cristall is cleere. (32.22-25)

Theatrical witness, so to speak, is a game played under the wing of the "spirit of prophecy."

Having established the form by which the audience is engaged in the dramatized witness events of the plays, we can now examine more closely the treatment of the elements of theological witness. Leaving aside, for the time being, the notion of respondent witness, we will examine the theme of the salvific event, particularly as it is expressed through the related ideas of open witness, divine light, and effective presence. Open witness and divine light constitute dramatic motifs, both of which illustrate the relationship between witness and revelation. In the New Testament, the concept of openness (*parrhēsia*) is applied regularly to Jesus and the apostles where it refers to witness made in public, and sometimes, in the case of Jesus, to witness made in plain language. Hans-Christoph Hahn writes that John often notes that Jesus' preaching was done openly:

("Openness, Frankness, Boldness," 736). With respect to the apostles' preaching, Hahn writes that "openness" is used to refer to their fearless witnessing: "Again and again Acts reports how fearlessly Peter, Paul and others stood before the Jews or the Gentiles and proclaimed the works of God" (736). Throughout the cycle, boldness is linked to obedience, in the phatic phrase "lowde and still," which always refers to the bold obedience of the faithful to God or Jesus (8.41, 145: 17.455; 20.150; 21.58, 139; 23.47; 24.76; 47.205).

We have seen an expression of this kind of openness in the doctor's remark on Isaiah's proving "vnto olde and yenge," a stock phrase that is commonly used in the plays to describe the openness of witness events. A particularly revealing statement of Jesus' openness occurs in the temple when the child Jesus tells the doctors, "Sirs, I schall proue in youre present / Alle þe sawes þat I saide are" (20.137-38). "Present," as Beadle glosses the word, means "assembly," and thus indicates Jesus' willingness to make open witness. There is also a pun, in which "present," with theological correctness, conflates the ideas of Jesus' open witness and his presence in the world. Furthermore, as Jesus has, earlier in the scene, alluded to his special knowledge of the doctors' laws (20.93-94), his reference to "þe sawes þat I saide are" extends back to the divine revelation on Mount Sinai. Thus, his remark expresses with perfect simplicity the principle of the "spirit of prophecy" — Jesus' presence in the world, the self-witnessing nature of which is illustrated in this particular act of open testimony, is in itself a proving of God's power. Given that Jesus' very presence in the world is an act of divine openness, there is great irony in his accusers' anger at his silence in the trials. What they do not understand is that for all his verbal silence, Jesus is never *not* making open witness before them, and Herod is representative of their moral blindness when he tells Jesus, "Nowe sir, be perte Y þe pray" (31.259).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Related irony occurs in the soldier's chastising of Jesus for being "so bolde" (29.326), quoted above.

The concept of *parrhēsia* also refers to the related idea of the confidence of faith with which one should approach God and future judgement (Hahn 736-7). This idea of confidence in God approximates the sense of nearness to God that is expressed in the edification theme. That is, the image of dwelling with God expresses the confidence in God that emboldens one to publicly testify to Christ. The relationship between the two senses of openness is shown in the play of Jesus' baptism, which begins with John the Baptist, in a long speech, "witness-bering of þat light, / þe wiche schall light in ilka man / þat is comand" (21.17-19). Further on in this speech, John comments on his bearing of specifically open witness, saying that when the people asked him if he were a prophet, he at first answered negatively, then changed his answer:

I wreyede —

High aperte

I saide I was a voyce that cryede

Here in deserte. (21.25-28)

One sense of "aperte," here, is clearly witness made in public. But John then turns to the metaphor of the individual as a temple, and the idea of nearness to God:

Loke þou make þe redy — ay saide I —

.....

For if we be clene in levyng.

Oure bodis are Goddis tempyll þan.

In the whilke he will make his dwellyng.

Therefore be clene, bothe wiffe and man.

þis is my reed:

God will make in yowe haly þan

His wonnyng-steed.

And if ȝe sette all youre delyte  
 In luste and lykyng of þis liff.  
 Than will he turne fro yow als tye  
 Bycause of synne. boyth of man and wiffe.  
 And fro ȝou flee.  
 For with whome þat synne is riffe  
 Will God noght be. (21.29. 36-49)

John's theological disposition to deliver this particular metaphor is accounted for earlier in the cycle, in a scene between Mary and Elizabeth, in which the latter says,

Sone als þe voyce of þine haylsing  
 Moght myn neres entreand be.  
 þe childe in my wombe so yenge  
 Makes grete myrthe vnto þe (12.213-16).

showing that John is inhabited by the holy spirit from the time he is in his mother's womb (Luke 1.15. 41-44). On the whole, therefore, John's speech links together the openness of public witness and the openness of confidence in God, as expressed in the spiritual temple metaphor.

The linking of confidence to public testimony is evident also in "Moses and Pharaoh," where the context is a witnessing to the power of the Old Testament God. When God commands the reluctant Moses to go to Pharaoh's court, he tells him, "Be bolde in my blissyng. / Thy belde ay sall I be" (11.179-80), so that the idea of boldness is linked directly to the idea of confidence as expressed in the idea of God's protective shelter. The metaphorical sense of dwelling in spiritual shelter, which tends, through the edification theme, to be latent in the "belde" word-group, is reinforced in this case, contextually — Moses is about to enter into a dwelling that is conceptually

opposite to that of God, Pharaoh's palace. Thus, when Moses, whose wand has turned into a snake, tells Pharaoh of God's message:

He saide þat I shulde take þe tayle  
 So for to proue his poure playne,  
 And sone he saide it shuld not fayle  
 For to turne a wande agayne (11.241-44).

the boldness of this act, to "proue . . . playne," is rooted in his knowledge that, while physically he is in this place of danger and temptation, spiritually he is dwelling with God in the shelter of his promised "belde."

In the plays, openness refers to God's revelations in the broad sense of personal encounter, without necessarily implying the more specific sense of *public* testimony. The New Testament does not apply *parrhēsia* to God, but Hahn links the New Testament concept of openness to Old Testament ideas about the nature of God's appearances to humankind. Hahn writes that the *parrhēsia* word-group "is used of God in Ps. 94.1 (LXX 93.1) where *eparrhēiasato* (lit. "spoke freely") translates the [Hebrew] *hōpia'*, "thou God of vengeance shine forth" (735). He adds that "the [Hebrew] word is used in connection with theophanies," and cites Deut. 33.2; Pss. 50.2; 80.2; and Job 10.3, 22. Hahn also notes the instance of revelation described at Prov. 1.20-21: "Wisdom preacheth abroad, she uttereth her voice in the streets: At the head of multitudes she crieth out, in the entrance of the gates of the city she uttereth her words." This image of Wisdom appearing in public is a good example of what Ernst Schmitz describes as the Old Testament view of "knowledge [of God] as something which continually arises from personal encounter" (396). As this principle of personal encounter applies broadly to all acts of divine revelation in the plays, we should temper with it Diller's attribution of a "splendid remoteness" to the York plays' revelation speeches (168).

In treating God's revelations, the plays retain the idea of divine light, particularly as the

medium of a salvific effect, but, in doing so, turn these revelations to the theme of witness, either directly, or through the motif of open revelation. God's revelations are clearly attached to the idea of witness in "The Transfiguration," as we have seen. The divine revelation of the transfiguration is described as an open event when Moses praises God for "this solempne sight, / bat in þis place þus pleyne / Is mustered thurgh þi myght" (23.82-84). Later in the cycle, an association between divine revelation and witness to Christ is similarly suggested when, responding to Andrew's remark that Jesus' ascension has "proued here opynly" the falsehood of the Jews (42.246), Peter advises the disciples, "wende we vnto seere contré / To preche thurgh all þis worlde so wide" (42.255-56).

In "The Transfiguration," the connection between revelation and witness is made more subtly, and with attention to divine light, through punning on the word, "poynte." The word is used throughout the cycle in the context of revelation and witness events. In "The Transfiguration," Moses praises God, who "wolde tell / þis grete poynte [instance/event]of thy pryuyté" (23.75-76). This remark is echoed at the end of the play by Jesus: "Here haue ʒe sene in sight / Poyntes of his priuité" (23.225-26). Later in the cycle, Jesus tells his accusers of his openness: "I prechid wher pepull was moste in present, / And no poynte [not in the least] in priuité to olde ne ʒonge" (29.314-15; Jn. 18:20), and one of Herod's sons says to the silent Jesus, "Do telle vs some poynte [detail/virtue] for thy prowe" (31.316). In another occurrence, "pointe" is used in reference to the open forensic examination of a witness when Annas tells Judas, who has pleaded to the court for Jesus' release, "Oure poynte expresse her reproues þe / Of felonye falsely and felle" (32.243-44). In these occurrences, as elsewhere in the cycle, though the sense of "pointe" varies somewhat, the context of its usage is an encounter between bearers and receivers of witness, gathering together thematically all such events, from God's revelations to Judas's testimony.

But, especially with respect to the appearances of God and Jesus, which are both, on occasion, depicted as being accompanied with the phenomenon of divine light, "poynte" can also

have the sense of a point of light. In “Herod and The Magi,” the association between “poynte” and light is made when the second king tells the third that he and the first have followed the star “fare fro home / Som poynte therof to preffe” (16.101-02). At one level, he means that they have followed the star to inquire into its meaning. But as the star obviously functions as a source of light, “poynte” takes on the sense of an actual point of light coming from the star, however that might be represented by the stage property.<sup>5</sup> In linking divine light to the act of witness — a connection reinforced, in this case, by “preffe” — the pun in “poynte” expresses the idea of the salvific effect of the light of Jesus’ self-witnessing presence, which occurs in various places in the New Testament, including special emphasis in the gospel of John.<sup>6</sup>

“Some poynte therof,” refers, of course, to Jesus, whose theological status as one “point” of God’s self-revelation is clearly demonstrated in “The Transfiguration,” where the light of divine presence is a major element. The vision in which “Poyntes of [God’s] priuité” are revealed, in that play, includes Jesus’ appearance as a “brightnes” (23.85; also 97-98) and the “lemys” of the cloud on which God descends (23.198; also 202). Divine light is also mentioned at 23.186 (“glorious gleme”) and 191 (“brightnes”), apparently in reference to Jesus, though the attribution is not entirely certain, possibly to suggest the reflection in Jesus of the light of God. The light-of-witness motif also occurs in “The Harrowing of Hell,” in which the arrival of Jesus in hell is preceded by a “glorious gleme” (37.42), and at the end of which, as noted above, John the Baptist praises Jesus, saying, “Nowe se I all þi poyntis appere [ends fulfilled]” (37.368).

In the opening play of the cycle, the motif of divine light has incipient significance, in this

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<sup>5</sup> Among the various meanings for “pointe,” the *MED* gives “a spot or beam of light” (n.2) and “one of the angular points of a figure or star” (n.12.c). Referring to this occurrence of the phrase, “preven pointe,” the *MED* suggests “?also, discover the meaning of a star” (n.6.d).

<sup>6</sup> See “Light, Shine, Lamp” in the *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*; especially Hahn’s article on *phos*, 494.

regard, reinforced by the Johannine identification of God as the Word, and even further, as we shall see below, by the contrasting character of Lucifer. The light of God is the "lyghte" of Lucifer, whom God calls "merour of my mighte" (1.36, 34), and is mentioned by the angels, who praise "þat lufly lorde of his lighte" (1.43) and him "þat vs þis lyghte lente" (1.121). The latter remark indicates that light, however it may be represented, is a primary attribute of bliss, as that state is understood metaphorically. The idea of divine light as spiritual nourishment is suggested when the angels ask, "Ay with stedefaste steuen lat vs stande styll, / Lorde, to be fede with þe fode of thi fayre face" (1.75-76). Especially as God has been identified as "lyfe and way vnto welth-wynnyng" (1.3), this association of his nourishing light with his personal presence anticipates the salvific light of, and the audience's theatrical witnessing to, Jesus' presence.

The importance of this preparation is particularly evident in the next play, in which the creation of the world is depicted in terms of divine revelation. Having created night and day at the end of the first play, God continues, in the second play, saying,

Syne þat þis world es ordand euyn,  
 Furth well I publysch my power:  
 Noght by my strenkyth, but by my steuyn  
 A firmament I byd apere. (2.29-32)

Moments later, he says,

Vndir þe heuyn and als aboue  
 þe wateris serly sall be sene,  
 And so I wille my post proue  
 By creaturis of kyndis clene. (2.45-48)

The words, "publysch" and "proue," frame God's acts of creating, in the first case, and the creations themselves, in the second, as revelations, so that at this point in the creation emphasis is again

placed on the presence of the creator before the angels and the audience. Thus, the Johannine theology informing the opening play of the cycle, as noted by Johnston, includes the idea of witness: God's creation of the world is an act of open witness, which, when met by the audience's respondent act of sight, brings salvation. Through these revelatory gestures, the theatricalization of the doctrine of mutual edification — the building of the audience and God in union — is completed in the mutual witnessing of God as the "maker" (1.2) and the audience through its theatrical church.

In the final play of the cycle, the concept of openness is broadened somewhat to show the futility of avoiding an open relationship with an omnipotent God. Brought up for judgement, an evil soul says,

Oure wikkid werkis þei will vs wreye,  
 þat we wende never schuld haue bene weten.  
 þat we did ofte full pryuely,  
 Appertly may we se þem wreten. (47.129-32)

Those that did not, through their good works, bear open witness to Christ are ultimately betrayed by the openness of their sins to God.

Contrasting with God's open revelations, in the first play of the cycle, is the self-worship of Lucifer. Particularly important is the speech in which the "poynte" motif, with a clear connection between witness and light, first occurs in the cycle:

All the myrth þat es made es markide in me!  
 þe bemes of my bryghthode ar byrmande so bryghte,  
 And I so semely in syghte myselfe now I se.  
 For lyke a lorde am I lefte to lende in þis lighte.  
 More fayrear be far þan my feres.  
 In me is no poynte þat may payre. (1.49-54)

Lucifer's proud self-witness completely perverts the idea of the self-witness of Jesus, who is careful to distinguish between his self-witness and pride: "If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true" (Jn. 5:31). The point of Jesus' claim, that his self-witness is always to the power of God, is expressed in the motif of divine light, which is the context, here, for Lucifer's failure. As the "merour of [God's] mighte," Lucifer has received the light of God's open revelation, but violates the principle of openness by reflecting that light back to himself, as is suggested by the complex reflexive line, "I so semely in syghte myselfe now I se."<sup>7</sup> With respect to the proper reflection of God's light in the act of witness, therefore, the York Lucifer is a failed type of Jesus.

Lucifer's self-witness is of course by definition exclusive of God, the error having most significance, in the context of the performance, in its failure to realize the converging power of the "spirit of prophecy." This idea is expressed in part by Lucifer's physical isolation, which is indicated by his remark that he is "left to lende." As Collier notes, Lucifer's "isolation . . . which he sees as his glory . . . is his sin *and* its punishment" (275). In contrast to Lucifer's proud self-witness, the other angels in this play address only God, and except for one occurrence of "I" (1.127), the plural pronouns "us" and "we" are used throughout their speeches, lending a clear sense of the ecclesiastical virtues of open testimony and unity to their worship.

Lucifer's failure to dwell with God is also expressed as an ontological entrapment. Commenting on the mirror image of Lucifer's remark, "I so semely in syghte myselfe now I se," Beadle writes that the angel's "relentlessly self-referential" attitude "expresses the scholastic notion of his sin of striving to become the source of his own beatitude" ("Poetry, Theology and Drama" 221). If we look more closely at Lucifer's statement, we can see that it demonstrates the ontology of that sin. He appears to say two things: that he is beautiful and that he sees that beauty. But, in

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<sup>7</sup> In a personal conversation, Johnston has noted that a mirror was used to good effect in this speech, in the 1977 *Poculi Ludique Societas* production of the *York Cycle*.

fact, these two are one and the same thing, for, as Lucifer is characterized by an extreme self-sufficiency, it can only be on the basis of his viewing of himself that he can be said to have beauty. This collapse of an attempted objectivity into the subjective is symptomatic of the ontological self-enclosure, or imprisonment in pride, described by Augustine in his sermon on the prodigal son where he writes that to be attracted to worldly things is to become trapped in the self (*Sermon 96.2*, p. 30). Such ontological entrapment corresponds to the sense of material entrapment in the earthly palaces of pride, and shows up, as we shall see below, in the figure of Pilate. The conceptual oppositions of enclosure and openness, thus, traverse and interlink the witness and edification themes: failing to make open witness to God, Lucifer, in a parody of the self-witness of Jesus, becomes trapped in his pride and excluded from the openness of spiritual union in the house of God, which in this case is figured, as we have seen, as a palace.

The openness of Jesus' self-witness, various direct references to which have been noted already, is demonstrated in the simplicity and straightforwardness of his post-resurrection self-witness to his disciples: "Drede you nozt, for I am hee. . . . I ame Criste, ne drede zou nocht." (41.32, 45). The concept of openness is also applied to Jesus' self-witness in deeds. In assuring John the Baptist that it is right and necessary that he be baptized, Jesus points to the efficacy of his deeds: "rightwisnesse be nozt oonlye / Fullfillid in worde but also in dede." (21.129-30). He then tells John to baptize him "Appertly here" (21.133). The power of his open self-witness in deeds is also noted when Annas says of his raising of Lazarus, "pertely þus proued he his poure" (30.449), and in "The Road to Calvary," when Veronica cleans Jesus' face, and says,

Behalde howe he hath schewed his grace.

Howe he is moste of mayne!

This signe schalle bere witnesse

Vnto all pepull playne.

Howe Goddes sone here gilteles

Is putte to pereles payne. (34.184-89)

This call for an act of sight for Jesus' act of self-witness, made "Vnto all pepull playne," is a perfect example of how the plays exploit the witness-theatre parallel to incorporate the audience's act of looking on the plays into a dramatized act of witness.

In referring to the passion, Veronica's comment touches on the fact that Jesus' steadfastness and patient suffering are in fact acts of self-witness, adding the theological concept as yet another layer of significance to the multivalent concept of his virtuous stillness. Tracing the roots of the concept of theological witness, Coenen writes that witness in the sense of expressing

moral or philosophical convictions . . . acquired its great importance primarily from the time of the Stoics. The Cynic or Stoic philosopher regarded himself as a witness called to give evidence on behalf of divine truth, in that he testified to the truth of his ideas and doctrines by his conduct in adverse circumstances — his endurance of suffering, and his acceptance of his conditions as training, not allowing himself to be shaken by them. (1039-40)

Given this tradition, Jesus's stillness manifests the coincidence of witness and spiritual building in his body, which is both the necessary instrument of his personal presence and the physical referent for his symbolic function as the spiritual temple. That coincidence is nowhere so clear as when, with the bound Jesus standing silently before the tribunal, Annas tells Pilate, "Sir, wnesse of þis wanes may be wonne, þat will telle þis withowten any trayne" (33.106-07). Annas's claim that there are witnesses available to testify to Jesus' "wanes" (conduct), becomes, through a pun on "wanes" (walls, suggesting dwelling place), an expression of the dual theme of witness and spiritual building. The pun on "wanes" is reinforced by the prominent "wylle of wane" motif (discussed in chapter one) and in the echoing of an earlier play in which a handmaiden testifies to Joseph about

Mary's chastity:

Na. here come no man in þere wanes  
 And þat euere witesse will we.  
 Saue an aungell ilke a day anes  
 With bodily foode hir fedde has he.  
 Othir come nane.  
 Wharfore we ne wate how it shulde be  
 But thurgh þe haly gaste allane.  
 For trewly we trowe þis.  
 Is grace with hir is gane.  
 For sho wroght neuere no mys.  
 We witesse euere ilkane. (13.123-33)

The relevant point in this speech — that the handmaiden is in the house of God, not only literally, like Joseph, but also, through her act of witness, spiritually — is repeated in Annas's remark: those who bear witness to Christ win spiritual shelter. Thus, as Annas offers to call witnesses to Jesus' past conduct, attention is drawn to the steadfastness and patient suffering he exhibits, here, in his stillness, which symbolizes the peace of spiritual shelter and constitutes what, in continuity with his stillness on the cross, is the supreme act of witness to the power of God. Thus, the imperative on the audience to build spiritual shelter, emanating most imploringly from the brutalized figure of Jesus, is coupled with the doctrinal obligation to respond faithfully to his self-witnessing presence. Moreover, as Jesus is fulfilling his promise of obedient stillness, made in the prayer (in the Garden of Gethsemane — perhaps the key instance of spiring within the drama) that begins in the confidence that "þe nowys þat me neghed hase it nedis not to neuen" (28.43), his self-witness, here and throughout his passion, is exemplary also of boldness inspired by spiritual shelter in God.

With Jesus as their prisoner, Caiaphas tells Annas that they “will prese to ser Pilate, and presente hym with pride / With þis harlott” (30.207-08), in which remark lies the seed of a contrasting of Jesus’ humble presence with the proud presence of those who try him. The idea of proud presence is developed particularly in the character of Pilate. The procurator’s self-awareness is directly noted in “Christ before Pilate 1.” where he tells the “cursed creatures” who are his audience, “Youre pleyntes in my presence vse platly applyand” (30.1. 3), a remark that shows interweaving of the presence and proud order motifs, in correspondence to the coincidence of witness and peace in the stillness of Jesus. This thematic interweaving continues in the second stanza of this speech where the witness theme is specifically registered. There, Pilate gives a brief personal genealogy: “Sesar was my sier . . . / . . . / And my modir hight Pila þat proude was o plight: / O Pila þat prowde, Atus hir fadir he hight” (30.10, 13-14). These latter two names, he says, provide the components of his name. He concludes by asking,

Nowe renkis, rede yhe it right?

For þus schortely I haue schewid you in sight

Howe I am prowdeley preued ‘Pilatus.’ (30.16-18)

As was the case for Pharaoh, Pilate fails to recognize the divine order — in which the audience is pointedly not “cursed creatures” — celebrating instead his temporal origins and, in the process, a proud order, as represented by his ridiculous genealogy. The futility of a proud order is signalled, in Pilate’s self-witness, by his threats of violence and by his verbosity, the latter of which is the point of ironic comment in that “schortely.” By contrast, Jesus’ self-witness, as we have seen, *is* short and is characterized by a tone of assurance: “Drede you nozt, for I am hee. . . . I ame Criste, ne drede zou noht.”

The formula of “prowdeley preued,” which is spelt out in the next line, “Loo, Pilate I am, proued a prince of grete pride” (30.19), goes directly against the Johannine record of Jesus’ self-

abnegation in the act of self-witness. Indeed, the lines, “For þus schortely I haue schewid you in sight / Howe I am prouedly preued ‘Pilatus.’” appear to directly anticipate Thomas’s, “But þe poure of þat prince was presiously preuid / Whan þat souerayne schewed hymselffe to my sight.” As “presiously” draws attention to the salvific effect of the event of witness, “proudely” points to a thwarting of that effect. While Pilate, unlike Lucifer in his act of self-witness, actually addresses an audience, he has no interest other than establishing a bond of tyranny with it. His addressing of the audience as “cursed creatures” sets him in direct opposition to God’s revelatory acts of creation and the idea of openness, in every sense of that concept, between ruler and subject. This point is made quite clear when his wife says to Pilate, “Who þat youre preceptis pertely perloyned, / With drede into dede schall ye dryffe hym” (30.32-33). Pilate’s witness, which is effectively not open, sets the standard for his court: as Percola’s remark suggests, no one there is going to feel confident about speaking out.

Indeed, Pilate’s audience is redundant to the actual proving of his pride, which, by definition, stands alone. This inherent self-sufficiency of pride is illustrated by Pilate’s genealogy, which effectively proves his pride by an internal logic prior to the event of personal encounter with an audience. Thus, Pilate’s proud proving betrays the same ontological entrapment described in Lucifer’s “I so semely in syghte myselfe now I se.” The connection between the procurator and the angel, in this respect, is clarified in “The Remorse of Judas,” where Pilate, in the “preuyd vnder palle” speech discussed above, boasts, “And myne eyne þei glittir like þe gleme in þe glasse” (32.21). These associations of Pilate with Lucifer are instances of what Beadle identifies as a pattern of self-referentiality set by the angel for the tyrants of subsequent plays in the cycle (“Poetry, Theology and Drama” 221). Pilate’s desire to be looked at, which he extends to the presentation of his wife — “Lo sires, my worthely wiffe, þat sche is, / So semely, loo, certayne scho

schewys" (30.26-27) — only serves to underline the perversion of the act of witness in this scene.<sup>8</sup> In fact, contrary to Pilate's intended self-glorification, the audience should receive his witness as a moral failure, the resulting interpretive rift producing a form of theatrical witness that, through the effect of dramatic irony, is entirely different from that involving Jesus. In short, there is no spiritual building — no unification — accompanying the theatrical witness of Pilate.

The moral emptiness of Pilate's self-witness is reaffirmed when, following his speech, the beadle addresses him as "O schynyng schawe" (30.56), echoing Lucifer's "My schewyng es schemerande and schynande" (1.69). While Jesus' presence is the light of salvation, Pilate's, like Lucifer's, is mere "schawe." The emptiness of Pilate's presence is noted again, later in the trial plays, in his remark that "Ther is no prince preuyd vndir palle / But I ame moste myghty of all to behold" (32.26-27). The unwitting subtext of Pilate's claim is that the power of his presence is a condition merely of his regal robe, a point that works in conjunction with the other sense of this remark, noted above, that the power of the true prince is realized through theatrical witness. That Pilate's morally empty presence is, moreover, a corrupting one is a point made, earlier, in "The Conspiracy," where the procurator tells his audience, "Pounce Pilatt of thre partis þan is my propir name. / I am a perelous prince to proue wher I peere" (26.15-16). Beadle's gloss on this occurrence of "perelous" is "greatly to be feared" (1982 513). The word can also mean "to be spiritually dangerous, or corrupting," which corresponds to the charge Caiaphas makes against Jesus later in this scene: "he pervertis oure pepull þat proues his prechyng" (26.113). The reference to "thre partis" has two interrelated senses, in this context. First, Pilate's appearances in the "thre partis" of his jurisdiction — Judea, Samaria, and Idumea — are directly opposed to the salvific force of Jesus' self-witnessing presence, in the land and before the audience. Second, the power of Jesus' theatrical

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<sup>8</sup> Mills discusses these speeches by Pilate in the context of the "language of display" (6).

witness, as expressed in the notion of the "spirit of prophecy," is bound up with the "thre partis" of the holy trinity. In contrast, because his "thre partis" are merely temporal, Pilate's theatrical witness pointedly does not afford the audience access, in the holy spirit, through Jesus, to God.

Turning, now, to a closer examination of respondent witness, the first broad feature to note is that the motifs of seeing and speaking about Jesus begin to become prominent, appropriately, with his birth, picking up soon after, therefore, on the doctor's preparation of the audience for theatrical witness. At the nativity, in a coincidence of the witness and spiritual shelter themes, Joseph's first words upon reentering the stable and learning of Jesus' birth refer to the salvific effect of seeing Jesus: "Wele is me I bade þis day / To se þis foode" (14.90-91). This remark completes the idea that the light of Jesus (Mary's "sone" — 14.88) supplants the need for the "fewell" that Joseph had been searching for outside. It also completes the sense of his expressed intention to "come home vnto Marie" and "spirre," his act of sight, as an inquiry (a "preuing"), in the theological sense of respondent witness, added to his inquiry in the sense of faithful interpretation. The connection between sight and witness is made more explicit when Joseph tells Mary that they should go to Jerusalem "To spire and spie all men emang" for their lost son, in the play of the Doctors.

When the three shepherds have followed the star to the place they understand to be the place they sought, the second says, "In þat same steede now are we stadde. / Tharefore I will go seke and see" (15.88-89). The attention drawn to the act of seeing, here, is maintained in the same shepherd's remark: "Loo, here is the house, and here is hee," and in the third shepherd's response, "Loo whare þat lorde is layde" (15.91, 93), in the first of which the witness and shelter themes again coincide. These remarks imbue the short remainder of this play, in which they present their gifts, with a sense of the self-witnessing presence of Jesus in the world, the salvific effect of which is being realized, in the first instance, by their acts of sight.

With the shepherds, the motif of speaking about Jesus, suggested by Joseph's "spirre,"

begins properly. The play opens with the first shepherd saying, "Bredir. in haste takis heede and here / What I wille speke and specifie" (15.1-2). Their ensuing speeches of embedded witness recall the testimony of prophets, including that of Hosea and Isaiah (15.5-12), Balaam's vision of the star (15.14-16), the testimony of the "witty lerned men of oure lay," who interpret "the texte" (15.17-20), of the second shepherd's "syre" (15.21-24), and of unspecified testifiers whom the third shepherd has "herde say, by þat same light / The childre of Israell shulde be made free" (15.29-30). The respondent witness in the form of embedded testimony is matched by the second and third shepherds' acts of responding to the first and the second, respectively. Their testimony continues until the third says, enough, time to go find the sheep, "And talke of sumwhat ellis" (15.36). Off they go, but — "We, Huddle!" — they see the star (15.37). "Steppe furth and stande by me right," the first tells the third, "And tell me þan / Yf þou sawe euere swilke a sight" (15.40-2). With great irony, the shepherds, who, it appears, think they have found "sumwhat ellis" indeed to speak about, are in fact speaking about the prophesied star of their previous testimony. The power of Jesus' self-witness to elicit respondent witness is thus figured in the star, which has moved the shepherds to respond despite their initial failure to consciously connect it to the prophecies. At this point in the manuscript there is a missing leaf, which, as Beadle notes, "must have contained the appearance of the Angel to sing 'Gloria in excelsis deo'" (*York Plays* 130). But the particular point of the preceding humour carries through to the next leaf where the first shepherd says,

I can synge itt alls wele as hee.  
 And on asaie itt sall be sone  
 Proued or we passe.  
 Yf 3e will helpe. late see. halde on.  
 For þus it was. (15.60-64)

Again, the shepherds, though still lacking conscious insight, respond to the angel's song exactly as

they should, with "proving" song. The potential for salvation through this act of respondent witness is suggested by the subsequent, sudden, insight of the first shepherd (in this respect, a type of John in "The Transfiguration"), who despite the continuing confusion of the others, says.

An aungell brought vs tythandes newe

A babe in Bedlem shulde be borne.

Of whom þan spake oure prophicie trewe. (15.72-74)

Thus, the play repeatedly shows the power that inheres in the witness event itself, in which form that power overrides the limits of human understanding.

The power of the star is noted again, in the next play, when one of the magi tells Herod that they follow "A stern . . . / That makes vs speke and spir / Of one þat is new-borne" (16.162-4M), with another association of spiring with witness. The motif of seeing is then reintroduced, as a handmaiden greets them with, "Come nere gud syirs and see," and the third king says, "Behalde here syirs, her and se" (16.293, 295).

In the next play, "The Purification," the various motifs of witness are developed into one of the cycle's most concentrated expressions of that theme.<sup>9</sup> The play's structure — one half, expectation of Jesus, the other, his reception — represents the Christological view of history as prophecy and fulfillment of the incarnation. Moreover, the play turns the theme of divine presence that inheres in this biblical episode to the specific idea of divine presence as salvific self-witness. Three characters make up the first half, the temple priest, the prophetess Anna, and, most importantly, Simeon. The priest's opening speech both situates him squarely in the Old Testament world and anticipates the arrival of Jesus. He begins by affirming Old Testament justice and the

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<sup>9</sup> See Beadle (*York Plays*), 434-437, for the complex bibliographical evidence pertaining to this play. Beadle writes that between 1415 and 1567 "the play was either substantially revised or completely replaced" (436).

provision made for disobedience: "To stone all theme that kepis it nott / Vtterly to death, both lesse and moore; / There shulde be no marcy for them be soght" (17.18-20). Though he asserts the *status quo*, the single word "marcy" points his entire assertion to the impending replacement of the old law with the new dispensation of salvation. A similar effect occurs when he elucidates the laws of sacrifice, and especially as he applies this law to the practice of purification, in which a "lame is offeryd for Goddes honour" (17.45).

In this context of anticipation, two themes are particularly pertinent: revelation and divine presence. The priest begins the speech by recalling God's Sinaitic revelation:

In the mount of Syney full fayre,  
 And in two tabyls to you to tell,  
 His lawes to Moyses tuke God there  
 To geve to the chylder of Israell. (17.9-12)

His pragmatic, "to you to tell," tends to conflate his act of speech with the revelation and Moses' subsequent preaching. Thus, attention is drawn to the common element of testimony in all three, and implicitly to Jesus' pending self-witnessing presence. Divine presence is specifically noted in the context of the laws of sacrifice: "ye shulde bryng your beistes good / And offer theme here your God to knawe" (17.26-27), a remark that points also to the theme of edification (spiritual indwelling) that tends to inhere in the temple setting. At the end of the speech, divine presence is symbolized in the constancy of the priest's own presence at the temple:

Loo, here am I, preest present alway,  
 To resave all offerandes that hydder is broght,  
 And for the people to God to pray  
 That helth and lyfe to theme be wroght. (17.53-56)

The overall point of the speech, then, is to prepare the audience to view the arrival of Jesus, in the

context of the edification theme, as salvation-through-witness.

With Anna the theme of presence is tied directly to that of prophecy. She begins her speech by declaring,

Here in this holy playce I say  
 Is my full purpose to abyde,  
 To serve my God bothe nyght and day  
 With prayer and fastyng in ever-ylk a tyde. (17.57-60)

She goes on to tell of her 64-year widowhood, saying, "And here I haue terryed with full good chere / For the redempcyon of Israell" (17.63-64), and then relates her dwelling in the temple directly to her gift of prophecy:

And so for my holy conversacion  
 Crete grace to me hais nowe God sent,  
 To tell by profecy for mans redempcion  
 What shall befall by Goddes intent. (17.65-68)

As she puts that gift to use, her "conversacion" in the temple is linked to the audience's presence:

I tell you all here in this place  
 By Godes vertue in prophecy,  
 That one is borne to oure solace,  
 Here to be present securely  
 Within short space. (17.69-73)

An important element of the dual theatricalization of the "spirit of prophecy" and spiritual building is the audience's personal experience of the unfolding of salvation history. "Here in this place," the audience, having experienced over the course of the cycle, thus far, a taste of bliss and its subsequent loss, can identify its presence with the temple and Anna's "conversacion" there. But

this conflation of the historical temple with the audience's spiritual building must include the insufficiency of the temple for humankind's spiritual needs.

That insufficiency, and the consequent desire for Jesus, is focused in the character of Simeon, who is introduced by Anna, in terms that sustain the context of witness:

And Symeon, that senyour  
 That is so semely in Godes sight,  
 He shall hyme se and do honour  
 And in his armes he shall hym plight,  
 That worthy leyd.  
 Of the holy goost he shall suthly  
 Take strength, and answeare when he shall hy  
 Furth to this temple and place holy  
 To do þat deyd. (17.78-86)

A source for this passage is Luke 2.26 where the answer is that given by the holy ghost to Simeon, "that he should not see death, before he had seen the Christ of the Lord." The dramatist appears to have deliberately transmuted that sense to show that Simeon's encounter with Jesus will be governed by the power of the witness event: in "answere" to holy inspiration he will go to the temple where in "answere" to Jesus' presence he will faithfully see and cradle him. Prior to these events in the play, however, Simeon is shown to benefit from an act of witness, so that, reiterating the important lesson of the doctor's prologue, the drama draws attention to the power inherent in the event itself, regardless of historical setting.

This point is made in Simeon's opening monologue, in which his relationship with God is shown to be problematic. Anna's remark, that he "is so semely in Godes sight," is complemented by Simeon's opening line, in which he asks God to "be [his] beylde" (17.87). But then he goes on

to say that "In hevynes my hart is hylde. / Vnto myself." (17.89-90). Thus, his desire to be together with God is immediately subverted by his admission that he holds his heart back within himself, an act that corresponds directly, if distantly, to the self-enclosure of pride. Moreover, the tone of his prayer marks it as a less-than-adequate communion. For 16 lines, he complains bitterly, telling God that his "welth ay wayns and passeth away" and that he wishes he were "Owte of this worlde" (17.92, 97). In sum, the opening two stanzas depict Simeon as one who is somewhat impeded in his faith, despite his desire to be with God. He, thus, embodies the need for that "marcy" which is absent from the old law.

Simeon's specific need, as suggested by the trait of self-enclosure, is for a way to make open witness to the power of God. This idea is reinforced by his impatience in suffering. Together, these two traits anticipate the depiction of Jesus' steadfast patience as an act of self-witness, in bold response to which the audience can open its "hart" to God. We should understand Simeon's impatience and self-enclosure in the context of Kolve's concept of the natural goodness of imperfect beings (237-64). Kolve's principle that in the plays' naturally good characters we must see "virtue as a plant growing in human soil" (240) is borne out in this speech, beginning at the end of the second stanza when Simeon's thoughts turn to Jesus: "So happy to se hyme yf I warr" (17.102).<sup>10</sup> Then, at the start of the next stanza, he says,

Nowe certys then shulde my gamme begynne  
 And I myght se hyme, of hym to tell,  
 That one is borne withouten synne  
 And for mankynde mans myrth to mell. (17.103-06)

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<sup>10</sup> This is the first of seven declarations, in the monologue, of a desire to see Jesus, and is the best example in the plays of the constant yearning for the sight of Jesus, which contrasts directly with Pilate's need to be always calling for an audience to look at him and his possessions.

The temporal setting established in the first two lines of this passage is sufficiently ambiguous to suggest that Simeon's telling begins "Nowe," before the arrival of Jesus. This sense of an erasure of temporality is reinforced by the device of embedded witness, as he goes on to make repeated reference, in this and the next two stanzas, to prophecy of the messiah (17.108, 111, 115-18, 128-31). Thus, Simeon begins, here, before his personal encounter with Jesus, his witness to Christ — his "gamme . . . of hym to tell."

That the term "gamme" signifies not just the activity, but also the joy it brings is evident in the sudden change that overcomes Simeon in these three stanzas. He now demonstrates the patience and openness that had been frustrated by a lack of means by which he could fulfil his natural goodness. There is no mention whatsoever of his pain and by the second of these three stanzas, after one "my" and one "I" in the first (17.103, 104), he has switched to the first person plural, indicative of a turning to the audience, to testify to the "soccour" (17.125) coming for all God's people. Embedded witness is restricted to these three stanzas. In the next one following, he says,

Ay, well were me for ever and ay  
 If I myght se that babb so bright  
 Or I were buryed here in clay.  
 Then wolde my cors here mend in myght  
 Right faithfully.  
 Nowe lorde, thowe grant to me thy grace  
 To lyf here in this worlde a space.  
 That I myghte se that babb in his face  
 Here or I dy. (17.132-40)

The temporal context has returned to a simple yearning for a future event, with Simeon having undergone a crucial change: he no longer wishes to be "Owte of this worlde." In the remainder of

the monologue, his impatience in suffering is replaced by an impatience to "se that babb in his face," which comes to a head when he apostrophizes Jesus, "When wyll thowe comme babb? Let se, haue done: / Nay, comme on tye and tarry nott" (17.153-4). That there may yet be a minor moral flaw in this impatience, though it certainly is a long way from his impatience in suffering, is suggested in the last line of the speech when he says that if he were to see Jesus, "Then were I putt all owte of dowte" (17.164). Even this lesser flaw is mediated by the comic tone that, as Kolve notes, is used in the English cycles' depictions of natural goodness (240-41).

When the angel tells Simeon to go to the temple where Jesus has arrived, he adds "That be thowe bolde" (17.344), which remark lends, through the associated ideas of confidence and openness, a sense of witness to Simeon's subsequent encounter with Jesus. The witness theme, registered again through the idea of boldness, is conjoined with the edification theme, when Simeon greets Jesus with,

Haill, the moost worthy to enhance,  
 Boldly thowe beylde frome all yll,  
 Withoute thy beylde we gytt grevance  
 And for our deydes here shulde we spyll. (17.362-65)

Following Simeon's monologue, the motif of seeing Jesus is expressed, in the character of Simeon, at ll. 169, 177, 180, 342, 351, 412, and 416, with the effect of constantly linking his respondent witness to Christ with the audience's act of onlooking. At the end of the play, Simeon praises God for his open act of salvific revelation:

That helth lorde hais thowe ordand I say  
 Here before the face of thy people,  
 And thy light hais thowe shynyd this day  
 To be knowe of thy folke that was febyll

For evermore. (17.419-23)

Thus, the salvific power realized in Simeon's respondent witness to the presence of Christ is identified as the light that God shines in the person of Jesus, and the phrases, "Here before the face of thy people . . . this day / To be knowe of thy folke," extends that convergence, through theatrical witness, to the audience's onlooking of the performative event, its "gamme . . . of hym to tell."

The second broad feature to note about respondent witness is that the plays, through a thematic treatment of the distinction between theological and conventional witness, constantly remind the audience that theatrical witness depends upon an onlooking that is indeed faithful. In this element, the witness theme again shows a Johannine influence. In the conventional sense, witness is made to an objective fact or event. Coenen writes that the Greeks originally used the *martyria* word-group in the legal setting. Among the uses in that setting, "the invocation of the gods as witnesses has its place where human witnesses or given circumstances cannot be adduced" (1039). Such an invocation of God occurs, outside of the legal setting, in "Joseph's Trouble about Mary," where Mary calls him to witness her fidelity (13.156).

The concept of theological witness begins to arise through "a proximate and additional use of the word . . . by which the *martyria* was no longer intended to substantiate something objectively given, but instead expressed moral or philosophical convictions," a sense that, as noted above, was developed, most prominently, by the Stoics (1039). But, in surveying the Septuagint, Coenen finds that

the words of this group essentially remain within the framework already adumbrated in classical [Greek], or at least are not aware of the understanding shaped by the Stoics. One is a witness for something one has experienced, or one is enlisted as such for an event. . . . The idea of testimony or of a witness derived from uncertifiable subjective convictions is not known in the [Old Testament], and

also has no place in Judaism. (1042)

God's direct revelations, in their Old Testament occurrences, Coenen classifies as conventional witness. He writes that when the *martyria* word-group is used in the Old Testament the reference is often to the covenant or the Law where the particular usage may denote evidence given of the founding of these institutions, or the meeting of Yahweh with his covenant-people, both denotations pointing to "the revelatory speaking of God" (1040). The distinction between this sort of divine revelation and conventional witness of the earthly kind is self-evident.

A potential for confusion arises, however, with the incarnation. Of Jesus' self-testimony, Coenen writes,

it is not a matter here of witness borne to verifiable matters of fact, but — along the lines of the prophets, even if in the linguistic clothing of gnosticism — of God's self-communication in Jesus, requiring response. . . . In form there certainly is a correspondence with men's demands for legitimation, but the confirmatory testimonies which are brought into play provide no proof in the customary sense, but affirm the very thing for which proof is required. . . . The criterion for the message is the content itself. (1045-46)

Coenen writes that Paul uses the *martyrion* word-group in the conventional sense,

but . . . is probably also the first to give the noun *martyrion* a new meaning and content, when he says in 1 Cor. 1:6: "Even as the testimony [*martyrion*] of Christ was confirmed among you." It can no longer here be a matter of a document, or of a piece of evidence or recollection giving encouragement or warning; the word is used in the sense of the gospel, the proclaimed message of salvation in Christ. (1043)

Luke is the first to use this sense of "witness" to identify those — specifically, the apostles — who

are witnesses, and witness, to Christ (1043-44). In Johannine theology, however, the distinction between the two forms of witness takes on special significance:

John too is aware of the classical use of the word in the sense of human attestation or testimonial. This is shown in Jn. 2:25, where Jesus is said not to need other men's testimony concerning a man in order to form an opinion; as also in Jn. 18:23, where he challenges the temple guard who struck him to give proof of his improper speech [also Jn. 3:28; 8:17-18; 12:17]. . . . But it is precisely against this background that the specific character of the Johannine concept of witness is brought into relief in its three aspects: witness is testimony to or of Christ (i) in pointing to Jesus (John and the Scriptures), (ii) in Jesus' testimony to himself and (iii) in reference to Jesus in the proclamation of the disciples. (1044-45)

The plays follow suit, making much of the relationship between conventional and theological witness.

In "The Transfiguration," in which the motif of seeing is understandably prominent (23.5, 6, 9, 17, 20, etc.), the relationship is treated in such a way as to emphasize the divine authority that empowers theological witness. That the testimony of not only God, but also Moses and Elijah, is in fact of the conventional kind is suggested when Elijah says, as quoted above,

Als messenger withouten mys

Am I called to this company,

To witnesse þat Goddis sone is þis. (23.113-15)

The sense here of Elijah being "called" as if in a legal setting is entirely appropriate because, given his supernatural nature, he can indeed testify to Jesus' identity as objective fact. Thus, when the play subsequently links divine revelation to theological witness, the conviction required for the latter is supported by this demonstration that the truth of Christ can ultimately be proven in the

conventional sense. In another instance, the possible coincidence of the conventional and the theological, in purely natural circumstances, is shown in "The Entry into Jerusalem," where a waiting burgess says,

Of Juda come owre kyng so gent.  
 Of Jesse. Daud. Salamon:  
 Also by his modir kynne take tente.  
 Þe genolagye beres wittesse on.  
 This is right playne. (25.239-43)

Here, subjective conviction includes objective genealogical fact (later to be parodied in Pilate's genealogy, discussed above), which in turn reinforces the conviction. Most prominent in the treatment of conventional and theological witness, though, is a motif by which the former indicates moral failure, as it substitutes for, rather than conjoins with, theological witness.

The motif finds its natural setting in court scenes where conventional witness is a matter of course. An early instance occurs when the magi, who tell Herod of the baby that will be "kyng / Of Jewes," are reprimanded for "Swilke gawdes . . . / To wittensse þat neuere was" (16.175-76, 185-86). A later one occurs when, after the crucifixion, the centurion tells Pilate's court that they have executed a "rightwise mane," to which Pilate replies by reminding the centurion that he is

a lered man in þe lawe.  
 And if we schulde any wittnes drawe  
 Vs to excuse.  
 To mayntayne vs euermore þe awe.  
 And nozt reffuse. (38.65, 68-72)

Pilate does not see that the centurion's words are given over to a far greater witnessing than Pilate could ever demand for himself.

Before the trial plays, the motif is especially prominent in "The Temptation," in which the devil's tempting of Jesus is presented as a legal action, a "trying," making the devil the archetypal interrogator of the plays. A trial setting is suggested with his opening curse to the audience: "high myght zou hang / Right with a roppe" (22.3-4). That this is more than a generic curse becomes clear in the third stanza where he says.

And certis, all þat hath ben sithen borne  
 Has comen to me, mydday and morne,  
 And I haue ordayned so þam forne  
 None may þame fende. (22.13-16)

Here, we have a picture of the devil as a perverse lawyer receiving sinners in his chambers and working in opposition to an advocate who would defend them. In the next stanza, we are brought back to the present trial setting, as the devil's dismissal of prophecy — in itself signaling his failure to partake of the power of theological witness — has the flavour of a lawyer's scorning of legal testimony:

And nowe sum men spekis of a swayne,  
 Howe he schall come and suffre payne  
 And with his dede to blisse agayne  
 Þei schulde be bought.  
 But certis þis tale is but a trayne,  
 I trowe it nozt. (22.19-24)

In the stanza after that, the condescending tone is used to disparage, in lawyerly fashion, the character of Jesus. He is a "mytyng," who "has in grete barett bene / Sithen he was borne" (22.26-28). The ambience of a trial is evident also in the devil's stated intention to go after Jesus in the wilderness "And garre hym to sum synne assente" (22.41). Thus, by the time he announces the

purpose of his trial — “For so it schall be knowen and kidde / If Godhed be in hym hidde” (22.49-50) — the audience is well-equipped to reject the devil’s truth on the basis of the distinction between conventional and theological witness. By the latter, the audience will realize Jesus’ self-witness and the salvific effect of his divine truth, which receives ironic allusion, by way of “forensic flattery,” in the devil’s first words to Jesus: “þou witty man and wise of rede” (22.55).

As the devil’s trial of Jesus gets underway, the audience is further reminded of its need to distinguish between conventional and theological witness by the devil’s use of the words, “poynte” and “proue.” Attempting to make Jesus jump from the mountain top, the devil says,

If þou be Goddis sone, full of grace,  
Shew som poynte here in þis place  
To proue þi myght. (22.98-100)

When he fails at this attempt, he concedes that Jesus “proues þat he is mekill of price” (22.127). The lesson complements that which distinguishes between interpreting the edification theme and interpreting it faithfully: the audience’s theatrical witness must go beyond the devil’s seeking of a merely objective truth — it must not just look on the drama as an objective event, but must, to requote John 6.40, “seeth the Son, and believeth in him.” As we have seen, this play goes on to a comprehensive elucidation of the meaning of Jesus’ stillness, which we can now understand as including a positive expression of this lesson, one which guides the audience (the “folke” — 22.193) away from the devil’s error to theological witness.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> The devil and Jesus conflict on these grounds, again, when Jesus tells Satan that his harrowing of hell is the fulfilment of ancient prophecies, and Satan misconstrues these prophecies as testimony to objective truth:

Nowe sen þe liste allegge þe lawes,  
þou schalte be atteynted or we twynne,  
For þo þat þou to wittnesse drawes  
Full even agaynste þe will begynne. (37.277-80)

He then attempts to overrule the prophecies of Christ with what Solomon and Job said about the nature of hell, to no avail, of course. The witness theme explains the “almost juridical” quality Diller attributes to one of

Leading up to the actual court trials of Jesus, this lesson is twice repeated. First is an instance of conventional witness that is blatantly immoral. In his opening monologue in “The Conspiracy,” Judas offers witness about Jesus, the context of which is initially signalled, and simultaneously condemned, by his presumptuous judging of his master: “*Ingenti pro inuria* — hym Jesus, þat Jewe / Vnjust vnto me, Judas, I juge to be lathe” (26.127-28). Judas’s boldness enhances the contrast between his subsequent testimony and theological witness. As Judas tells of the incident with the ointment at Simon the leper’s house, his shameless witness to his own wickedness makes it clear that his testimony about Jesus has no salvific effect, the point being reinforced ironically by the concluding stock phrase: “But for þe poore, ne þare parte priked me no peyne — / But me tened for þe tente parte, þe trewthe to beholde” (26.144-45).

Second is a case in which the distinction between conventional and theological witness is made through an emphasis on the inconsequentiality of Peter’s denials of Jesus. Peter fails to witness, in the conventional sense, to the objective truth of his relationship with Jesus (29.119-20, 129, 154-57). Malchus responds to Peter’s denial by self-righteously telling the people gathered about Jesus that he will “preue to zou pertly and telle you my tale” (29.134). He then witnesses, in the conventional sense, to an event he actually experienced — the loss and restoration of his ear (29.135-46). Malchus’s openness sets him in direct contrast to Peter, and the point of the scene lies in the comparison of their respective conducts in this witness event. Malchus’s self-righteousness is matched by his desire to shame Peter: “Late se whedir grauntest þou gilte” (29.147). Thus, even though he testifies specifically to the power of Jesus, his witness is not a proclaiming of Christ, and has no salvific effect. Peter, on the other hand, though he fails in making conventional witness to the truth of his relationship to Jesus, does not fail in his faith. That is, his denial of Jesus is a matter

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Jesus’ speeches in this play (163).

of fear for his own well-being: he does not doubt Jesus' divinity. The point is confirmed when Peter responds to and begins to realize, through contrition, the salvific effect of the self-witness of Jesus' bright presence: "The loke of his faire face so clere / With full sadde sorrowe sheris my harte" (29.168-69). Thus, conventional witness — in which Peter is no match for Malchus — is shown to be of no spiritual value without the underlying support of faithful conviction.

With the arrest of Jesus, the ironic contrasting of conventional and theological witness, seen already in the remark that "witness of þis wanes may be wonne," reaches its height. Before Caiaphas and Annas, Jesus is questioned about the crucial matter of his identity and invited to make self-witness: "Yf þou be Criste, Goddis sonne, telle till vs two" (29.292). Jesus, outstripping the conventional limits of Caiaphas's sense of the act of testimony, affirms that he is God's son. In the priests' responses, however, the theological sense is twisted back into the conventional. In rejecting the content of Jesus' statement, they accept the form of self-witness, but purely in a conventional sense, and only as self-condemning false testimony. Caiaphas says, "Nowe nedis vs no notes of newe, / Hymselfe with his sawes has he schamed." Annas adds, "Nowe nedis nowdir wittnesse ne counsaile to call, / But take his sawes as he saieth in þe same stede" (29.298-301). In the following play, Jesus' self-witness is, again, held up against the conventional sense of witness, but in this case it is the priests who are asked to make witness. Pilate calls Jesus to the bench: "Come preste, of a payne, and appere," and tells the priests, "youre pontes bes prevyng" (30.402-03).<sup>12</sup> As the appearance of Jesus anywhere is an act of self-witness to divine truth, the "prevyng" of the priests is precluded as morally empty before it can even begin. Their "pontes" are nothing against those of the light of Jesus' presence.

Finally, in an incident that highlights the integration of the conventional-theological

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<sup>12</sup> Pilate also asks Christ to "appere." at 30.376

distinction with the theme of effective presence. Caiaphas defers the witness-bearing of the priests to Pilate's presence: "What poyntes þat we putte forth latt your presence appreue vs" (33.134). The language ironically echoes the gospels, such as 1 Thess. 2:4: "But as we were approved by God that the gospel should be committed to us: even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God, who proveth our hearts." The moral emptiness of the priests' conventional act of witness is made most apparent by the silent presence of Jesus, who, as Pilate notes a moment later, "is nocht right ferre" (33.138). In the careless tone of that acknowledgment, it is abundantly clear that the true force of Jesus' presence will not be known by these accusers. The responsibility falls to the audience to look on that figure of stillness in an act of respondent sight that will realize the "poyntes" of his divine light and, under the ultimate guidance of the "spirit of prophecy" in gospel, "proveth [their] hearts" with God.

The final broad feature of respondent witness to be considered is the plays' depiction of, to requote Coenen, the "inherent power in the *martyria*, by means of which God does not merely give men intellectual knowledge, but also sets them in motion." To begin with an interesting exception, at the end of "The Baptism," John, having baptized Jesus "Appertly here," declares his intention to go off and bear witness himself:

I loue þe, lorde, as souereyne leche  
 That come to salue men of þare sore,  
 As þou comaundis I schall gar preche  
 And lere to euery man þat lare,  
 That are was thrall. (21.169-73)

In this case, as respondent witness will be made as a result of Jesus' direct instruction, the "inherent power in the *martyria*" does not receive clear expression. Jesus also gives such instruction to the disciples, at, for example, 41.193-96. But, in the case of John the Baptist, direct instruction has

special significance. As John himself is technically the last Old Testament prophet, prophetic continuity is seen in his personal encounter with Jesus as historical event. In keeping with that context, John's respondent witness is directly prescribed by Jesus, the supernatural power of divine inspiration remaining covert in the dramatic representation. On the same grounds of the historical context of prophetic continuity, the play has no embedded witness — its absence most obvious in John's opening speech where it would otherwise be expected, as bearing witness is the dominant theme and form of that speech. This condition of prophetic continuity as historical event is perhaps the general idea behind a pun in Jesus' remark, "John, for mannys prophyte — wit þou wele — / Take I þis baptyme certaynely" (21.155-56), that "wit þou wele" a knowing wink, between master and apprentice, at the pun.

In "The Resurrection," on the other hand, the power of witness to "set [people] in motion" is seen quite clearly in the centurion. Embedded witness is, again, in absence, a possible explanation being that the centurion, as a pagan with new-found faith, has not the necessary knowledge to quote prophecy. Having observed the reaction of the natural world to the crucifixion, he asks,

A, blissid lorde Adonay,  
 What may þes meruayles signifie  
 þat her was schewed so oppinly  
 Vnto oure sight,  
 þis day whanne þat þe man gune dye  
 þat Jesus highte? (38.37-42)

As his subsequent testimony to the court is characterized by boldness, it has a sense of being directly governed by the divine revelation, "schewed so oppinly," at the death of Jesus. He tells the court, "I drede me þat 3e haue done wrang / And wondir ill" (38.59-60). Ironically, Caiaphas then asks him to speak openly: "Wondir ill? I pray þe, why? / Declare it to þis company" (38.61-62).

That irony carries over to the centurion's reply, with its explicit avowal of openness, which is therefore linked, in preclusion of Caiaphas's request, to the influence of divine revelation:

So schall I sirs telle 3ou trewly  
 Withouten trayne:  
 Þe rightwise mane þanne mene I by  
 þat 3e haue slayne. (38.63-66)

As the scene continues, the centurion persists in his open witness. He declares, "To mayntayne trouthe is wele worþi," and then, with significant confidence, says,

I saide 3ou whanne I sawe hym dy  
 þat he was Goddis sone almyghty  
 þat hangeth þore:  
 3itt saie I soo, and stande þerby  
 For euermore. (38.73-78)

Finally, he tells the court, "All þat I tell for trewthe schall I / Euermore traste" (38.107-08).

Importantly, despite that earlier testimony at the cross,<sup>13</sup> and its recounting, here, the first speech quoted above (38.37-42) presents the centurion as one who has not fully accepted the divinity of Jesus. This is not to suggest a discrepancy, but rather a reiteration, with expansion, of the earlier enactment of his testimony. In this expanded version, the element of uncertainty is suggested by the apparently deliberate contrast between his acceptance of the Jewish God, "Adonay," and his reference to Jesus simply as "þe man . . . þat Jesus highte." This sense of uncertainty is affirmed in his immediately following remark that "Itt is a misty thyng to mene, / So selcouth a sight was neuere sene," upon which he resolves to inquire with the "princes and prestis"

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<sup>13</sup> Depicted at 36.322-25, without, however, a clear sense that he is indeed addressing the tribunal.

to see "What þei can saye" (38.43-45, 48). Thus, his subsequent witness to Christ takes on a greater sense of being in response to an *inherent* power in the event of divine revelation, and of having in itself a power to illuminate the truth, for as soon as he begins his testimony, all uncertainty disappears.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, with thematic comprehensiveness typical of the plays, this incident reverses the usual course of events, as the centurion, by his testimony, comes to Christ through God.

The potential for the "spirit of prophecy" to lead, through respondent witness, to an extended sequence of linked witness events is nowhere as clearly illustrated as in "The Entry into Jerusalem." In this case, not only is the device of embedded witness employed, but its principles are also first explicated in the dialogue and action. Prophecy occurs with the first words of the play, as Jesus says,

To me takis tent and giffis gud hede

My dere discipulis þat ben here,

I schall zou telle þat shal be indede. (25.1-3)

A link to ancient prophecy is made when he says, "The prophicie nowe drawes to ende" (25.10).

The effectiveness of this link is suggested when he tells them to fetch an ass,

þat I on hir may sitte a space,

So þe prophicy clere menyng

May be fulfillid here in þis place:

‘Doghtyr Syon,

Loo, þi lorde comys rydand an asse

þe to opon’. (25.23-28)

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<sup>14</sup> Beckwith mistakenly assigns the phrase "misty thyng to mene" to the centurion's testimony to the tribunal. Thus, when she writes that "the complexities, difficulties, and frustrations of this 'meaning' complicate greatly any simple act of witnessing," she is missing the crucial point that the "mistiness" does indeed lift with the centurion's act of bearing witness ("Ritual, Theater, and Social Space" 69).

With increasing suggestion of some impelling power in prophecy, Philip says to Peter.

Go we broþere, with all oure mayne

My lordis desire for to fulfill.

For prophycye

Vs bus it do to hym by skyl

þarto dewly. (25.45-49)

Upon seeing the ass, Peter suggests that they should find her owner and “ask mekely,” but he follows the lead of Philip, who thinks it unnecessary to seek permission in this case. They are then confronted by the janitor, who chastises them: “Yow semes to bolde” (25.66). This momentary failing and recovery of boldness serves further to show the power of prophecy driving the disciples forward. Their boldness is then put into the context of open testimony when, in response to the janitor’s inquiry, Peter declares that their master is

Jesus, of Jewes kyng and ay be schall.

Of Nazareth prophete þe same.

þis same is he.

Both God and man withouten blame.

þis trist wele we. (25.80-84)

Peter’s testimony, driven by prophecy, now adds to that force, compelling the janitor to respondent witness:

I schall declare playnly his comyng

To the chiffe of þe Jewes, þat þei may sone

Assemble same to his metyng. . . .

.....

This tydyngis schall haue no laynyng.

But be þe citezens declared till  
 Of þis cyté.  
 I suppose fully þat þei wolle  
 Come mete þat free. (25.93-95.101-05)

The janitor says he intends to speak to “ȝonge and olde in ilke a state.” and draws attention to his sought-for audience — “Lo. wher þei stande” — so that his subsequent announcement of the coming of “þe prophette called Jesu” is given a strong sense of testimony made openly (25.107. 110. 123). Thus, Jesus’ concern for “clere menyng” in the fulfillment of prophecy “in þis place” has been answered by, first, the disciples’ and, now, the janitor’s boldness.

The janitor’s testimony initiates that of the burgesses, which constitutes a subset of linked acts of witness and respondent witness. In two sequences, each of the eight burgesses speaks in turn, declaring over and over again, in anticipation of Jesus’ arrival, that he is the prophesied “kyng.” The first burgess does not have a speech to start the first sequence, but is brought into the round when he starts the second sequence with a response to the eighth burgess’s first sequence speech. Both sequences are studded with embedded witness. In the first sequence, the second burgess recalls what he has “herde” of “þat prophette Jesu” (25.127-28), and the third and fourth burgesses then contribute what they have heard. The fifth notes that “What þe prophettis saide in þer sawe, / All longis to hym” (25.153-54). The prophecies of Isaiah and David are recalled by the sixth and seventh burgesses. In the second sequence embedded witness occurs at 25.227 and 234.

The power of their witnessing to elicit further witness, and the salvific effect of these acts, is stated explicitly by the eighth burgess in the last speech of the second sequence.

Ȝoure argumentis þai are so clere  
 I can noȝt saie but graunte you till.

For whanne I of þat counsaile here  
 I coveyte hym with feruent wille  
 Onys for to see.  
 I trowe fro þens I schall  
 Bettir man be. (25.253-59)

In coveting to see Jesus in response to the seventh's "counsaile," the eighth burgess is realizing the salvific effect of the witness event, and all the burgesses, for their witnessing, are already "bettir" men.

As the burgesses process to meet Jesus, their "myrþe" catches the ear of the blind man, who asks the pauper to "declare" its meaning (25.304-05). The pauper tells him of the coming of "Jesus þe prophete full of grace" (25.307-08). When confronted by the blind man, Jesus commands him to "Telle oppynly" what he would have him do "In þis present" (25.345). The blind man's witness to Christ is made simply in his addressing of him as "Lorde," when he asks for his sight (25.346). Restoring it, Jesus tells him "Þi faith shall þe saue" (25.350), so that the miracle is coupled with the act of witness. The lame man, for whom there is no mediated act of witness, as the pauper gave the blind man, responds directly to "þis mirthe þat I see here" (25.361). His witness, too, is made simply in his address to Jesus: "Þou lord þat schope both nyght and day" (25.365). Finally, Zacheus, whose perching in a tree draws Jesus' attention directly, comes down, as requested, to greet his "Lorde" and welcome him "With all þe pepull þat to þe lange" (25.436, 441). Attention is again drawn to the crowd when he says, "Lorde, I lette noȝt for þis thrang / Her to say sone / Me schamys with synne but ouȝt to mende" (25.445-47). His open confession is noted by Jesus, who tells him, "Thy clere confessioun schall þe clense, / Þou may be sure of lastand lyffe" (25.454-55).

"The Entry into Jerusalem," thus, shows acts of witness and respondent witness linked through Peter, the porter, eight burgesses, the pauper, the blind man, the lame man, Zacheus, and, of

course, Jesus, himself. The overall effect is one of a swelling unity in salvation. Especially with the last lines of the play, in which a burgess says to Jesus, "Hayll and welcome of all abowte / To owre ceté" (25.543-44), it is a unity into which the audience is implicitly invited to enter.<sup>15</sup> Beckwith describes the effect as one of being "swept up in a process of ritual participation in which York becomes Jerusalem" (66), but she argues that prophecy is pointedly not a part of that process. Noting the importance of prophecy at the start of the play, in Jesus' instructions to the disciples, she then writes that "this consciousness of scriptural precedent . . . disappears" (65). Once the "hailing of Christ as king" begins, "structures of belief and doctrinal considerations are . . . utterly unimportant" ("Ritual, Theater, and Social Space" 66). It is true that embedded witness is not part of the burgesses' hailing of Christ. But this does not constitute a disappearance of "structures of belief and doctrinal considerations." On the contrary, the cessation of embedded witness, which tends to occur with the arrival of Jesus anywhere in the plays, emphasizes the fulfilment of prophecy that occurs with his coming. That is, when Jesus tells the disciples at the play's opening that "The prophicie nowe drawes to ende" (25.10), the idea is not that they can now forget "scriptural precedent," but exactly that they remain aware that the events to take place in Jerusalem have been prophesied. Theatrical witness depends on such awareness: the audience's "hailing" of Christ rests, as I have shown, on the doctrine that the power of those events is not only demonstrated, but also *accessed*, through the "spirit of prophecy," that, as Thomas recalls, "þe poure of þat prince was presiously previd / Whan þat souerayne schewed hymselffe to my sigt."

Now, having been "instructed" by the doctor, guided by those who responded to the infant's self-witness, set example by his resistance to the devil's "trials," presented with the "evidence" of

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<sup>15</sup> As Johnston notes, in her article "The York Corpus Christi Play," "the Entry into Jerusalem is both the Biblical event and the welcoming of Christ into the city of York," and follows the ritual and geographical patterns of royal entries into York (372).

the transfiguration, and, here, theatrically interlinked to the expansive witness event of his arrival in “vnkynde” Jerusalem (25.479), the audience is ready to look on Jesus’ passion in an act of theatrical respondent witness, by which event they will take, in union with him, spiritual shelter from the courts of evil.

### Theatrical Enclosure

Fundamental to the grounding of metaphors of the game of spiring in the actual performance space is the iconic relationship between the audience space and the dramatic space. Some degree of “analogousness,” to use Keir Elam’s term from *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*, between the *performance* space and the dramatic space is inherent to all drama (22). Under certain conditions, this spatial iconicity extends to the audience space. This is true for street theatre when the dramatic action being presented in the street is itself set in a street, constituting what Elam calls “literal iconic identity” (23). In this form of iconic spatiality, the entire street — both playing and audience space — is potentially gathered together into a single identification with the mimetic street. In the resulting theatrical space, the audience potentially experiences an effect of personal involvement in the dramatic action set in those streets. A prime example of this effect in the York plays is that which occurs, as noted in the previous chapter, in “The Entry into Jerusalem.”<sup>1</sup> Allowing for some of the variability Elam assigns to “the degree of genuine homology operating between the performance and what it is supposed to denote” (23), this kind of iconic identity applies to all the diverse types of roadways in the plays. Roadways constitute the most frequent setting of the York cycle, occurring, singly or in conjunction with other settings, in 19, or 40 percent, of the 47 extant plays. Some of these are roads to salvation and some roads to damnation, a moral distinction

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<sup>1</sup> Stevens discusses this effect, with respect to that play, in his chapter, “City as Stage,” in *Four English Mystery Cycles*.

that could form the basis for a game in theatrical space.

Our interest, however, is in not roadways, but all the diverse interior spaces that take a positive or negative moral value in the edification theme. In fact, allowing for the in-between state of limbo, the edification theme exhausts all the interior spaces of the plays, which are accordingly divided, generally-speaking, into houses of God and houses of evil. The houses of evil, with the exception of the palace of hell (strictly speaking, the "presone" in God's palace), are all earthly palaces, which correspond to the heavenly palace, as noted in chapter one. The houses of God, on the other hand, take the form of any building in which God is "at home," and are thus represented by a broader architectural range, including Noah's ark (subsuming the nautical), the house of Joseph and Mary, the stable, the temple, and the castle at Emmaus. Sharing in the physical nature of these spaces are, for example, Mary's womb, the cradling arms of various characters, and, in a complex way, Jesus' grave. Moreover, a house of God may be expressed, as we have seen, by the rising of the disciples after the transfiguration, by Jesus' intimacy with God on the Mount of Olives, and, with even greater imaginative work, the crucifixion. Limbo, a place within the palace of hell, is associated with the disciples' house in Jerusalem, and, again, with the grave of Jesus, a site of important dual enclosure symbolism.

The spiritual referent of both kinds of houses is sometimes the primary expression, in which case, however, a sense of interiority is expressed through the metaphorical commonplace that spirituality is located in the interior space of the soul. On the negative side, there is the interiority of Lucifer's and Pilate's ontological self-entrapment in pride. On the positive side is the interiority of faith. Moreover, in both cases, this spiritual interiority is generally linked with the architectural image through the edification and witness themes. Thus, as we have seen, proud self-enclosure, denoting a failure to bear theological witness, is symbolic of an exclusion from the house of God. And following the, by now, familiar pattern, faith is associated with openness, in the sense of a

confidence in God, manifested in open witness, and symbolically related to dwelling with God. The concept of openness, therefore, distinguishes between the houses of evil and of God: only the latter is afforded the paradox of being an enclosure of openness, and this contrasts sharply with the extremity of narrow confinement suggested by ontological entrapment. Finally, in the transitional figure of Simeon, spiritual interiority expresses a need for a new way to open to God, and marks, in the context of the continuity of witness, the transition from the old to the new temple.

The entire scheme of the houses of God against the houses of evil is, according to the redemptive pattern of the drama, centred on the opposition of the courts of the trials and passion to the spiritual shelter figured in, and the heavenly court promised by, Jesus. There are 18 plays set in part or in whole in courts, which thus stands as the second most frequent setting of the plays. This count includes a fragmentary heavenly court scene at 7.71-72 and the harrowing of hell play, in which one of the locales of the action within the palace of hell is possibly, though not necessarily, the hell-court. The number of court settings can be increased, however, if we allow for the play of the temptation, with its court-like action, and "The Death of Christ," in which, as we have seen, Pilate, Caiaphas, and Annas oversee that death from their seats on a dais.

Between the performance stations and the interior settings there is not the literal iconic identification that occurs for the street settings. Yet, there is between these spaces an obvious structural analogy. In her study of the 17 stations listed for 1569, Eileen White finds that the average width of the streets where stations were located, excluding the two broadest streets, is 27 feet (27, 49). "The top of Micklegate and the Pavement, beginning and end of the route" are in places where the road was 45 feet wide.

The rest average 27 feet (the narrowest being 23 feet at the junction of Spurriergate and Coney Street, although this is affected by Jubbergate.) These approximate measurements are from wall to wall, and it should be remembered that the waggons

would need to avoid the overhanging floors of the houses, which could project about [one foot, six inches] or [two feet] on each storey, and that space would have to be reserved for the audience in front of the waggon. (49)

Thus, in the majority of the performance stations, the narrowness of the street produces a quality of enclosure.<sup>2</sup> The overhanging storeys that characterize the surrounding buildings add to the quality of interiority in these spaces. In this respect, the stations approximate the very basic features of an interior space of habitation, with applicability to all such spaces in the plays, the architectural, the anatomical, the sepulchral, and the spiritual.

From this analogy, the plays develop, through thematic emphasis and audience address, an elaborate strategy of theatrical enclosure, by which all the motifs of enclosure, and its conceptual opposite, openness, are localized in the audience's space. As these motifs interweave the theme of edification with the doctrine of witness, this localization enhances the effects of audience engagement that I have discussed thus far in this dissertation, pertinent instances of which will be reviewed, in sharper focus, and supplemented, in the ensuing discussion. Theatrical enclosure constitutes a playing field, as it were, for the audience's game of spiring — for its "spirringes in þat space" (33.63) — and creates for the audience as powerful a sense as possible of a personal encounter with the divine.

All the motifs of enclosure converge in the idea of charity, the chief form of witness ultimately advocated by the plays, and therefore a central value of the audience's stillness. In this convergence, especially, the drama defers to the collectivity of the audience itself, representative of the living stones of the spiritual temple, as the ultimate site of the effects of theatrical enclosure. As

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<sup>2</sup> This quality has been widely noted. See Beadle, "The York Cycle," 99; Johnston, "The York Corpus Christi Play," 366; White 49, 57. The York performance stations constitute an extreme example of the enclosure which William Tydeman, in *The Theatre in the Middle Ages*, attributes generally to the open-air theatre of the period (141).

we have seen, this symbolic status of the audience is implicit everywhere in the edification theme. In some instances, the plays explicitly acknowledge the enclosure created by the body of the audience itself. As such audience-inherent enclosure is potentially available throughout the cycle's performance, the effects of theatrical enclosure do not entirely depend upon the physical enclosure of the station. However, as dramatic emphasis lies on architectural enclosure, either metaphorical or literal, theatrical enclosure reaches its fullest effect, opportunistically, in the enclosed stations. It is there that the game of spiring will be most intense; but it is in the audience's symbolic sense of itself, regardless of station conditions, that the lessons of that game receive their final expression.

As the plays' major themes of edification and witness, culminating in the lesson of charity, can be embodied within the audience as a self-aware collective presence, intense audience engagement appears to be the determining factor in the drama's thematic fabric. On the other hand, the game of spiring is ultimately a theatricalization, in the setting of biblical history, of the audience's obligation to be edifying members of the extra-theatrical Christian community. But which concern is driving the dramaturgy: audience engagement for its own sake, or community advancement? In Olson's view, the game form itself is evidence of a lack of interest in aesthetics: "at the core of [the scholastic theory of game] is the perception of performance and drama as a kind of playing and thus principally as a kind of social *activity* rather than as a kind of artistic creation or object" (197). Whatever the direction of the relationship between audience engagement and community advancement, the important point for the present discussion is that the game of spiring literally ensconces, in fulfilment of the edification theme, its moral lessons within the audience. As the audience becomes the collective embodiment of the values of edification and witness, there is a continuity maintained between the theatrical event and the Christian community beyond.

With respect to this continuity it is worth noting a non-theatrical application of the game model, in late medieval England. In *English Medieval Mystics: Games of Faith*, Marion Glasscoe

writes that

the concept of play as an activity entered into with delight for its own sake is important for both the theology and the psychology of religion. The Christian belief in God's being as a Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit was traditionally interpreted by the Church Fathers who formulated theology, as an interplay of power, wisdom and love. The creative power of the Father is expressed in the Son as his wisdom and, in the Holy Spirit, as the creative love which binds them. Thomas Aquinas understood the relationship between Father and Son as that of the joy of divine wisdom playing before the face of God and contemplative life as sharing in such play.

The mystics understood the story of the Incarnation as the game of love in time, and the life of faith as engaging with, and extending it. . . . Living by faith in the story of the Incarnation turns out to be for these writers a totally absorbing game, the playing of which is a self-validating exercise that releases human creative energies to the full and extends the play of divine wisdom before the face of God.

(8)

This employment of a game metaphor in the broader context of medieval spirituality suggests the possibility of a ready platform to receive the audience from its theatrical game. That is, the lessons the audience learns through its theatrical game-playing can be applied extra-theatrically by continuing reference to the game metaphor.

Theatre-community continuity also exists in the environmental referent for the audience's spiritual temple, the space it must keep against the threat of entrapment in the dramatic courts of evil. To the extent that the audience identifies this space as its own, it will hold correspondence to the spaces of the Christian community, the city of York being the primary referent, in this respect.

All these elements of theatre-community continuity — the audience's playing of a spatial game of faith while symbolically identified as the spiritual church — are enhanced by theatrical enclosure, as it reinforces the audience's thematic understanding of its own presence at the performance.

Thematic emphasis on enclosure begins in the opening speech of the cycle when God, in "building" his palace, refers to "A blys al-beledande abowte me" (1.21). This line comes from a passage — in which God is creating bliss and the angels — the poetics of which reflect the uniquely transcendent state of enclosure in bliss:

Baynely in my blyssyng I byd at here be  
 A blys al-beledande abowte me.  
 In þe wilke blys I byde at be here  
 Nyen ordres of aungels full clere. (1.20-23)

The homophonic extension of "blys" from God's "blyssyng" evokes a sense of profound union and expresses a fulfilment of the promise God makes earlier in this speech, that his "blyssyng o ble sall be blendyng" (1.5). In addition to the "blendyng" of sound and letters in "blyss" and "blyssyng," the chiasmus, "here be"-"be here," mimics the interweaving of the angels with bliss. And the chiasmus itself is interwoven with the homophone: "blyssyng" . . . "here be" . . . "blys" . . . "be here." Such verbal subtleties, as Johnston has said, are effective because the physical closeness of the performance stations allowed for close listening.<sup>3</sup> In this case, the poetics in turn exploit that closeness, lending an effect of transcendental union to the theatrical identification of the station with the heavenly court.<sup>4</sup> As God has been identified with Christ, as "lyfe and way" (1.3), and has enjoined for "worthely warke . . . / In my sprete" (1.17-18), this effect of a transcendental enclosure

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<sup>3</sup> Personal conversation.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. King, who, distinguishing this as a *locus* rather than *platea* speech, writes, "the space they perceive does not in this instance contain the audience" (54).

of the audience achieves theatrically that which is sought mystically by Julian of Norwich: "We be closyd in the fader, and we be closyd in the son, and we are closyd in the holy gost. And the fader is beclosyd in vs, the son is beclosyd in vs, and the holy gost is beclosyd in vs . . ." (2.563: ch. 54, ll. 23-26).

The depiction of negative enclosure, in this play, begins with a primarily spiritual image — Lucifer's proud self-enclosure — and moves to a primarily architectural one when Lucifer finds himself in "a dongon of dole" (1.98), excluded, by his failure to witness to God, from the heavenly court. The transition for the fallen angels from positive to negative enclosure is succinctly described by one of the devils: "We þat ware beelled in blys, in bale are we brent nowe" (1.107). The effects of this play point to two important principles of theatrical enclosure. First, as suggested above, the identification of the station with interior settings is a broad effect that includes not only concrete architectural analogies, but also, with an intensification of the audience's imaginative engagement, metaphorical analogies that identify the audience's material enclosure with spiritual interiors.

Second, the theatrics of enclosure is highly flexible, allowing for simultaneous, complementary, competing, and transitional identifications. At a basic level, the station will be identified, at any given moment, with whichever interior space is then taking dramatic precedence. Thus, the station's theatrical identity transforms with the fall of the angels. At a more significant level, however, the station's identity is generally subjected to tension, as evil and virtuous interiors are rarely held separate for long in the dramatic action. In this case, as God remains in his throne above, the heavenly court and the "dongon of dole" coexist in the dramatic setting and in theatrical space. Consequently, the audience is put in a position of spatial crisis, an essential element of theatrical enclosure, to be examined in detail below.

A coupling of spiritual enclosure with literal, rather than metaphoric, physical enclosure

occurs with the ark when Noah, warning his wife against disembarking to fetch her friends and cousins, tells her to “Loke in and loke withouten were” (9.146). This association of the ark with inner faith carries forward to where, with the waters rising, Noah tells his sons to “Wendes and spers youre dores bedene” (9.161). The encouragement Noah gives his family is linked, suggestively, to the boldness of witness, and in particular to that of the audience, when, “ix monethes” later, he says, “O barnes, itt waxes clere aboute. / þat may ȝe see there wher ȝe sitte” (9.179, 183-84). Elaborating on the conventional typological link between the ark and the church, this figuring of the birth of Jesus anticipates the audience’s theatrical witnessing, by an act of sight, to his “divine light.” Thus, the audience’s sense of enclosure with Noah and family, looking out from the ark as the sky “waxes clere aboute,” figures the spiritual shelter the audience will take in Jesus, through the event of his self-witness. References to the sky form a small dramatic motif of theatrical enclosure in themselves, as they point to the open-air condition of the enclosed stations.

The conjunction of ontological self-enclosure in pride with entrapment in tyranny has its first expression, in the plays, in the “daunger” of Pharaoh’s Egypt. When Moses tells Pharaoh that he will lead the children of Israel to the wilderness, Pharaoh replies,

I make no force howe þou has mente.

For in my daunger sall þei dwelle. (11.211-12)

In his pride, Pharaoh conflates the world with himself, in which case his dismissal of Moses’ words — “I make no force howe þou has mente” — is simply a matter of fact: they can have no “force,” because, in a world which *is* Pharaoh, all meanings other than his own are precluded. In this play, a sense of physical entrapment, in particular, is evoked by the concrete detail of the shut “dore[s]” and the “wall” of the sea that divides that dangerous land from the “more plener place” (11.290, 380, 200). Looking ahead for a moment, we can see a similar conjunction of ontological and physical enclosure in “Herod and the Magi.” At the plays’ opening, the first detail of what becomes a claim

to rule the world is Herod's sense of the sky as his roof: "The clowdes clapped in clerenes þat þer clematis inclosis" (16.1). But his pride — indicated most relevantly, in this context, by his taking of comfort in the sun's "þemes þat oure belde blithes" (16.13) — betrays a self-enclosure that not only excludes him from the light of God's palace, but also, by an ontological priority, reduces the expanse of his realm to the confines of his own being. Thus, as his gesture to the sky identifies the entire performance station with "þer clematis inclosis," the audience's enclosure is dominated by a sense of potential ontological imprisonment.

Though the text makes no reference to the setting of the Annunciation, the traditional setting of the virgin's bower would certainly provide a strong visual image of enclosure. To the extent that the audience is intended to experience theatrical enclosure in Mary's bower, the effect has a parallel in the early thirteenth-century anchoritic text, *Þe Wohunge of Ure Lauerd*:

Broht tu haues me fra þe world to bur of ði burðe. steked me i chaumbre. I mai þer  
þe swa sweteli kissen & cluppen. & of þi luue haue gastli likinge. (285)

Commenting on this passage, Renevey writes, "the imagery of the Song of Songs refers to and recalls . . . the conditions particular to the *reclitorium*. The bower (the one in which Mary is depicted in Annunciation scenes but also that of the courtly lady in secular love lyrics and romances) becomes associated with the *reclitorium*, the meeting place for Christ and his lover-spouse" (59).

Complementing the audience's identification with that literal enclosure are references to the anatomical enclosure of Mary's womb, as she pleads her chastity to the angel Gabriel. In her article, "Anchoritic Aspects of *Ancrene Wisse*," Alexandra Barratt notes the metaphorical application of the virgin womb to anchoritic enclosure, with reference specifically to Christ "as a type of the anchoress" (42). In "Joseph's Trouble about Mary," a sense of enclosure in the virgin womb is especially prominent. The enclosure of the house, noted by the handmaiden who testifies

to Joseph that no man has come within these “wanes” (13.123) refers, according to general allegorical tradition, to Mary’s chastity.<sup>5</sup> This association is suggested also in the previous speech by another handmaiden, who says, “Come here no man bytwene / To touche þat berde so bright” (13.121-22). In both plays, the audience’s identification with enclosure in the virgin womb gives it a sense of receiving the embryonic Jesus into its presence. Thus, the audience’s space is theatrically ascribed with chastity, an important element in later instances of theatrical enclosure.

At the birth, the audience has a sense of enclosure in the stable, which, despite inconsistency in the detail of the stable’s ruined walls, “doune on ilke a side” (14.17), is a particularly apt analogue for the station as a semi-enclosed space. The analogy is fulfilled in the condition of the stable’s “ruffe . . . rayued aboven oure hede,” and in the important theological point that Joseph and Mary are liable to “be stormed in þis steede” (14.18. 16). Enhancing these effects are significant instances of symbolic enclosure. Having sent Joseph, with a blessing, out on his search for “light . . . / And fewell” (14.43-44), Mary says,

Nowe in my sawle grete joie haue I.

I am all cladde in comferte clere.

Now will be borne of my body

Both God and man togedir in feere.

Blist mott he be. (14.50-54)

This complex image of concentric enclosures — Mary, within the stable, “all cladde in comferte,” enclosing within her body a child in whom is enclosed God — draws timely attention to the common centre: “Jesu my sone þat is so dere, / Nowe borne is he” (14.55-56). The symbolic complexities of the audience’s theatrical enclosure at this central moment of the cycle afford it a

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<sup>5</sup> See Cowling 28-29, 148-149, for the description of the virgin womb in building terms, in the late-medieval French tradition.

sense of experiencing the mystery of the incarnation. A moment later, however, thematic focus shifts from that mystery to the spiritual enclosure of Jesus' redemptive action:

Sone, as I am sympill sugett of thyne,  
 Vowchesaffe, swete sone I pray þe,  
 That I myght þe take in þe armys of myne  
 And in þis poure wede to arraie þe.  
 Graunte me þi blisse. (14.64-68)

Concentricity replaced by reciprocity. Mary clothes and encloses the infant in her arms, while taking shelter in its promise of "blisse." Thus, at the moment of birth, the audience is instructed to shelter and take shelter in Jesus. The lesson of mutual edification applies directly to the audience's present theatrical enclosure of and in the infant, and foreshadows its engagement in the critical events of Jesus' redemptive action, complete to the winding of his corpse in a "sudarye" and the lowering of it into the "grounde" (36.387, 390).

In "The Purification," in accordance with the thematic context, the theme of enclosure is especially prominent. Anna greets Jesus with, "Babb, welcome to thy beyldly boure" (17.336), a line which resonates with a sense of the temple's glorious past and ironically foreshadows its imminent demise. The "belde" word-group occurs another eight times, in the play (17.87, 304, 313, 318, 363, 364, 409, and 453). The first of these is in reference to God; the others all to Jesus, with the effect of ringing in the new order. In this play, too, the theme of enclosure is linked with the idea of charity. The association of Simeon's self-enclosure with the temple, as a place representative of the need for "marcy" (17.20), affirms that we should understand a sense of enclosure by Anna's remarks, "Here in this holy playce . . . my holy conversacion . . . you all here in this place" (17.57, 65, 69). The latter remark, especially, effects a station-as-temple condition, which enhances the audience's theatrical witness with Simeon as he recovers, through the "spirit of

prophecy," from self-enclosure, in anticipation of Jesus' personal presence. In this case, the symbolic capacities of theatrical enclosure are fully engaged, because Simeon's "gamme of hyme to telle" takes place away from the temple. Under the force of that "gamme," the audience can experience, ahead of Simeon's call to the temple, the arrival of Jesus as a foreshadowing of his supplanting of the temple. At the theatrical level, this foreshadowing is expressed in a conflict of identification: station-as-temple (the ongoing dramatic setting) or station-as-spiritual temple (in anticipation of the redemption). This conflict challenges the audience to engage actively in the dramatic effects. The challenge is met, according to the lesson of Simeon's "gamme," specifically in the audience's respondent witness to the figure of Christ, by which, overriding the basic identification with the setting, it joins with him in the new temple.

An added element of the metaphorical fluidity suggested in these effects is that raised by the emphasis in this play on Mary's chastity, which, as Joseph argues, should excuse her from the rite of purification:

For certys thowe arte a clene vyrgyn

For any thocht thy harte within,

Nor never wroght no flesly synne

Nor never yll. (17.212-15; also 216, 268, 308, 317, etc.)

Thus, with the arrival of Mary and her infant, the enclosed station is possibly identified with, besides the spiritual temple, Mary's faithful heart and her inviolate womb. Imagistic flow between these various enclosures is evoked particularly by the priest's prayer.

That this babb lorde, present in thy sight,

Borne of a madyns wombe vnfyld.

.....

May beylde vs. (17.307-08, 313)

In the theatrical presence of Mary and Jesus, the station becomes new temple and virgin womb all at once, both symbolic of spiritual shelter. One final image of enclosure to be identified symbolically with the audience's space is that of Jesus in the arms of Simeon, who thanks God for "this gyrrh / Thus comly to catch here thy corse" (17.396-97). With Jesus in his arms, Simeon says,

Of helpe thus thy freynd never failis.

Thy marcy as every man avaylls.

Both by downes and by daylls.

Thus mervelous and mucche is thy myght. (17.399-402)

The cradling of Jesus, thus, becomes a visual image of the dual precepts of charity: love of God and love of the neighbour. The moment marks the resumption, in Jesus, of "Goddes commandement," which dominates, in the priest's opening speech, the start of the play. The theatrical enclosure of the audience in this act of charity is reinforced when a moment later, Simeon acknowledges the spiritual shelter to be found in Jesus: "And here thou beyld vs fro blame / And frome all stryfe" (17.409-10). Echoing Mary's seeking of bliss as she cradles the newborn Jesus, Simeon presents an image of the reciprocity of shelter in spiritual union. Especially as that reciprocity is expressed in terms of charity, the audience's enclosure *within itself*, forming, as never-failing friends of God and one another, the spiritual temple, becomes, for a moment in the performance, the privileged symbolism of theatrical enclosure. At the end of the play, glancing ahead to other potential symbolic identifications with the audience's enclosure in the station, Simeon first warns Mary, "the sworde of sorro thy hart shal thyrll," and then adds that she will recover, "in harte to be fayne" (17.441, 446).

Three further instances of the theme of charity demonstrate its sustainment as a force of theatrical enclosure in the subsequent drama leading up to the trial and passion plays. First, in "Christ and the Doctors," a doctor responds to Jesus' challenge of his knowledge by naming

þe firste bidding

þat Moyses taught vs here vntill:

To honnoure God ouere all thing. (20.145-47)

Jesus answers:

The secounde may men preve

And clerly knawe, wherby

ʒoure neighbours shall ʒe loue

Als youreselffe, sekirly. (20.153-56)

The use of the word "preve," under the considerable sway of the witness theme, constitutes a gesture towards the audience's representational presence as spiritual temple, proving by its theatrical witness, in response to the figure of Jesus, that they do indeed love one another in the name of God. Next, approaching Jerusalem, Jesus apostrophizes the city:

I murne, I sigh, I wepe also

Jerusalem on þe to loke.

And so may þou rewe

þat euere þou þi kyng forsuke

And was vntrewe.

For stone on stone schall none be lefte

But doune to þe grounde all schal be caste.

Thy game, þi gle, al fro þe refte

And all for synne þat þou done hast.

þou arte vnkynde:

Agayne þi kyng þou hast trespass.

Haue þis in mynde. (25.470-81)

The threat to tear the city down “stone on stone,” and to end its “game,” along with the charge of unkindness, compels the audience to self-assessment: is it playing the proper game the drama demands of it? Does it form “stone on stone” a place worthy to receive the messiah? Is it a place of kindness? Especially as the audience has converged, through theatrical witness, in the reception of Jesus outside the gates of Jerusalem, its answers are understood: it is indeed a place where, enclosed in the love of God, “Of helpe thus thy freynd never failis.” Finally, in the garden before his arrest, Jesus twice goes “Kyndely to comferte” the disciples (28.65, 126). As these acts of friendship are interspersed with his visits with God on the mount, the action as a whole defines the dual precepts of charity. That both times he finds the disciples asleep adds to the lesson the audience must take from this passage. As we shall see, watchfulness is firmly established as an essential element of the audience’s theatrical enclosure in the ensuing passion and trial plays.

In those plays, theatrical enclosure of the audience involves it directly in the struggle between the spiritual shelter of Jesus and the evil palace. The theme of evil enclosure in these plays is developed through direct reference to that spatial quality, or to entrapment, the idea of which is usually reinforced with threats of immediate personal violence. Generally, these elements occur in tyrannical addresses to a generic court audience, which are clearly directed, in support of theatrical enclosure, to the real audience. The full effect of these addresses is achieved in a combination of references to enclosure and entrapment with commands for obedience. Such commands from figures of evil to the audience are found in many English medieval plays. Typically, these commands seek a universal obedience, by demanding stillness, and, as Diller and others have noted, theatricalize the audience’s presence so that the spectators become subjects of the tyrant, or more

generally complicit with evil, as in the case of Titivillus's request for silence, in *Mankind*.<sup>6</sup>

In the York plays, such effects of engagement, turning on the interwoven polysemies of enclosure and stillness, are multilayered and organized according to the overarching opposition of proud to divine order. The element of obedience is at the core of the conjunction between theatrical enclosure and theatrical witness, for, as formulated in "The Temptation," the act of obedience is an act of witness. Faced, in this conjunctive context, with the tyrannical command for obedience, the audience, then, must look to Jesus' stillness as an act of witness, in bold obedience ("lowde and stille") to God through steadfast resistance to the temptations of the court. Reflecting the multivalence of Jesus' stillness, the audience's stillness will also express the virtues of patience, prudence, awe before God, peacefulness and harmony (indicative of true, constant order, in anticipation of final rest), and a general repudiation of the proud culture of the evil courts.

In extending this responsibility to the audience, the plays theatricalize the binding choice imposed by the act of witness, which "sets a standard, to ignore which is not simply indifference, but refusal" (Coenen, "Proclamation" 57). That binding choice, evident in the form and content of the pun in "spirre" — to interrogate, and to inquire (textually and theologically) — and in the theatrical condition that the imprisoning palaces threaten to engulf the audience whenever the virtuous example of Jesus is ignored, is triggered by the tyrannical command for obedience. Of particular significance, in this respect, is the inherent spatial quality of obedient stillness, which produces the effect of what Burke calls the "domains or 'regions' of silence," such as are centred around the body of ruler or judge (125). Thus, the command for obedience is the point of spatial crisis in the strategy of theatrical enclosure, and places the responsibility for the resolution of that crisis squarely in the hands of the audience. The obligation imposed by these commands upon the

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<sup>6</sup> Diller 122, 142. For *Mankind*, see Christine Richardson and Jackie Johnston, *Medieval Drama*, 135. See also Wickham 85-87 where he discusses techniques for gaining silence at the start of medieval plays.

audience, then, is to remain obedient to, and thus intimate with, God, as exemplified by Jesus in his intimate promise of obedience to God, on the Mount of Olives, just before his arrest:

Be it worthely wrought

Euen at thyne awne will.

Euermore both myldely and still.

With worschippe allway be it wroght. (28.60-63)

This charging of the audience's stillness with theological significance, complements the drama's similar, self-serving treatment, in the context of respondent witness, of the audience's onlooking and listening: to be a "good," attentive audience is to succeed in the theatrical game of the plays. The effect holds regardless of whether or not the audience initially greets the tyrannical figure with jeering, a traditional assumption. Important, in this respect is the fact that Jesus is not present during these addresses, which come at the openings of the trial and passion plays. His absence puts the audience in the position of creating a spiritual shelter in anticipation of his arrival in these courts, a theatrical parallel of the prominent anticipatory element in the Christological view of the history of the world. This element is seen in the doctor's prologue to the Annunciation where he expresses it in the form of prophetic testimony to the messiah, culminating in God's sending of John the Baptist before Jesus, so he "wolde his place puruay" (12.122). Shortly thereafter, in this play, Mary herself, having received Gabriel's message, becomes the place prepared for Jesus: "Goddis handmayden, lo me here / To his wille all redy grayd" (12.189-90), an image then repeated by Elizabeth: "Blissed be þou grathely grayed / To God thurgh chastité" (12.225-26). Preparation for Jesus' arrival is also expressed in John the Baptist's recollection of his testimony in the desert where he preached that people must "be clene" for "God will make in yowe haly þan / His wonnyng-steed" (21.39, 41-42). But especially in Simeon's recovery from self-enclosure, through an act of witness before the arrival of Jesus, the audience has an example of what it must do during

these tyrannical addresses: become still. “grathely grayed.” in a symbolic shelter analogous to Mary’s chaste womb.

Mary is also the source of a specific preparation of the audience for its paradoxical obligation of having to resist the tyrannical command to obedient stillness with stillness, a paradox otherwise played out, in the drama of these plays, in the opposition of virtuous and false “curteyse.” In “Joseph’s Trouble about Mary,” when Joseph enters their house seeking to confront his wife, a handmaiden tells him,

Certis Joseph, ze sall vndirstande

pat sho is not full farre you fra,

Sho sittis at hir boke full faste prayand. (13.79-81)

Perhaps Joseph only pretends not to see Mary so as to afford himself an opportunity for his sarcasm about her sexual status: “Whare is pat zonge virgine / Marie, my berde so bright?” (13.77-78). If his oversight is a pretence, there is a complex irony involved, for he does not “see” her as she actually is, a virgin. On the other hand, if he really does not see her — in which case there would be no lessening of his sarcastic tone — his spiritual blindness would be signified also by that actual oversight. Later in the play, Joseph’s spiritual blindness is itself expressed in terms of stillness. After an outburst of anger, he says,

For of slyk note war litill nede,

Yhitt for myn awne I wolde it fede,

Might all be still. (13.184-86)

His wish for stillness — of his doubts and perhaps of what he perceives to be the inescapable shame of his circumstance (13.46-54) — in exchange for a grudging fulfilment of paternal duty grossly underestimates the spiritual stillness that would come from “feeding” Jesus. Joseph’s oversight — actual or feigned — draws attention to Mary’s stillness, as she “sittis at hir boke full faste prayand.”

With her prayer book on her lap, next to Jesus in her womb, she is a paragon of the stillness of spiritual shelter. As we have seen, in the case of Mary and her handmaidens, and to the pointed exclusion of Joseph, that shelter is analogized in the physical house, whose “wanes” encompass also the audience.

Having finished with the handmaidens, Joseph turns to Mary, and the ensuing scene can be described as a conflict of stillnesses. He repeatedly puts the question of paternity to her. Each time, she answers that the child is his *and* God’s. Joseph cannot accept that answer and twice rebukes her with a command for obedient stillness: “Neme it na more to me, be still!” he says, and then,

Therefore be nozt so balde

Pat no slike tales be talde.

But halde þe stille als stane. (13.170, 191-93)

In each case, Mary appears to obey, not speaking again until Joseph reiterates his question. But the meaning of stillness in Mary is always obedience to God. This condition, supported by that prior, powerful image of her at prayer, is affirmed when, at one point during this interchange, she turns obediently to God — “Mekely to þe I bowe” (13.203) — and prays for her husband, “Pat in his herte myght light / þe soth to ken and trowe” (13.205-06).<sup>7</sup> Here, in the confidence of her faith, she is indeed “balde” and “stille als stane,” as she builds a spiritual house to match the anatomical and architectural ones. Impervious to her example, and, significantly, as he prepares to leave the house, Joseph again commands stillness — “drawe thyn hande [hold your breath] / . . . / . . . sitte stille here tille I come agayne” (13.223, 228). Whether Mary has already resumed, or subsequently takes, her seat at prayer, the lesson to the audience is clear: in the face of such commands, whether from

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<sup>7</sup> Mary and Joseph are typologically figured, with an incipient sense of virtuous stillness, but a transposition of the commanding of it, by Adam and Eve, when she rebukes him for his griping at the expulsion: “Be stille Adam, and nemen it na mare, / It may not mende” (6.155).

domestic or political tyrants, respond with obedient stillness to God.

In the first of the trial plays, Caiaphas backs up a command for obedient stillness — “Pees bewshers, I bid no jangelyng 3e make. / And sese sone of youre sawes and se what I saye” (29.1-2) — with the threat of a superior knowledge of the law:

I am a lorde lerned lelly in youre lay.

By connyng of clergy and casting of witte

Full wisely my wordis I welde at my will. (29.4-6)

The implications of that threat are clarified when he tells the audience:

All domesmen on dese awe for to dowte me

That hase thaym in bandome in bale or in blis:

Wherfore takes tente to my tales, and lowtis vnto me. (29.20-22)

Though Caiaphas, unlike Pilate and Herod in subsequent plays, does not threaten immediate personal violence, he shows a willingness to turn the law to that end. In this respect the speech parallels the effect of a building tension in the ensuing action, with respect to the safety of Jesus. Once the interrogation has begun, Caiaphas twice overrules a suggestion that Jesus be beaten (29.242-43, 288), before summarily ordering his execution (29.334). Being swayed from that course by Annas, he finally gives the order to beat the prisoner (29.349). In the opening speech, a similar tension is extended theatrically to the audience, as the instrument of potential entrapment in Caiaphas’ “bale,” his “wordis,” fills the enclosure of the station. The effect is ironic, and productive of spatial crisis, as the audience understands that true entrapment comes *with* obedience to Caiaphas.

After Caiaphas, it is a sword that is wielded in these addresses to the audience. In “Christ before Pilate I,” the tyrant orders,

Yhe cursed creatures þat cruelly are cryand,

Restreyne you for stryuyng for strengh of my strakis:  
 Youre pleyntes in my presence vse plately applyand.  
 Or ellis þis brande in youre braynes sone brestis and brekis.  
 Þis brande in his bones brekis.  
 What brawle þat with brawlyng me brewis.  
 That wrecche may not wrye fro my wrekis.  
 Nor his sleightis nozt slely hym slakis. (30.1-8)

As we have seen, Pilate, in an elaborate parody of Jesus' self-witness, goes on in this speech to prove himself "a prince of grete pride" (30.19). Thus, the speech is richly suggestive of a witness context for the audience's response to his command for obedience. According to the allegorical implications of respondent witness, then, Pilate's boasts that he may "sone" plant his sword in their brains and bones, and that those threatened may not avoid his punishments, nor cunningly extricate themselves, clearly describes the outcome of a mistaken response in this theatrical game: enclosure in the palace of evil. Such tyrannical threats of violence manifest the bond of tyranny noted in the previous chapter, and contrast most sharply with the "blyssyng blys" of divine enclosure.

The definitive statement of the theatrical struggle of the edification theme, along with one of the two clearest references to the quality of enclosure in these courts, comes in "Christ before Herod," where the tyrant commands,

Pes, ye brothellis and browlys in þis broydenesse inbrased.  
 And freykis þat are frendely your freyknesse to frayne.  
 Youre tounge fro trefyng of truffillis be trased.  
 Or þis brande þat is bright schall breste in youre brayne.  
 Plextis for no plasis but platte you to þis playne. (31.1-5)

"Plea not for places but kneel you in this place" — the line exactly describes the spatial crisis of

theatrical enclosure: kneel in obedience to Pilate and become enclosed in a place where a sword is likely to burst open one's head, or be still in the name of God, so that "þis broydenesse inbrased [surrounded]" becomes spiritual shelter from such threats.

In "plasis," Herod appears to refer, generally-speaking, to actual and symbolic places of privilege in his court, if only those from which one may make a complaint. The audience's proper response — an act of witness in the court of God — exactly opposes Herod's expectation, precluding such jostling for privilege, by rejecting the proud tyrannical order itself. Nevertheless, Herod's remark, in describing that opposition in terms of such jostling, is also suggestive of a wholly temporal context for the audience's spatial crisis. Of interest, in this respect, are the first lines of Pilate's opening speech, in "The Conspiracy":

Vndir þe ryallest roye of rente and renowne  
 Now am I regent of rewle þis region in reste,  
 Obeye vnto bidding bud busshoppis me bowne  
 And bolde men þat in batayll makis brestis to breste.  
 To me betaught is þe tent þis towre-begon towne. (26.1-5)

The final remark is an obvious reference to York itself, which was renowned for its stone walls, including the many-towered one which enclosed the city, as well as those which enclosed the various liberties within the city.<sup>8</sup> This reference suggests a topical context also for Pilate's remark about being the "regent" who collects "þe tent" beneath the "ryallest roye of rente," an allusion perhaps to an earlier time when the most vilified person in York was the King's Sheriff of Yorkshire, who ruled the city during the 12th century. Most symbolic of his duties, in that

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<sup>8</sup> On the walls and towers of York, see John Leland, *The Itinerary of John Leland*, 54; T.P. Cooper, *York: The Story of its Walls, Bars, and Castles*; Miller, "Medieval York," 51; Harvey, *York*, 115-16; and Nuttgens, *York: The Continuing City*, 55.

vilification, was the collection of the annual farm paid by the city to the Crown.<sup>9</sup> The topical allusion includes Pilate's qualification of his tenure: he is the governor during times of peace. Such was the case with the king's representative in York, for in times of war (in the north), the king himself would relocate to that city.

The political allusion may have had contemporary significance, as the struggle for civic autonomy was ongoing.<sup>10</sup> In the context of this study, however, its importance is that, by casting the opposition between tyrant and audience in a context of civic autonomy, it brings the entire city, as an enclosed space, into the effect of theatrical enclosure.<sup>11</sup> Specific political implications notwithstanding, the general effect is that the spiritual shelter identified with the enclosure of the stations is referred ultimately to the city itself. At one level, it is the city of York that is opposed to tyrants in the theatrical struggle of the trial and passion plays: it is the city itself that is placed in theatrical jeopardy by the spatial crisis of that struggle. The audience's position with respect to this level of reference for theatrical enclosure is suggested by the wording of a petition, of 1399, from the commons of York, concerning an issue in the production of the plays: "And they (the commons) aske these things for the sake of God and as a work of charity for the benefit of the said commons and of the strangers who have travelled to the said city for the honour <of> God and the promotion

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<sup>9</sup> For the history of York's struggle for autonomy from the sheriff's office, see Miller 31-35.

<sup>10</sup> Taking a broader view of this issue, Robert Brawer, in his article "St. Augustine's Two Cities as Medieval Dramatic Exempla," writes that, in Corpus Christi plays, the "moral and spiritual choices . . . of the ancient Biblical figures . . . who are shown to be torn between the claims of earthly monarchs . . . and of Christ to divine sovereignty . . . [c]oncomitantly . . . are those of the medieval townsmen who impersonate those figures on the stage and of the audience itself, also medieval townspeople, in whose time the individual and communal struggle between the laws of men in the earthly city and the laws of God in the heavenly city persists" (225-26).

<sup>11</sup> Scolnicov discusses this identification of dramatic setting with the city itself, in the context of the processional form of the plays (23). Beckwith considers the plays' performance in the context of the spatial tensions created by the liberties within the city ("Ritual, Theater, and Social Space" 70-77).

of charity among the same commons” (Johnston and Rogerson, *REED York*, 2.698). The rhetoric matches exactly that which defines the plays’ strategy of theatrical enclosure, by which the audience is engaged in a struggle that requires it to oppose itself, as a city of charity, against the threats of proud tyranny.

In “The Remorse of Judas.” Pilate again wields a sword, as he commands.

Pees, bewscheres. I bidde you, þat beldis here aboute me.

And loke þat 3e stirre with no striffe but stande stone still.

Or by þe lorde þat me liffe lente I schall gare you lowte me.

And all schall byde in my bale þat wirkis nozt my will.

Ye rebaldis þat regnys in þis rowte.

3e stynte of youre steuenyng so stowte.

Or with þis brande þat dere is to doute

All to dede I schall dryue you þis day. (32.1-8)

In this case, the threat of enclosure suggested by the proximity of the sword, is countered by the imperative to build spiritual shelter that arises, ironically, from the echo of heavenly edification — the angels that “beelde . . . abowete” God (1.47) — and from the stone metaphor.<sup>12</sup> Again, the explicit statement of the threat of enclosure — “And all schall byde in my bale þat wirkis nozt my will” — ironically inverts the true nature of theatrical enclosure, that it is exactly a working of Pilate’s will which leads to entrapment. The ironic sense is upheld largely by the witness theme, which is interwoven here through the echo of God’s, “But onely þe worthely warke of my wyll / In my sprete sall enspre þe mighte of me,” as well as through other elements of parodic self-witness

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<sup>12</sup> A figural precedent, generally for all these tyrannical addresses, and specifically for this combination of a command to “stande stone still” with a threat of violence occurs in “The Slaughter of the Innocents” (19.1-5).

in this speech (noted in chapter two). In that context, it is clear that obedience to the tyrant would constitute an act of perverted respondent witness, entrapping the audience in that "bale," and thus excluding it from the house of God.

Finally, in "Christ before Pilate 2," God's injunction for "worthely warke" is again echoed, for the same effect, as the tyrant tells his court, "who werkis any werkes withoute me, / I sall charge hym in chynes to chere hym" (33.11-12). Pilate follows this threat of entrapment in chains with the second of those two clearest of references to the court as an enclosed space:

Tharfore 3e lusty ledes within þis lenght lapped.

Do stynte of 3oure stalyng and of stoutnes be stalland.

What traytoure his tong with tales has trapped.

That fende for his flateryng full foul sall be falland. (33.13-16)

Again, the audience must see past the logic of a proud order to understand that to "werkis" *with* Pilate is to become "chained" within that "lenght lapped." Immediately following this passage, the threatening command for obedience is extended to those who "vnsoftely will sege in þer sales" (33.18). This reference is perhaps an acknowledgment of audience members watching from second-storey windows, inserted here possibly to ameliorate the force of "þis lenght lapped," the specificity of which might lay unwanted stress on their exclusion from the more immediate effect of theatrical enclosure.

The full effect of these instances of theatrical enclosure is seen in the context of their placement relative to the other major devices used in the trial and passion plays for the development of the thematic braid of stillness, order, and entrapment. The general pattern is tyrannical address (plays 29, 30, 31, 32, 33), tyrannical retirement scene (29, 30, 31) threshold scene (29, 30, 31), and

ensuing conflict between material entrapment and spiritual shelter.<sup>13</sup> In every case, as we have seen, the audience, responding to the address, anticipates Jesus' arrival by preparing spiritual shelter for him. In those cases with threshold scenes, the approach to and entry into the evil palaces emphasizes the distinction between the audience's shelter and those palaces. And, in these cases, especially as the evil palace is "asleep," the "grathely grayed" audience has a sense, when the bound Jesus is led through the threshold, of being already "there," vigilantly waiting to receive him into its shelter, and to subsequently unite with him in shelter, as he experiences the passion. In the steadfastness of that shelter, the audience's struggle against the earthly palaces is a "morality play," whose values are allegorized in the same general way as those of *The Castle of Perseverance*.

These effects of theatrical enclosure continue in the ensuing passion and death of Jesus, though, with the end of the second Pilate play, the literal court settings give way to exterior settings that offer in themselves no referent for the idea of interiority. In "The Road to Calvary," with the familiar images of edification and stones, a soldier commands,

Pees, barnes and bachillers þat beldis here aboute.

Stirre nozt ones in þis stede but stonde stone stille.

Or be þe lorde þat I leue on I schall gar you lowte.

.....

Therefore I comaunde you on euere ilke a side,

Vppon payne of enprisonment þat no man appere

To suppowle þis traytoure, be tyme ne be tyde.

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<sup>13</sup> In play 32, "The Remorse of Judas," Jesus does not appear; in play 33, "Christ before Pilate 2," as noted previously, he is brought directly into court where the tribunal sits "vndre sylke," without an intervening gate scene.

[ . . . . . ]<sup>14</sup>

Nought one of þis prees.

Nor noht ones so hardy for to enquere.

But helpe me holly alle þat are here

þis kaitiffe care to encrees. (34.1-3, 9-15)

Yet again, in a witness context, signalled here by “enquere” (synonymous with “spirre”), the audience is faced with the irony that disobeying the soldier thwarts his threat of “enprisonment.” In this case, however, the potential of imprisonment lies in a quality of interiority that is assigned to the audience itself, which becomes an enclosing crowd “on euere ilke a side” of Jesus and his guards. This instance of theatrical enclosure exploits the audience’s symbolic capacity as the “living stones” of the spiritual church. In that capacity, the audience’s identification with the spiritual church can be exhausted entirely in the metaphorical quality of rising, an identification that occurs, therefore, independent of station conditions. The sense of interiority attached to the audience could, however, contribute to such identifications. Certainly, for any play, this audience-inherent interiority would complement the effects of theatrical enclosure within the enclosed stations, and, especially if the audience is indeed a “prees,” would allow for a degree of those effects in the broader stations. In the case of “The Road to Calvary,” audience-inherent enclosure would operate in conjunction with the iconic identification of the performance and mimetic roadways. When this play was performed in the enclosed stations, that performance condition would complement the audience-inherent enclosure, resulting in a rich complex of theatrical effects, including those informed by the thematic significance of roadways, which lies beyond the scope of this study.

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<sup>14</sup> Beadle’s note: “Line missing, no gap in MS.”

In the pivotal plays of "The Crucifixion" and "The Death of Christ," theatrical enclosure is achieved through a thematizing of enclosure in symbolic shelter. Contributing to these effects, in the latter play, are two crucial instances of audience address and, as noted above, an approximation of the evil court setting. In "The Crucifixion," the audience's "worthely warke" of building shelter comes up against the "wirkyng" of the crucifiers, who "boldely do þis dede" (35.26, 31). This opposition of good and evil work is partly focused in the cross. When one of the soldiers says, "Þe crosse on grounde is goodely graied / And boorede even as it awith to be" (35.39-40), there is a linguistic echo by which the audience's building of a place "grathely grayed" (as was Mary) for Jesus is identified with the cross itself. The symbolic identification of the audience's enclosed space with the cross is paralleled in *De Wohunge of Ure Lauerd*, in the same passage that identifies the anchorage with Mary's bower:

Mi bodi henge wið þi bodi neiled o rode. sperred querfaste wið inne fowr wahes &  
henge i wile wið þe & neuer mare of mi rode cume til þat i deie. (285)

As Renevey puts it, the effect is to depict "the anchoritic life as a medieval crucifixion" (59).

As the scene continues, Jesus prays for humankind, that God "fro þe fende þame fende. / So þat þer saules be saffe / In welthe withouten ende" (35.57-59), by which the audience's spiritual building is connected also with the eternal shelter of God's palace, the "place full of plenté" (1.12). The lesson that these sheltering spaces are accessed only by the act of obedience is expressed, appropriately, in a silent act that preempts a soldier's command for obedience:

Third Soldier: Haue done belyue boy, and make þe boune.

And bende þi bakke vnto þis tree.

Fourth Soldier: Byhalde, hymseiffe has laide hym doune

In lenghe and breede as he schulde bee. (35.73-76)

The struggle between Jesus, as spiritual shelter, and the soldiers continues with the nailing: "This

boy here in oure baile / Shall bide full bittir brayde. / . . . / þan muste he bide in bittir bale" (35.95-96. 110). The audience is then directly engaged as the soldiers struggle to raise the cross:

Assaie sirs, latte se yf any gynne  
 May helpe hym vppe withoute hone,  
 For here schulde wight men worschippe wynne.  
 And noght with gaudis al day to gone. (35.197-200)

As the audience, "here," raises Jesus in its spiritual building, its theatrical game avoids the attempted labelling with "gaudis," which falls, rather, squarely on the soldiers' work, that ignominy affirmed moments later when a soldier complains, "So wille of werke neuere we wore — / I hope þis carle some cautellis caste" (35.205-06). Conversely, the audience's "worthely warke," by way of, not magic tricks, but holy inspiration, prevents it from being "wylle of wane."

In "The Death of Christ," the symbolism of the cross is complemented with the doctrine that Jesus' status as the new temple begins to be fulfilled in his death. Annas says, "Þou saggard, þiselffe gan þou saie, / Þe tempill distroie þe todaye" (36.82-83), the epithet ironically pointing to the steadfastness of the new temple. The irony continues, with a gesture to the audience's obligation to preserve shelter, when Caiaphas adds,

þou saued þame fro sorowes, þai saide —  
 To saue nowe þiselffe late vs see.  
 God sonne if þou grathely be grayde.  
 Delyuere þe doune of þat tree  
 Anone. (36.96-100)

This question of Jesus being truly created ("grathely grayede") as God's son is directly linked to its linguistic counterpart, and thus to the audience's preparing of a place for Jesus, when, shortly thereafter, Mary complains, "Allas, for full louely he laye / In my wombe, þis worthely wight"

(36.133-34).

The theatrical conflict of the edification theme, in this play, enhanced to the degree that the tribunal's placement on a "deesse" (36.329) approximates a court setting, is centred in two addresses made to the audience by Jesus from the cross. In both, which together constitute the paramount expression of the charity theme, he makes pointed commands for their attention:

Pou man þat of mys here has mente.

To me tente enterly þou take.

.....

Who couthe þe more kyndynes haue kydde

Than I?

.....

On me for to looke lette þou nozt. . . .

.....

Manne, kaste þe thy kyndynesse be kende.

Trewe tente vnto me þat þou take.

And treste. (36.118-19, 125-26, 185, 189-91)

These commands for attention counter those made to the audience at the start of the trial and passion plays, by Caiaphas — "And trewe tente vnto me þis tyme þat 3e take" (29.3); Pilate — "Loo, Pilate I am, proued a prince of grete pride" (30.19; also 32.14, 33.4); and Herod — "And 3e þat luffis youre liffis, listen to me" (31.21). Thus, in two of his final acts in this world, Jesus, against the proud self-witnessing of his judges, commands the audience to make respondent witness to his own ultimate act of self-witness. The allegorical implications are affirmed, and the audience's conscience pricked, when, following the last of the quoted commands, Jesus delivers the transposed

gospel passage that, as noted in chapter one, is a primary instance of the plays' "wylle of wane" theme:

For foxis þer dennys haue þei.

Birdis hase ther nestis to paye.

But þe sone of man this daye

Hase noȝt on his heed for to reste. (36.193-95: Lk. 9.58)

How could the audience not respond with "kyndynesse"? The powerful sense of Jesus' homelessness evoked in these lines serves well this climatic moment of the combined effects of theatrical enclosure and theatrical witness. The audience, responding to Jesus' supreme act of "kyndynes," in direct denial of his proud judges on their dais, "kaste" themselves in "kyndynesse," a symbolic house of charity in which to shelter him and themselves together, steadfast against the imprisoning palace of evil.

As the play draws to a close, the basis for theatrical enclosure shifts from the cross to Jesus' grave. Sepulchral enclosure becomes the central visual image, and is repeatedly mentioned, as Joseph receives permission, and he and Nicodemus take down and prepare the body (36.338, 340, 355, 364, 382, 390, 391). This imagery of burial generates a complex symbolism of enclosure, which serves in part to engage the audience in the conflicting emotions and irresolution in the aftermath of the crucifixion.<sup>15</sup> On the one hand, sepulchral is linked to spiritual enclosure, in both senses of the sheltering of Jesus and the shelter one takes in Jesus. The idea of the spiritual sheltering of Jesus during the passion is extended in the literal sheltering of his corpse in the grave. Contributing to this sense of shelter is the respectful and tender sheltering with which Nicodemus and Joseph treat the body, as they take it down from the cross, "vs betwene / Betwene vs," and

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<sup>15</sup> Noted, in chapter one, with respect to the "wylle of wane" motif.

“halde hym and halse hym with hande” (36.377-78, 381). These acts, thematically continuous with Mary’s and Simeon’s cradling of the infant, suggest that while the passion is over, the obligation to build spiritual shelter for Jesus is not.

By simple reflection, the grave’s shelter symbolism refers also to the reciprocal sheltering of the faithful in Jesus, a meaning that is supported as the grave becomes symbolic of the redemptive process. The promise of bliss is verified in the immediacy of Jesus’ promise to the penitent thief:

Sen þou fro thy foly will falle.

With me schall dwelle nowe þis daye.

In paradise place principall. (36.210-12; Luke 23.43)

To the extent that the evil court is being represented by the tribunal on the dais, this remark constitutes, outside of Jesus’ acts of personal resistance, the first sign of his victory in the conflict between spiritual shelter and material entrapment, in the trial and passion plays. That is, with his death (ordered at 36.287), the penitent thief is understood to be released from Pilate’s imprisoning court of evil into Jesus’ principality. For the audience, shelter from evil comes first in the redemptive promise itself. The continuity between sheltering promise and promised shelter is suggested in the graveside prayers of Nicodemus and Joseph: “þou kepe vs in clennessesse ilkone / . . . / To þe, kyng, on knes here I knele, / þat baynly þou belde me in blisse” (36.394, 406-07). Together with their accompanying acts of sepulchral enclosure, these prayers give full expression to the shelter symbolism of the grave. The audience’s theatrical enclosure in Jesus’ sepulchre is paralleled in the anchoritic metaphor of being dead to the world.<sup>16</sup> Sepulchral-as-spiritual enclosure completes

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<sup>16</sup> For symbolic last rites in anchoritic enclosure ceremonies, including those described in an early 16<sup>th</sup>- century York Pontifical, see Rotha Clay, *Hermits and Anchorites*, 96, and Francis Darwin, *The English Medieval Recluse*, 74-76. For the metaphorical application, in *Ancrene Wisse*, of Jesus’ grave to anchoritic enclosure, see Barratt 43.

the image of enclosure expressed by Mary when, beneath the cross, she recalls how “full louely he laye / In my wombe, þis worthely wight.” As the anatomical marks the beginning, sepulchral enclosure marks the end of the redemptive process of winning shelter for humankind.

In the penultimate speech of the play, Nicodemus recalls that, “He highte me full hendely to be his / A nyght whan I neghed hym full nere” (36.408-09). The remark, also delivered at the grave, and thus contributing to its shelter symbolism, describes the reciprocity of spiritual shelter experienced by the audience as it has theatrically enclosed, and been enclosed, in Jesus. With a possible echo of Jesus’ intimacy with God just before his arrest — “þe nowys þat me neghed hase it nedis not to neuen” (28.43) — the remark brings the theme of spiritual shelter, as developed in the context of the passion, full circle. Thus, the audience, which has been so *closely* involved in the passion, is signaled that its theatrical sheltering of Jesus during his personal suffering has ended. But, then, in the play’s final speech, from Joseph, there is again a reminder of the ongoing obligation to maintain such intimacy with Christ:

þis lorde so goode

þat schedde his bloode,

He mende youre moode,

And buske on þis blis for to bide. (36.413-16)

The echo, in the final line, of Mary’s earlier declaration of steadfastness beneath the cross — “To he be paste / Wille I buske here baynly to bide” (36.181-82) — reminds the spectators of their obligation to respond steadfastly as Jesus prepares them for bliss. Both the exemplum and the blessing — paralleled in the exhorting of anchorites to steadfastness in their enclosure — are readily accommodated within the audience’s multivalent sense of its stillness.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> For the idea of anchoritic steadfastness, see Darwin 10-12.

On the other hand, the grave, as the site of the interim between life and resurrection, symbolizes separation from Jesus. This symbolic capacity of the grave is generally established earlier in the play, also in Mary's complaint at the cross, when she uses the image of sepulchral enclosure to express her grief: "Allas sone, sorowe and sizte. / þat me were closed in clay" (36.157-58). The dissonance between the sheltering promise and separation symbolism of sepulchral enclosure is perhaps intentionally reflected in Nicodemus's striking choice of words when, during the act of interment, he prays to be kept in "clennesse." The distinction between these two capacities of sepulchral symbolism anticipates the action of the opening of the grave, by which shelter symbolism triumphs over that of separation, the opening, as it were, defeating the one sense of enclosure to realize the other.

Anticipation of the triumph is sustained, as the dual symbolism of sepulchral enclosure continues in the next play, "The Harrowing of Hell." At the beginning of this play, with analogy to his victory over the imprisoning earthly palaces, Jesus declares "aboute nowe woll I bee / þat I haue bought for to vnbynde" (37.7-8). Moments later, he says, "My bodie bidis in graue / Tille alle thes dedis be done" (37.23-24), so that his ensuing action of breaking into and harrowing hell is linked with a standing image of his sepulchred body. As with his blessing of the penitent thief, the harrowing is a verification of the promised shelter symbolized by that enclosed body. Explicit verification comes at the end of the play when Jesus tells the angel Michael,

Ressayue þes saules all vnto þe

And lede þame als I schall þe lere,

To paradise with playe and plenté. (37.390-92)

The separation symbolism of the sepulchred body is activated by the imprisonment of the patriarchs and prophets for "Foure thowsande and sex hundereth zere," waiting for their "helpe," in "sorowes sadde" (37.39, 43, 44). When, having released the souls to Michael, Jesus says, "Mi graue I woll go

till, / Redy to rise vpperight" (37.393-94), he signals the end of this primary instance of symbolic sepulchral enclosure.

Importantly, though triumph is in the air, theatrical enclosure is kept in a state of spatial crisis. In "The Harrowing of Hell," this crisis holds in the motif of simultaneous multiple-enclosures, which, having occurred previously most notably in the birth scene, becomes quite prominent, taking the form specifically of double-enclosure. The first instance occurs in the linking of Jesus' entry into hell with the image of his sepulchred body. Corresponding to this instance of double-enclosure, is that of the prophets and patriarchs, who are imprisoned, within hell, in "Lymbo" (37.102) — the specific site of their separation from Jesus — of which Beelzabub says, "they are sperde in speciall space" (37.110). Satan, recounting for the devils his past endeavours against Jesus, says he "entered in Judas" (37.165), which, as noted in chapter one, refers simultaneously to his possession of Judas and his entry, thereby, into that space that rivals hell as a place of entrapment, Pilate's court. Later, Satan is one-upped when Jesus tells him how, anticipating his antagonism against the redemption, he executed the incarnation: "to haue / Mi Godhede here, I hidde / In Marie modir myne" (37.248-50). In this case, double-enclosure is constituted by the general concept of the incarnation ("to haue / Mi Godhede here") and that specific execution ("In Marie"). In a final instance of simultaneous double-enclosure, one that directly answers the locking of the souls in "speciall space," Jesus sends Satan "doune / Into thy selle where pou schalte sitte" (37.341-42). The concentration of double-enclosure in this play may be ultimately a meta-theatrical reference to the formal double enclosure — of station and setting — that defines theatrical enclosure. At the same time, the distribution of these images of double-enclosure between the symbolisms of imprisonment and shelter maintains a state of spatial crisis in theatrical space.

even while the drama depicts the opening of limbo and gestures to the opening of Jesus' grave.<sup>18</sup>

The theme of charitable enclosure returns, in "The Supper at Emmaus," where it is introduced with the "wylle of wane" motif, the occurrence of which, noted in chapter one, has the pilgrim praying to God, "In my wayes þou me wisse þus will of wone" (40.2). The theme of charity is planted with an echo, as the two pilgrims bemoan the death of Jesus: "grette vnkyndynesse þei kidde hym. / Vnkyndynesse þei kidde hym. þo caitiffis so kene" (40.64-65). Following the ironic passage in which the pilgrims detail for Jesus the horrors of "How þei mourthered þat man þat we of mene" (40.90), they ask "sir pilgrime" to stay with them in the "castell beside her" (40.144, 142). In their ignorance, they illustrate the conflation of love of God and neighbour that is essential to the concept of charity. Their act of charity is identified as such when Jesus replies, "I thanke youe of þis kyndynesse ȝe kydde me" (40.149). The ensuing action lends a sense of enclosure to their charity, as the first and second pilgrims (the latter with characteristic shortness) invite Jesus in: "Go in sir, sadly and sone. / Sir, daungere dowte noȝt, haue done" (40.150-51). The power of charity is expressed simply in an image of a compliant God: "Sir, I muste nedis do as ȝe bid me" (40.152). There follows a brief Communion scene, in which Jesus blesses "þis brede þat brought is on þe borde" (40.157), with punning on the Communion table ("God's board").

Following the subsequent disappearance, and the pilgrims' recognition, of Jesus, they are filled with the intent to bear witness: "Go we to Jerusaleme þes tydingis to telle" (40.188). This desire to "telle" directly overturns their initial wandering "will of wone," which had, literally and symbolically, rendered them speechless: "Forthy as wightis þat are will þus walke we in were. / Forpechyng [panting] als pilgrymes þat putte are to pees" (40.83-84). At the end of the play, their sense of direction and purposefulness is referred to a meta-theatrical context: "Here may we notte

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<sup>18</sup> For a variant use of the motif of double enclosure, see Eldredge's discussion of "shelter-within-shelter," in his article, "Sheltering Space and Cosmic Space in the Middle English *Patience*," esp. 122-24.

melle more at þis tyde. / For possesse of plaies þat precis in plight" (40.191-92). Thus, in a grand gesture towards the audience's theatrical witness, the entire performative event is imbued with a sense of going, as a city of charity, "to Jerusaleme þes tydingis to telle." In this play, theatrical enclosure and theatrical witness are not so much integrated as they are deployed sequentially, the former, though not entirely lost, giving way to a journey metaphor.

Otherwise, however, with the resurrection, the theme of enclosure becomes especially intertwined with that of openness, as, with the rising of Jesus, the literal opening of his grave is linked to the openness of public witness. This connection, as noted in the introduction, is established ironically in the parodic witness event of the soldiers' discovering of the empty tomb: "Rise vppe and see" (38.292). This parodic moment at the open grave is important for revealing that the triumph of spiritual shelter over spiritual separation is not to be taken for granted. At the same time, it suggests that the power of the opening of that grave to defeat enclosure-as-separation and to realize enclosure-as-spiritual shelter is itself realized in the act of open witness, the idea of openness providing continuity, therefore, between sepulchre-as-shelter and the new temple.

These symbolic operations are evident especially in scenes set in the disciples' house in Jerusalem, in which separation symbolism is reinstated, as the disciples have enclosed themselves from the Jews, in the crucifixion's aftermath. The entrapment of the disciples is first depicted in "The Incredulity of Thomas," at the beginning of which Peter, John, and James complain of their fear:

Oute of þis steede ne durste we nocht.

But here ay dwelle.

.....

Durste we neuere come þame emang,

Ne hense to goo.

.....  
 Therefore I rede þat we dwelle stille

Here þer we lende.

Vnto þat Criste oure lorde vs wille

Some sucoure sende. (41.5-6, 11-12, 15-18)

An association, through a mediating link to limbo, between the disciples' and sepulchral enclosure is suggested in "Pentecost," when one of them says, "Itt is moste for oure spede / Here to be stokyn still" (43.59-60), echoing Jesus' declaration, as he breaks down the gates of hell, "þis steede schall stonde no lenger stoken" (37.193). This visual image of entrapment lends a sense of real, and thematic, urgency to the disciples' expectations. As we have seen, Peter recalls Jesus' instructions to "preche and bere wittnesse," and John adds, "be his counsaile to be kende / He saide he schulde sette haly kirke" (43.15, 27-28). John continues,

But firste he saide he schulde doune sende

His sande, þat we schuld nozt be irke.

His haly gaste on vs to lende

And make vs to melle of materes mirke. (43.29-32)

Thus, enclosure-as-separation — typologically figured, in this particular case, by Simeon's self-enclosure and need for guidance in making witness — is directly opposed to the spiritual enclosure of open witness. The connection is made explicit when, after the holy spirit's descent, an apostle remarks, "Vndo youre dores and haues no doute" (43.175), echoing the Egyptian's cry, "We dar not loke oute at no dore" (11.290), and pointing, in contrast to the Egyptians' plight, to an opening, through bold witness, into spiritual shelter. This image of opening doors, then, corresponds with the openings of limbo and Jesus' grave, and, most importantly, corrects the morally-empty witness of the soldiers at that grave. Thus, the dual symbolism of sepulchral enclosure is carried forward in the

cycle, passed the episode of the resurrection, to emphasize the crucial theological and theatrical point of the necessity of witness to realize the redemptive power hidden in Jesus' grave.

In the post-resurrection plays, as the idea of spiritual shelter becomes focused in the symbolism of the new temple, the theatrical enclosure of the audience becomes less symbolically-driven. That is, the audience is no longer being asked to imagine itself enclosed in places such as the ark, Mary's womb, or the cross, but in the architectural space of the metaphorical temple. Moreover, this is an enclosure, for which the audience, in its own enclosed space of open witness, has been the primary referent, as representative living stones, from the start of the cycle throughout. There is, therefore, a sense of convergence in theatrical enclosure, as the cycle winds to a close: the audience's world meeting the dramatic, on its own terms. Convergence at a spatial level, the most significant of those terms to theatrical enclosure, is evident in the primary scene of apostolic activity, the dramatic reference for the new temple.

In this scene, immediately following the assumption of Mary, the plays depict how charity might operate among the imperfect beings of the world. Thomas, who alone has seen the assumption and been forgiven by Mary for not attending at her death, takes her "girdill" to prove her "assendinge" to the other apostles (45.169, 162). He is met with hostility. Twice he is accused of being "vnkynde" (45.225, 233), and then, again, by Peter: "Þat þou come not to courte here vnkyndynes þou kid vs, / Oure treuth has of-turned vs to tene and to traye" (45.235-36). The word, "courte" — a "place of meeting," as Beadle glosses it — serves to both place the scene in the context of mutual edification and to theatrically engage the audience in a space that perfectly matches its own, a public place for witnessing to the "treuth." Thus, having struggled with Jesus to establish, against threatened imprisonment in the court of evil, the new temple, the audience now finds that temple filled not with peace and harmony, but rancour and discord. And implicated in the contention is the very doctrine of witness that has been upheld throughout the performance as a

primary function of the Christian community. What should be a force of unification has been brought to strife, a failure made all the more apparent as the drama imposes on the action the specific context of the witness of charity. Most telling of the sad state of the new temple, however, is Peter's confounding of his anger at Thomas with his grief at having just buried Mary:<sup>19</sup>

Bis yere haste þou rakid, þi reuth wolde not ridde vs.  
 For witte þou wele þat worthy is wente on hir waye.  
 In a depe denne dede is scho doluen þis day.  
 Marie þat maiden and modir so milde. (45.237-40)

Quite shamelessly, he vents his anger in the name of her he praises for mildness. Here, sepulchral symbolism is reintroduced, for its established effect. Mary's enclosure, at this moment, is symbolic of separation from the divine, as the disciples fail to make proper response to their gift of holy inspiration. Then, the "girdill" is produced (45.249), and her grave is found to be empty. "Behalde," says Peter, instantly reestablishing the power of witness. "nowe hidir youre hedis in haste, / Pis glorious and goodely is gone fro þis graue" (45.261-62). With the embellishment of this symbolic opening into bliss, the spiritual temple is restored with peace and harmony, as the apostles turn to Thomas in contrition: "Mercy full kyndely we crie and we craue" (45.265). Thomas replies,

Oure saueour so swete  
 Forgiffe you all,  
 And so I schall (45.269-71).

and, thus, the apostles have "kaste" themselves in "kyndynesse," again, witnessing to Christ in their charity.

Sepulchral enclosure is a prominent image in the final play, "The Last Judgement," in

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<sup>19</sup> The play of Mary's funeral, referred to documents in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, is missing from the manuscript which contains the York plays.

which the angels call to humanity. "Rise and fecche youre flessh þat was youre feere / . . . / . . . to þis grette assise" (47.86, 94). The symbolism of this enclosure, however, is complicated by the uncertain outcome of the release of the bodies from their graves. As some will go to hell, the opening of the graves is not purely symbolic of the triumph of spiritual shelter over separation from Jesus. With respect to the bad souls, the opening of their graves is associated with the disillusionment of secretive evil-doers, with disclosure rather than release: "þat we did ofte full pryuely, / Appertly may we se þem wreten" (47.131-32). Thus, God's omnipotence is expressed as the power that governs the totalizing scheme of enclosure and openness. In other words, if self-enclosure is intended as an advantage over God, it becomes imprisonment, with the potential for eternal separation from God. Sepulchral symbolism, in this play, leaves the audience with a choice, therefore: to be self-imprisoned until a day of disclosure leads to eternal damnation, or to be enclosed in the spiritual temple of Christ until it opens into "bygly blys."

In a parting gesture, the cycle defines this choice and its outcome, according to the dual precepts of charity. The theme is introduced in God's long opening speech, as he recalls his son's sacrifice — "For þame he shedde his harte-bloode — / What kyndinesse myght I do þame mare?" (47.31-32) — and remarks on the subsequent wickedness of humanity: "þus haue þei quitte me my kyndinesse" (47.46). Then, through a variety of images of literal enclosure, the audience's spiritual temple is contextualized in extra-dramatic and, thus, extra-theatrical works of charity. Addressing the good souls, God<sup>20</sup> offers, first, an image of an unhappy enclosure ameliorated by an act of charity, and, second, an image of shelter given to one who is "wylle of wane":

Full seke whan I was brought in bedde.

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<sup>20</sup> The idea of the convergence of God and Christ is demonstrated through their enactment by a single actor playing "Deus," which, by this point in the play, refers in the first instance to Christ.

Kyndely 3e come to coumforte me.

Whanne I was wille and werieste

3e herbered me full hartefully. (47.291-94)

Then, in response to the good souls' inquiries, he explains.

What tyme þis dede was to me done:

When any þat nede hadde, nyght or day.

Askid 3ou helpe and hadde it sone. (47.310-12)

Turning to chastise the bad souls, God answers their failure to provide charitable shelter — in the usual sense and in the sense of ameliorating actual imprisonment — by condemning them to be themselves imprisoned away from the shelter of bliss:

Whanne I had mistir of mete and drynke,

Caytiffis, 3e cacched me fro your 3ate.

Whanne 3e wer sette as sirs on benke,

I stode þeroute, werie and wette:

Was none of yowe wolde on me thynke.

Pyté to haue of my poure state,

þerfore till hell I schall you synke —

Weele are 3e worthy to go þat gate.

Whanne I was seke and soriest

3e visitte me noght, for I was poure:

In prisoune faste whan I was feste

Was none of you loked howe I fore.

Whenne I wiste neuere where for to reste.

With dyntes ze draffe me fro your dore.

Butte euer to pride þanne were ze preste.

Mi flessch, my bloode. ofte ze forswore. (47.325-40)

Following another stanza of condemnation for their failure to provide him shelter, the bad souls sorrowfully ask God for an explanation (47.349-56). God repeats the formula of dual charity, telling them that when they spurned the “nedfull . . . / . . . / To me was þat vnkyndines kyd” (47.358. 361). Importantly, the inquiries (“spirings”) of the good and bad souls into God’s meaning are indicative of, respectively, a continuing, and a futile grasping at, faith.

God concludes history with final acts of separating enclosure, inviting the good souls to bliss, and sending the bad ones to hell (47.365-72). His final words are directed to the audience, with retrospective urgency:

Thei þat wolde synne and sessid noght.

Of sorowes sere now schall þei syng.

And þei þat mendid þame whils þei moght

Shall belde and bide in my blissing. (47.377-80)

Thus, the cycle ends by asking the audience to carry on what they have done in the game of spiring, to edify, by faithful inquiry and acts of sheltering charity, the spiritual temple, and thereby to accept Jesus’ redemptive promise of a return to “bygly blys.”

## *Conclusion*

The monumental cohesiveness of the York cycle over centuries of revision suggests that the dramatic project was supported, at the textual level, by some form of enduring framework.<sup>1</sup> The game of spiring constitutes what may be a major dual-purpose element in such a framework, contributing simultaneously to the dramatic and the rhetorical coherence Collier ascribes to the plays (259). First, the ideas of edification and witness, as they are rooted in fundamental and interrelated Christian doctrines, create, along with the idea of enclosure, a tightly-woven thematic braid running throughout the cycle. Second, these themes, separately and in conjunction, accommodate the cycle's linked goals of intense audience engagement and community advancement. Edification, witness, and enclosure, therefore, constitute, for a possible textual framework, a major thematic support that both spans the drama and extends into a concomitant theatrical level of audience engagement. In other words, the game of spiring stands as a possible source of clear and definite guidelines that governed, in Beadle's words, the "diverse authorship and rolling revision of the cycle through the years" ("York Cycle" 89).

On a purely speculative note, the game form of the drama may hold some key as to the way in which successive dramatists of the cycle approached the tasks of revision and composition. If the

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<sup>1</sup> Critics have often remarked upon, and pondered the source of, what Beadle calls "the powerful submerged consistency of intent that informs the writing at every point" in a cycle that was revised over many generations ("York Cycle" 89). See also Collier 259, and Johnston, "*The Word Made Flesh*," 246.

game of spiring did contribute to a framework of "composition rules," the dramatists may have approached their work on the text as a game in itself. That is, they may have considered themselves to be part of an inter-generational game of faith, in which they worked in the spirit of constructive competition, each seeking different ways of dramatizing and engaging the audience in the themes of the game of spiring. A later secular analogue for such activity would be the sonneteing of courtiers.

Beadle writes that "the York cycle's success in achieving the essential 'Gothic' aesthetic virtue of diversity-within-unity perhaps confers upon it the status of norm against which the other cycles or cycle-type compilations may be judged." He goes further to suggest that the cycle's "evident antiquity, and a documented career that suggests more or less annual performances in a basically stable form for up to two centuries, cannot but have attracted attention as a paradigm, though by no means one that was slavishly imitated elsewhere" ("York Cycle" 89). Assuming that this paradigmatic influence may have extended even to the non-religious drama of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, we should remain alert for possible continuities between the York cycle's game of spiring and the theatrical traditions of that later drama.

Of the several applications of the concept of edification in its secular form perhaps the most pertinent to the later drama is that of nation-building. For any attempts that were made to actively engage audiences in the themes of nation-building, the theatrical building of the York plays established a clear example of the effects that can be achieved. Theatrical witness has a broad applicability, reaching beyond the theatre-forensics parallel that concerns the studies noted in the introduction. The thematizing of the audience's presence, onlooking, and listening is a potential strategy for any drama that explores issues of public appearance and presentation, and in particular the issues of truth and legitimacy in the context of public assemblies, whatever the forum. Of all the elements in the game of spiring, theatrical enclosure has the widest applicability, with the potential

to enhance any attempt to engage the audience in an imaginative projection into mimetic spaces. With such broad applicability, it might be difficult to isolate any particular theatrical tradition. On the other hand, theatrical continuities may be found in the specific details of engagement through audience-inherent enclosure alone, or in combination with the physical enclosures of performance spaces of later periods.

With respect to all these strategies of engagement, the setting of the audience in union with and against dramatic characters has applicability to all drama at its essential level of spatial configuration. The degree and manner with which an audience identifies with its space in a performance venue will vary according to the venue's physical and cultural architectural qualities. Whatever the case, in this respect, the highly-developed spatial competition of the game of spiring offered a powerful dramaturgical model.

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